

WHERE JESUS LEADS

Online Relational Meetings for Churches Today

In addition to worshipping online during this time of physical distancing, how is your congregation staying connected and even reaching out to others?

Here's a sample format for community building (relational) meetings, small groups or coffee and conversations for congregations using Zoom, Skype, Google hangouts or other video/audio conferencing. This is just one way to stay connected, and contains some common elements of effective small groups described in *Where Jesus Leads*, including some ways of asking: What are you going through? What do we need to pray about? And who isn't here who needs to be here? And, of course, there's plenty of room to be creative and work within the contexts and cultures of your congregations.

Remind people of normal protocols as you get started with your meetings. Ask participants to pray aloud together but have only one person unmuted at a time (one reader at a time for group prayers or liturgies). Then follow these **steps** of a structured conversation and pause often to allow conversations:

1. Brief Prayer

Example: O gracious and loving God, you work everywhere reconciling, loving and healing your people and creation. In your Son and through the power of your Holy Spirit, you invite each of us to join you in your work. We ask you to form us more and more in your image and likeness, through our prayer and worship of you and through the study of your Scripture, that our eyes may be fully opened to your mission in the world. Then, God, into our communities, our nation and the world, send us to serve with Christ, taking risks to give life and hope to all people and all of your creation. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

2. Brief Scripture lesson

Example: Philippians 4:4-8

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Ask only: **What did you hear?**

Wait for responses, which may be one word or more; facilitator or priest does not teach or preach but encourages everyone to be involved in the conversation; ask, "Someone else?"

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3. Structured check-in

Examples: Specific appreciative questions:

Is there something that you're enjoying now that you weren't doing as much before the virus (e.g., taking walks, listening to music, etc.)?

How are you staying connected with friends and family during this time?

How are you paying attention to your faith journey this Lent and is this different from before?

(This topic and the next are intended to let people share some of what they are going through personally without derailing the meeting.)

4. Encourage purposes/ministries

How can we help people during COVID-19? What are new or ongoing ministries that we can do during this time?

Examples

Prayer chain, phone tree, online prayer group

Pastoral phone calls/check-ins

Helping people (over the phone) to get connected to Facebook Live streaming or Zoom (maybe even call their grandchildren)

Outreach activities

Online formation (such as a free ChurchNext/Forward Movement course with our own online group discussion in a format similar to this)

Online giving

Others? (Keep a list and mention in future meetings)

How might these things also help to strengthen our congregation for the future?

5. Brief updates/announcements

Sunday Livestream

Christian formation/small groups

Etc.

Next meeting of this group: When? Who will facilitate? What special topics could be helpful? (Expand this ministry and participation and offer coaching.)

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6. Invitations to these meetings

Ask: **Who isn't here who needs to be here?** (Create an expectation that all are welcome from the beginning to build the group.)

Ask: Will you call and invite this person? Who will call and invite this person? When calling, please ask them if they need help to get connected and ask if someone can call them to help.

Ask at next meeting: Were you able to call _____? (Keep a list and create accountability.)

7. Prayers

This is the most important relational part of the meeting with God and one another (and why people come back)! If you use breakouts for other parts or conversations during this meeting, consider coming back together for this!

Ask: **What do we need to pray about?** (When all have added their thanksgivings and petitions, add some form of "Lord, hear our prayers")

Lord's Prayer

Thank you for this time together! Go in peace!