

Digital MC Gathering Toolbox

MC Leaders,

We are all in the midst of an unprecedented time. For nearly 2,000 years the Church has been marked as the gathered people of God who worship Jesus corporately on Sunday and in smaller groups throughout the week. And yet, we find ourselves unable to gather physically right now.

1 Peter 2:10 tells us that “once [we] were not a people, but now [we] are God’s people”, and so the question becomes, “How do we relate to one another as God’s people during this time?” Thankfully, in God’s grace we live in a time where we have the ability to connect with each other through the use of technology. Therefore, we thank God for it and as church leaders we will utilize it to create environments where people can connect, belong, believe, and worship together until we are able to gather again in person.

The purpose of this document is to provide you with a resource that explains how your community can gather digitally, and some leadership principles to consider during this prolonged season.

“In what ways can my community meet digitally?”

Below is a list of free digital platforms along with brief explanations and links with instruction videos

Zoom

Explanation: Zoom is an online video chat platform where individuals in your community can join a scheduled meeting to talk and see each other's faces.

Device(s) Compatible: Computer, tablet, and smartphone.

Limitations: In light of the coronavirus, Zoom offers free plans that allow meetings for 1-100 people.

Special Note: Many workplaces provide their employees an enterprise account that has no limitations, so consider asking your group if anyone has an account to set up meetings.

Sign-Up Here: zoom.us

Instructional Video: [Check out this video.](#)

Google Hangouts

Explanation: Google Hangouts is an online video chat platform where individuals in your community can join a scheduled meeting to talk and see each other's faces.

Device(s) Compatible: Computer, tablet, and smartphone.

Limitations: In light of the coronavirus, Google offers free plans that allow meetings of 1-25 people. A Google account (like Gmail) is required to set up a call.

Special Note: Workplaces that utilize Google's "G-Suite" as their email and cloud storage provider have Google Hangouts accounts already integrated into their work email, so consider asking your group if anyone has an account to set up meetings.

Sign-Up Here: hangouts.google.com

Instructional Video: [Check out this video.](#)

Your Current Communication Platform(s)

In addition to the resources listed above, be sure to continue using your current communication platforms (iMessage, group texting, Slack, GroupMe, etc.) to share stories, send prayer requests, and have fun with each other!

“How should I lead a digital meeting?”

Know your technology. Refer to the instructional videos above if you need help and do a test run with one or two people before your group meets. Make sure you are familiar with all of the buttons on the program.

Plan ahead and establish expectations in advance. Schedule your meeting and send out the link to your community a couple of hours (if not days) prior. In addition, let them know what they can expect for the meeting. How long will it go? What will you be doing? Do they need to prepare or reflect on anything in advance?

Keep an eye on the time but be flexible. Try your best to start and end on time. However, keep in mind that not everyone will join on time and people will have technical difficulties. Embrace these moments but get things started as soon as you can.

Aim for connection over content. Be sure to start each meeting with questions that allow people to share and connect. As a leader, keep in mind that people in your group will have varying levels of fear, worry, loneliness, etc. Remember the reason why we are connecting digitally is because we are unable to connect in person. Thus, the goal for the meeting is connection. Be okay with not getting to the discussion/exercise if people are genuinely connecting.

Facilitation is necessary. To make sure you are staying on track, allowing everyone to share, and honoring the time, you will need to be clear and direct, yet kind at the same time. Call on specific people to answer questions or ask them to share next. Be prepared to redirect the conversation if it gets off track.

Pro tip: remind everyone to be on mute if they aren't talking to prevent background noise and multiple people talking at once :)

End the meeting with expectations. Make sure your community knows when the next meeting is and what they can expect. If any prayer requests or action steps were mentioned, summarize them at the end.

“How should I be leading and caring for my community?”

Listen well. When your community gathers digitally, people will be all over the map emotionally, spiritually, mentally, and physically. As they share, make sure to listen well and respond thoughtfully. Make note of people who you can reach out to personally at another time.

Pray often. One thing we are all being reminded of is how powerless we are. We are unable to respond and act in ways we normally might be able to. In these times we must pray because God is powerful, He is in control, and He listens to us. Spend time praying for your community by name and send them a brief message telling them how you are praying for them.

Care for yourself. Leadership does not excuse us from the trials of this life. Make sure you are fighting to center your life on Jesus through spiritual disciplines and don't be afraid to ask for help, prayer, and encouragement from people in your community and your congregation leadership.

“How often should my community gather digitally?”

Formally gather as an entire group at least once a week. We have found a helpful rhythm to be on Sunday afternoons. Encourage everyone in your community to watch the [digital services](#) by a certain time and then gather online.

During this season, we recommend you follow a simple flow of connect, discuss, and pray during your meetings.

Connect: Spend the first portion of your meeting allowing each person to share how they are doing and what the group can pray for.

Discuss: Spend some time discussing the digital service or another form of content as a group. You can visit [austinstone.org/grow](#) for other resources.

Pray: Conclude the meeting with some time in prayer. You can ask people to pray for things shared earlier, or consider reading a psalm and praying through it as a group.

Encourage smaller groups to gather online at some point during the week.

LTG: Even though we are at home, we are still sinners in need of community to confess, repent, and be held accountable. If your MC has LTGs established, encourage them to meet digitally during the week.

Creative Hangouts: Consider gathering digitally for fun ways to connect through a virtual happy hour or guys/ladies night! Join the live prayer service on Wednesday nights at 7 pm. This is another way for your MC to connect not only with each other, but with the rest of the church body. You can join weekly at [austinstone.org/live](#).

Thank you for leading your group during this unique time. If you have any questions, please email your congregation leadership.

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