LET'S STAY CONNECTED!

During this season, there are lots of amazing ways for us to stay connected, from social media, text groups, FaceTime, Skype, and WhatsApp, to good old fashioned calling. But what if we could create a network of virtual groups to stay connected, care for one another, pray and encourage?

Hosting an online group is an incredible tool to help people connect with each other when an in-person group may not be possible. You can encourage each other's faith, share authentically, and watch God work in ways you may not have dreamed possible.

Your first few meetings will take some adjusting as everyone gets acquainted with the technology and the format, and works out all of the kinks. So don't give up too quickly if your first few meetings are a bit of a challenge!

As you look into launching a group online, or having your group try it out for a week, this guide will help you figure out the technology to use, best practices for a good online experience, and what a typical group meeting might look like.

HOW DO I MOVE MY COMMUNITY GROUP ONLINE?

I'm sure you have a few questions. This guide is designed to give you the answers as well as best practices and tips to help you continue to lead your group into community.

1. What does "online" even mean?

Any community group can gather regularly through a video chat, conference call, or a text platform to share life, discuss the week's sermon notes, do a book study, and pray for each other. That's what it means to be "online". There are multiple tech options available for use to connect with one another!

2. What tech do I use?

There are a lot of options out there! A few of our favorite digital platforms to choose from are listed on the next page, under "What Kind of Technology Is Available?"

→ **PRO TIP:** As with all new things, it's a good idea to test it out with a friend before you launch your group, and remember to give yourself grace through the process of learning something new! Even if challenging at first, remember…the people in your group are worth it!

We have also included some steps for having a *good video call*, to help you lead at your best through this new medium.

> → **PRO TIP:** If tech isn't your thing, see if someone in your group enjoys it and invite them to lead the charge of connecting the group in this new way.

3. What's different about leading online vs. leading in person?

While leading a video chat is very similar in all the human ways, there are a few key things we would like to point out to help you have the best experience possible:

- Start the video chat a few minutes early for small talk so that people can mingle before the group, like they normally would.
- You won't have the same body language cues as you would in person, so be sure everyone has a chance to share if they would like, and be ready to assist in situations where two people talk at once to break the tie and order the conversation.
- It's possible you may experience some technical issues, so please have grace for each other and you may even want to deputize a "tech person" to help handle problems so you are free to lead.
- When your group is finished with the questions and done praying, feel free to leave a little time for people to talk, like they normally would at an in-person meeting.

WHAT KIND OF TECHNOLOGY IS AVAILABLE?

① Google Hangouts

If you have a Google account this is a great option. It allows you to create a group of up to **25 people**, it's **free** and gives you **unlimited time together**. It's accessible via a web browser on your computer or through a Google app.

How To Use:

- Open Google Hangouts in web browser or mobile app (Apple device, Android device, Chrome web browser extension)
- Login
- Click the "Video Call" button
- Click "Invite People" and type in their email address (if they don't have a Google account if will send them an invite to setup an account)

- You can also schedule a meeting on your Google calendar and send an invite to join you at a specific time, including a link to your online meeting

② Facebook Groups

You don't even need a Facebook account to use this tool. It's accessible via the web browser on any computer. (If you don't have a Facebook account, you'll need to download the app to your phone and use your phone number.) You can host up to **50 people** (6 on video, 44 audio only).

HOW TO USE:

- Open Facebook Messenger on web browser or mobile app.
- Login (with Facebook account or phone number).
- Click "New Message" button to add Facebook friends to group chat.
- After adding contacts, click the "Video Call" button to start video chat.

③ Zoom

Zoom is a **very easy to use platform** once you know how to set up a meeting. The free version limits calls to 40 minutes for any more than two attendees. The Pro (paid) version allows for unlimited attendees. There are various different subscriptions available for Zoom if you want to upgrade from the free version, and most are affordable on a monthly basis.

How to Use:

- Make sure you, as the leader, sign up for a Zoom account.
- Download the Zoom desktop client or Zoom app from your phone's app store.
- Click "Schedule a Meeting" and name your Topic/Title (You can click "recurring meeting" and personalize if ongoing).
- Unclick "Require meeting password" for ease and convenience.
- Click Video "On" for Host and Participant.
- Leave Audio as "Both" options.
- Customize Meeting Options (Leave "Enable Waiting Room" unclicked so members can automatically join in).
- If you have a Co-Leader, list that person's email as an "Alternate Host".
- Save.
- Invite Attendees.
- Click "Copy the invitation".
- Paste the content into an email and send it out to Group members.
- Remind members to add it to their calendars.

- Right before the meeting (15-30 minutes before scheduled start time)
    - Log onto your Zoom Desktop Client or App
    - Click onto "Meetings"→"My Meetings"
    - Hit "Start"

HOW TO HAVE A GREAT VIDEO CALL!
→ Pro-Tips for online group meetings

LIGHTING | Place a light source in front of you, shining on your face.

SOUND | Choose the quietest place you can to limit background noise.

CAMERA | Level your camera straight in front of your face, so you're not looking up or down.

MUTE & UNMUTE | During the call, use Mute when you are listening and Unmute when talking.

MEETING PLATFORM | Login and get familiar with the platform and settings before the call. We find it's best to try it with a friend beforehand to practice.

Still have questions?
Feel free to reach out to support@gatewaycf.com, or call the church office at 360-426-2758.
We would love to help!