

## Clergy Zoom Conversations

### *Relationship Building Now and Later: From Initial Connection to Faith Conversations*

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with

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#### General tips for building virtual community

- Have fun while using online platforms: help people relax in a new setting
- Spend time helping people become familiar with how to use the online platform

#### Doing Online Small Groups Well

- Provide content ahead of time; use time together for conversation, checking in, relationship building
- Use social media for distributing content – post video in Facebook group, etc.
- Use interactive technology – like Zoom – for conversation & relationship building
- About 50% of in-person groups – small groups, Sunday School classes, etc – have moved to online platforms; the other 50% have stopped meeting completely; an opportunity to reach out to include more people
- How can you do an in-person class well?
  - Hospitality
  - Minimize distractions
  - Focus on engagement & interaction
  - Prepare well; know what questions you will ask, what order to ask them in, etc
- Use features of virtual platforms to mimic in-person groups –Zoom breakout groups, backgrounds, prepare ahead and share screen, whiteboard, etc.
- Invite feedback & encourage responses
  - Ask good questions that invite response
  - Monitor who is participating and who isn't; invite those who aren't speaking to speak
- Set expectations ahead of time. Use a group covenant that includes being truly present with each other as much as possible.

#### Unique Pieces of Online Groups

- Seeing yourself is awkward
- Tech stumbles happen; it's okay!
- Lacking social cues, people will talk over each other; allow it to happen and give permission to keep going
- Digital experiences are easy to check out of or click off; physically walking out of a room is more obvious than leaving a virtual space
- Use visuals well to engage people
  - <https://vibrantfaith.org/visualfaith/>

#### Community & Connection

- Connection is a starting place, but it is easily broken – need to move from connection to community
- Connections are in some ways easier to make virtually; barriers to entry are lower. People can join from wherever they are, in their pajamas in the living room. Challenge is to move from connection to community.

- Opening check-in questions are helpful to encourage movement from connection to community. How are you today? What is distracting you today? What do you carry with you today? People can answer at their own level, but will gradually deepen their answers.
- Community involves intimacy and trust
- Community requires vulnerability; leaders must model vulnerability
- Community heightens accountability
- Community builds over time – it requires consistency of time spent together
- Some people engage more easily in virtual space: in comfort of their own home, fewer barriers, safer space, etc.
- Virtual groups should develop a covenant to intentionally create community

How do we connect without “tech tools”?

- Discipleship happens best in small/micro groups, even 1-to-1. Focus on relationship building in natural ways.
- Phone conversations; walk in a park with physical distancing, but close enough for conversation; even talking from the driveway or through the screen door.
- Encourage faith conversations in day-to-day life.
- Phone trees are back in style

Encouraging Laity to Lead Faith Conversations

- Model leading well. Start a group with your leaders, and let them see how you do it.
- Encourage “subject-centered approach” rather than “teacher-centered approach.” It’s about coming together around a particular question or topic – each person brings something to the conversation. Not an expert who has all the answers.
  - Courage to Teach by Parker Palmer
- Encourage facilitation rather than teaching to ease anxiety
- Remind people that it’s OK to fail: sometimes small groups do not click

### **Questions and Answers During the Session**

How do you create bonding among people in virtual groups?

- Play online games together
- Create shared experiences
- Share best experiences: memories, stories, etc.
- Show and tell: share an object with meaning and share why
- Coffee & Conversation Zoom groups: casual connection to build deeper relationships

How do we handle people returning to onsite worship at different times (i.e. some may not feel comfortable returning if they think it’s too soon/not yet safe, etc.)?

- Emphasize compassion and understanding for others

How do you get a new person who has joined online worship to join an online small group?

- Watching worship can be a passive activity: find ways to engage people to integrate into community
- Host a “talk back” session after the online worship: how did you experience God today in worship?
- Be intentional in inviting the person to join a small group

Upon returning to onsite worship, how do we inform people that we are still recording worship for broadcasting, posting online?

- Put a note in the bulletin or announcements that the service is being recorded
- Designate a “safe space” in the sanctuary that will not be seen in the recordings

How to invite new people who have been in online worship to come to onsite worship?

- Develop a relationship with the person online
- Acknowledge and verbalize that “belonging to community” is a hunger that people have; invite people to satisfy this hunger by coming to onsite worship
- Have the courage to invite new people to come: communicate that you WANT them to come

How do we help “people in the pews” who have been around for a long time to understand that there is now an online community?

- Remind them of the goal of discipleship: to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world
- An opportunity to invite more people into a faith relationship

Available resources:

[Www.discipleship-ministries.teachable.com/courses/](http://www.discipleship-ministries.teachable.com/courses/)

[Www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/making-the-most-of-online-small-groups](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/articles/making-the-most-of-online-small-groups)

[Www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/who-am-i-as-a-teacher](http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/who-am-i-as-a-teacher)