

IDEAS FOR CONNECTING WITH EACH OTHER IN THIS TIME OF LOCKDOWN

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Our “big idea” is to treat the church now as a scattered network. So, our group leaders are doing/coordinating pastoral care through exclusively online groups, making sure people have what they need and are prayed for. That is the primary focus of the groups in this season. We also do some “Sunday broadcast” things for those who want it. We are a church of about 650, but we had more than that viewing on Sunday; although we are not clear how accurate the figures are.

For online groups: Google Meet (www.meet.google.com)

We have opted to use Google Meet, as we use Google “G Suite” for our emails/file sharing/calendars etc, so Google Meet is included free in this package. We have had to set up a few new users (though, as a charity we get those for free. You have to agree to various Terms & Conditions that not all churches may agree with. We are also unsure if Google are still giving away free charity G Suite accounts) to enable all our groups to get online. So each group has a G Suite account and can start a ‘Google Meet’ call.



The one big advantage of Google Meet is that people who are not connected to the internet or smart phones can access the Group Video Calls over the phone by dialling a London phone number and entering a pin. This hopefully means no one should be excluded because of technological problems.

You could get everyone on to Google Meet calls with just one user account with a fairly secure-but-simple password attached to a G Suite email address. You would need to stagger the calls (you cannot have multiple calls at a time, even on different devices). This would cost about £4.50/month. If churches want to modernise their IT a little and get “on the cloud”, which is what I would recommend), they may wish to switch to G Suite. It is cheaper than paying for email hosting, IT support and a Zoom subscription, for example.

We have provided the church with these tools, with some specifically for leaders. For more information see: <https://centralvineyard.co.uk/help-getting-online/>. We have also provided them some ideas for content to use for studying, if they want it: <https://centralvineyard.co.uk/group-resources/>

Free alternative – Google Hangouts (<https://hangouts.google.com/>)

We are not using Google Hangouts, but Google Hangouts is accessible to anyone with a free Google account. However, people have to be online to use Hangouts, but it is free and you can have up to 100 user profiles on the call. (Meet can currently have 250, as Google have increased the performance of Meet for the length of the COVID-19 lockdown.)

Free alternative – Zoom (free version) (<https://zoom.us/>)



Zoom have a free version of their meeting platform. It is a really great platform. The free version can host up to 100 user profiles. The one limitation here is that the free version only allows calls to last for 40 minutes at a time. We have one paid-for Zoom account for staff meetings or other meetings that need to take place. But only because before this outbreak we were using Zoom, and assume we will stop using Google Meet when the crisis ends.

Other tools for groups

We have also instructed our group leaders to start a WhatsApp (www.whatsapp.com) or Facebook Messenger (www.messenger.com) group chat, so people can reach out anytime if they are in need. We have given the group leader permission to do whatever else they need, within government guidelines, to ensure people are looked after - text messages, phone calls etc.

Sunday broadcasting:

We are pre-recording videos for Sundays and 'broadcasting' them on the church Facebook Page via a 'Watch Party' and on YouTube (using their 'Premiere' feature). We have learned on YouTube that if you want people to be able to comment/chat to one another as they watch, you have to mark the video as not suitable for children, which is odd! We have the benefit of having some design/media/tech bods who are ironing this out to get to a good standard, but not everyone has that luxury - and in the 'YouTube generation' it is not really required.

We broadcast the above at 10.30am on a Sunday. We then also broadcast a short Children's activity at 11.30am for the children. The activity is designed to inspire parents to help their kids 'play out' the Bible stories.

Enabling their personal walks with Jesus

We are also praying that this season would be wonderful for people unhooking their dependency on Sunday mornings for a "shot of Jesus", and coming back to personal devotion. We have suggested a few resources to help with this: <https://centralvineyard.co.uk/scattered/>.

Podcasts are great way of being updated and staying connected with what Christian thinkers are discerning about the current situation. My favourite is: Red Church Melbourne – Renewal in a time of crisis by Mark Sayers. He offers interesting insights into the Corona situation <https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/renewal-in-a-time-of-crisis-mark-sayers/id445552264?i=1000468508057>

Other churches are offering daily blogs and podcasts. My favourite is Bridgetown Daily by John Mark Comer – he has a daily podcast with meditations on Scripture aimed at keeping people grounded in God and His peace: <https://bridgetown.church/series/bridgetown-daily/>



My concern is for churches who are not particularly IT orientated. If this is your church, you can stay connected by telephone or even by writing letters. The most important thing is to stay connected with God and to keep praying for one another, especially during this time of uncertainty.