

GUIDE *to* ONLINE/DIGITAL GROUP GATHERINGS

Our Christian faith gives us the gift of *community* as a primary expression of our belonging to the body of Christ, yet living through a pandemic has left many of us starving for human connection. One way to nourish this need—and keep our parish groups going strong—is by gathering a group of parishioners together for a series of online discussions around a common book, booklet, or theme. The active participation and interaction among believers can be a source of strength and a way to reinforce our conviction that we belong to the church community. Never has it been more essential to recall that “where two or three are gathered together,” regardless of the circumstances, Jesus is present and active in our midst.

1. SELECT YOUR PLATFORM

Digital group gatherings can be as effective as in-person gatherings if the technology is handled well. Select a platform that your group is comfortable using, be it Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Hangouts, Go-to-Meeting, or other. Before your first gathering, ensure everyone feels equipped to join the event.

Tech Tip ■ It may be helpful to designate a tech-savvy group member to be the platform facilitator. Select a member of your adult formation team to take on the technology so you can focus on the content of the discussion.

Offer a Few Basic Ground Rules ■ The facilitator might remind everyone of basic online discussion etiquette, such as muting your microphone when not speaking and staying present on-screen as much as possible.

Take Breaks ■ Sitting in front of a computer screen can be tiring—just like sitting for long periods of time in a social hall—so build in bathroom and coffee breaks. Give folks a moment to stretch and refresh.

Embrace the Silence ■ Silent reflection or prayer may feel awkward in a digital setting. Embrace it and keep going. Allowing space for quiet is an important part of our spiritual practice and growth.

2. GATHER YOUR GROUP

Keep It Small ■ Digital leaders have found that small groups work best in digital discussion groups. Aim for no more than 15 attendees per session.

Encourage Sharing ■ Every group has extroverts and introverts, people who are more comfortable sharing and those who take time to process before speaking up. Welcome all voices into the discussion.

Focus the Discussion ■ Even a short booklet can have major implications and themes. Choose one or two sections to discuss per session so as not to overwhelm the group and to allow for deep discernment and reflection.

3. DIG IN!

- To minimize distractions and help keep everyone focused, each member of the group should have their own copy of the Twenty-Third Publications book or booklet for referral. (All resources are available at www.twentythirdpublications.com.)
- In most cases, it is best to walk through the content sequentially, as most authors have intentionally written the book in a particular order of sections or chapters.
- As the facilitator, communicate page numbers clearly if you ask everyone to read a section together. Feel free to read short sections of the book aloud and repeat discussion questions as needed so everyone on the video gathering is “on the same page.”
- Before beginning each session, it may be helpful to come to a shared understanding of terms that may arise (for example: What does *accompaniment* mean?)

4. FOLLOW UP

You Matter ■ Send a brief follow-up email or text to attendees to thank them for their participation and to let them know how much they matter to your parish.

Remind and Connect ■ A few days before the next discussion, send an email or text reminding attendees of the date and time of the next discussion, as well as sending a digital link to the online platform. Remind the participants of the topic for the next discussion and the book or booklet that will be used. What a great opportunity to reach out and remind parishioners that their presence is valued in the body of Christ.

TWENTY-THIRD PUBLICATIONS, A division of Bayard, Inc.

One Montauk Avenue, Suite 200; New London, CT 06320; (860) 437-3012 or (800) 321-0411; www.twentythirdpublications.com

Copyright ©2020 Twenty-Third Publications. All rights reserved. Permission is granted to make copies for non-commercial use within your own parish.

Aside from use within your parish, no part of this publication may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission of the publisher.

Write to the Permissions Editor.