HOSTING ONLINE GROUPS:
BRIEF TUTORIAL AND BEST PRACTICES
USING ZOOM

New to hosting a group online? An online group is a great tool to help people connect when an in-person group may not be possible. Despite the lack of face-to-face interaction, online groups are perfectly capable of allowing you to authentically share life, encourage one another, study together, 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 online 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. Remember to have fun and laugh.

As you launch an online group, or work to move your existing group online, this resource guide is designed to help you understand some commonly-available technology platforms, best **practices for a good online experience**, and what a **typical online group meeting may look like.**

> *"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds**, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing,** but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching." – Hebrews 10:23-25 (NIV)*

AVAILABLE TECHNOLOGY PLATFORMS
Note: This document includes interactive links can that be accessed by clicking on them.

When it comes to online groups, we do not mandate any certain platform for connecting. Instead, we encourage groups to find a platform for connecting that works best – both from an ease-of-use standard and a sustainability standard – for your respective group.

1. Zoom / [Click to access Zoom](#)
Pros: Free. Only hosts are required to have a Zoom account. There is a phone-in option.
Cons: Meeting time is limited to 40 minutes unless you have a paid account ($14.99/month). Have to download the Zoom application to phone or computer.
Capacity: 100 participants/devices

How to create an account with Zoom:
- Go to: https://zoom.us/support/download
- Click the blue "Sign up, it's free" button in upper right-hand corner.
- Enter your email address. You will then be sent a link to your email.
- Open the email and complete the sign-up process.

How to use Zoom:
- Video Tutorial How to Use Zoom with Small Groups - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prw7rEhehEQ&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0NmT95V5ffPmTUsk4R-7xnOsMVxwFrQt9Oba2cLoTIGOvcFiNXBToFTkI
- Open Zoom in a web browser or mobile app (apple device, android device, chrome web browser extension)
- Login
- Click "Host a meeting with video on" in upper right-hand corner
- Click "Invite participations"
- Select how you'd like to send an invite:
  - Default Email, Gmail, Yahoo to send email invite, or "copy URL", "Copy Invitation" to copy a link and send it via a text message, email, Facebook message, etc.
- You can also schedule a meeting on the zoom website and send an invite to join you at a specific time, including a link to your online meeting. (See Zoom Instructional Video)

Watch Tutorial Videos in Zoom Video Library

Watch How to Use Zoom with your Small Group
See attached material:
1. How to start your Zoom Meeting.
2. How to schedule a Zoom meeting.
3. How to invite others to a Zoom meeting.

While there are many other platforms, like Skype, Google Hangouts etc., I do not want to overwhelm you with too many options. If you prefer to use others please feel free. We are going to suggest using Zoom as it is so easy to use.

NOTES REGARDING DEVICES AND TECHNOLOGY
- While mobile phones can be used, laptops and/or **desktop computers are recommended are they offer a larger screen size.**
- Only use one device per household. Multiple devices can cause audio feedback and internet bandwidth issues.
- Your device will ask for permission to access your audio and video. Approve all of this ahead of time, since it may require a reboot.
- Place your device on a table or stable mount, not on your lap or in your hand. Having your hands free allows you to reference your Bible or additional study materials.
- Make sure your device is plugged in or at full ba2ttery level.

o Use landscape mode [sideways] instead of portrait [up and down].

BEST PRACTICES FOR VIDEO CALLING / ONLINE ETIQUETTE

1. **Recommend that group members download any meeting software prior to meeting.**
   o See previous section on technology platforms available for online groups.
2. **Be aware of how you look on camera.**
   o Make sure your face has sufficient lighting. In general, lighting works best in front of your face, not behind. Brighter light is preferred to yellow/'warm' light.
   o Make sure your face is centered in the video camera. It's best to position the camera to eye level or slightly above.
   o Speaking tip: When talking, look directly into the camera. When not talking, look at the computer screen to watch others.
3. **Select the quietest room/location you can find.**
   o Turn off anything making noise in the background (TV, radio, appliances).
   o Put pets in a different room or have them in a place where they will be most quiet.
   o If you're at home, have a plan for childcare so as to minimize interruptions.
   o Places like a coffee shop or restaurant can work but sometimes background noise can be an issue. Noise canceling headphones can help with this.
4. **Mute your computer unless you're the person talking.**
   o Whichever platform you're using, know how to turn off and on your mute button.
   o If everyone's microphone is turned on at the same time, the sound quality can be an issue and it can be hard to hear the person who is talking.
   o If you are muted, make sure to nod your head and listen well so people can recognize you are following them. Find creative ways to practice non-verbal communication.
   o Recognize that the moderator has the ability to mute individual participants if needed.
5. **Be both positive and assertive as a moderator/host.**
   o Your demeanor will set the stage for the attitude of everyone else in the group.
   o The moderator/host of the group will need to be welcoming and in charge. Make sure as host you jump on a few minutes early to welcome everyone.
   o Redirect the conversation or mute participants as necessary. This may feel rude, but it is sometimes necessary to manage a good online experience.
   o As a rule of thumb, the host should talk 20% of the time and listen 80% of the time.
6. **Create a plan for participants to indicate that they'd like to talk.**
   o You may try things like raising a hand, answering in a specific order, or another signal.
   o Since participants will often be muted, having a plan will help you know when to mute and unmute.
7. **Encourage group participants to give their full attention (i.e. don't multitask).**
   o When participants are not giving their full attention, it can be as big a distraction with an online group as it can with an in-person group.
8. **Have a plan to stay in touch outside of your scheduled meeting time.**

- o Leverage resources and platforms like calling, texting, emailing, GroupMe, Facebook Groups and Messenger, WhatsApp, etc. as a place to stay connected and keep the conversation going throughout the week.
- o Assign group members to follow up with one another and engage in prayer requests.

ONLINE GROUP FORMAT / TYPICAL SCHEDULE

Practice Session/First Meeting (30-40 minutes)
- o It can be helpful to have a 30-40 minute practice session together, or take the first half of your first online group get everyone acquainted with how an online format will work.
- o Review the best practices/online etiquette (listed above). You may want to review these practices the first several meetings until they become more natural to people.
- o Help people learn how to use the technology and answer any questions.
- o If you are a new group, make sure to introduce yourself, share you name, and share how you got connected with Rivers Crossing and the online group.
- o End your group time by sharing prayer requests; have one person pray.

Typical Meeting (60-90 minutes)
1. **Moderator/Host welcomes everyone to the online group (5-10 minutes)**
   - o Buffer time is important, as people tend to arrive late online (as with in-person groups).
   - o Allow for people, if necessary, to adjust their lighting, camera, and microphone settings.
2. **Warm Up/Connection Time (10-20 minutes)**
   - o The key here is to get everyone talking. This also allows the group members to get comfortable learning how to mute/unmute themselves when talking and listening.
3. *Optional: Watch study/curriculum*
   - o Most Growth Groups are using our Sermon Based Material available online:
   - o https://www.maranathachapel.org/growthgroups#sermon-based-studies
   - o https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5e4c80df9c80885b56806c76/t/5eb9949175cd202d4c9f4db1/1589220499278/How-to-lead-a-group-with-Sermon-Based-Lesson.pdf
4. **Discussion Time (30-40 minutes)**
   - o Discuss the corresponding questions that apply. (ex: Growth Groups are provided sermon-based discussion questions).
   - o Remember that the objective of group isn't to get through all the questions – rather it's to hear from everyone in the group.
   - o Listen well and ask great follow up questions. Let the conversation flow among your group members and redirect/keep-on-track as needed.

5. **Take Prayer Requests and Close in Prayer (15-20 minutes)**
   - o Have a designated person to write down/record these prayer requests.
   - o Have one person pray for the group, or assign prayer requests to different people.