

ONLINE LIFE GROUP GUIDE

Introduction

CityLife Church is all about building a sense of community and relationship through Life Groups and partnering together for kingdom purposes. One of the most important connection points for CityLife is our Life Groups.

Community is so important at these times, especially where gatherings are not possible. It is vital that we make use of technology to continue connecting with our Life Group community, friendship circles, and families. So this begs the question on how can we continue to meet online and what tools are available to us?

The purpose of this guide is to outline the following:

- Ideas and considerations on the format of an online Life Group meeting
- Guidelines and tips on hosting/participating an online meeting
- Comparison of software/Apps available

Things to consider when running an Online Life Group

The normal activities that you do in a face to face Life Group meeting can still be carried out in an online meeting. Discussions, prayer, encouragement, worship and fun can all happen online, albeit slightly differently.

Invitation	The Life Group leader will set up a meeting using a online platform such as Zoom or Skype and circulate a link to the group members. Each member can then use this link on their phone, tablet or computer to join in, regardless of their location, allowing everyone to join together to see faces and hear familiar voices from their Life Group.												
Practise	If you're not use to using video conferencing tools, it will require a few attempts before one can feel comfortable with the features. Familiarise yourself by having one to one chats over the platform to help you get use to the technology and allow members of your group to get use to it as well.												
Chat while you talk	Many of the online platforms have chat functions as well, this is great if you want to send links to Bible verses or other media you are using during your group.												
Attendance	Don't be disappointed if your group is smaller than it would be face to face, these platforms take time for everyone to get use to. Make sure you connect with those unable to be present so that no one feels disconnected in this time, especially those vulnerable, at-risk, unwell or self-isolating.												
Keep it small	To ensure everyone has a chance to share his or her thoughts, aim for 10 or fewer people in the group, just as you would with a face-to-face group. If interest is high, MULTIPLY your Life Group to two or three groups that meet at different times, providing more alternatives for people with busy schedules.												
Technical problems	Bad internet connections, power outages and poor sound quality are bound to happen. Expect them, and it won't be so bad when they occur. Then if you have technical difficulties or if a group member cannot attend on camera, he or she can call in. Some software/apps provides a free conference-call number.												
Engaging Statistics	<p>Consider these suggested break times when comparing onsite (face-to-face) to online training/teaching</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>ONSITE</th> <th>ONLINE</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Have a physical break every (stretch/toilet/drink)</td> <td>90mins</td> <td>45mins</td> </tr> <tr> <td>A mental break every (pause content sharing/teaching, share story)</td> <td>20mins</td> <td>10mins</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Participant involvement every (poll/ask question/solicit comment,)</td> <td>10mins</td> <td>5mins</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		ONSITE	ONLINE	Have a physical break every (stretch/toilet/drink)	90mins	45mins	A mental break every (pause content sharing/teaching, share story)	20mins	10mins	Participant involvement every (poll/ask question/solicit comment,)	10mins	5mins
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Add Variety	You may want to include an icebreaker in the beginning or break up the meeting halfway through to help people digest information. Consider playing an online game together on yahoo or just chat informally for a while until everyone's ready to dig in.												
Fun & Laughter	Keep the sense of fun and community you have in your homes, make sure people still have their tea and coffee and that we can glorify God through many different means even when we're not together in person. <i>Please refer to the Appendix 'Fun Ideas' for some suggestions.</i>												

How do you run an online Life Group meeting?

Practically, what do you need to think through?

Before Meeting

- Make sure you are familiar with the platform and tool you are going to use.
- Do a trial run with a few people before the group, so you can make this tool easy to use for everyone.
- Send instructions and any user guides to your group.
- If you have any people in your Life Group who are not comfortable with technology. see if you can help them get setup beforehand, by phoning them and talking them through the steps. In this way, you can make sure no one is excluded.

During Meeting

- Welcome your group as people log in. It may take a little while for everybody to get on to the call, so don't start until you think everyone has joined the meeting.
- Ensure everyone's audio is muted when they join the meeting. Some tools allow the host to set this by default.
- Remember to pause, give people time to speak, people are a little slower to respond online than they are face to face. It may be helpful to ask individuals their thoughts on a question so other people know somebody is going to speak.
- As you end, make sure everyone knows that you are ending your time together, let them know to leave the video chat and then stop the meeting.

Suggested Online Meeting Format

1. Ask how is everyone is doing
2. Open with a prayer
3. Play a worship song with lyrics for all to join in
 - Consider using 'share screen' of YouTube worship clip with lyrics. If using Zoom, please ensure the host is sharing computer sound
 - Ask participants to mute audio whilst they join in the singing to avoid audio distortion
4. Share a word of encouragement (2-3 min)
5. Open the time for discussion
6. Open the time for testimony
7. Pray for each other needs
8. Closing prayer, announce meeting is over permitting members to leave the meeting
9. Chat time (optional)

After Meeting

- Thank everyone for joining with you.
- Encourage everyone to stay in touch using whichever tools you use as a Life Group – Facebook Group, WhatsApp group, or Email.
- Make sure everyone knows how you will be meeting as a Life Group and where to find instructions for the next Life Group meeting.

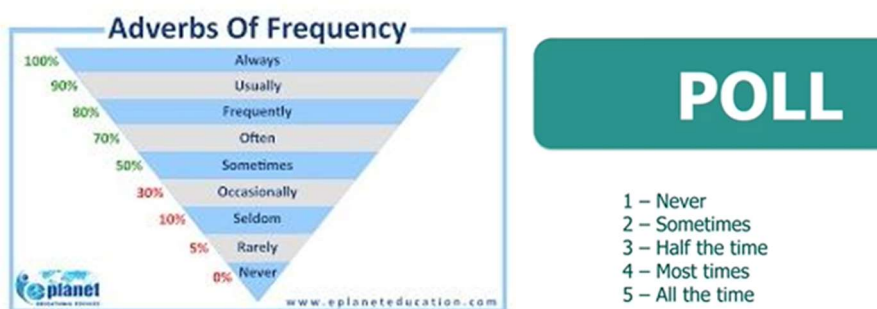
General Online Meeting Tips

These are some following tips to help make sure you have the best technical experience. It is within your best interests to follow these recommendations to ensure a good quality meeting.

- Consider using headphones or earphones. This will greatly reduce the chance for feedback and improve your quality for those who are communicating with you on the other side.
- When possible, connect to the Internet with a physical cable connection (Ethernet), not just Wi-Fi. This will give you much greater speed and service.
- Most video conferencing applications (e.g. Zoom, Skype) have a recommended connection speed of 1.5Mbps/1.5Mbps (upload/download). Participants can find out by running a quick online speed test: <https://www.speedtest.net/>
- A laptop or desktop is preferred over a Smartphone or tablet. However, if one experiences slow home internet connection, it may be faster to use 4G on the mobile device, but mindful of the mobile data usage.
- Don't be outside. Wind and background noise makes your device's microphone adjust and your voice may sound muffled.
- Don't have several programs running while using your online meeting software if you have an old computer. Close all unnecessary applications during your call so all processing power can be use to maximize the quality of your Zoom session.
- Pay attention to your background. Too much light behind you and you appear to be only a dark figure, please don't have anything behind you that may be distracting to those who are on the other side.
- To counteract back lighting, make sure you have a good source of light in front of you and behind the camera that you are using with your computer.
- Pay attention to your attire. Don't wear stripes or anything too bright. Solid colours are best.
- Avoid moving your head too much or "talking with your hands.". Too much movement can cause the video to pixelate and degrade.

How To Encourage Collaboration/Participation

- Use Chat feature to encourage comments or questions
- Use simple poll – Eg use 'Reactions' in Zoom, show of hands
- Use special polling feature if available in the video conferencing tool you are using
- Clarify question with a response scale



- Use 'Breakout room' function (if available) to facilitate small group discussion
- One-word whip: One word from each member to describe how they feel after the session
- Appoint different members to lead a section of the meeting

Available Online Meeting Software/Apps

To help you choose the online tool right for your Life Group, we have listed some of the more popular software/App. Any tool is only as good as the internet connections for all users, so do bear that in mind when using them.

Here are some of the tools that are simple to use and could work for your Life Group. (Source: Vineyard Church UK)

Software	Description	Pros/Cons
Zoom	<p>Zoom focuses on delivering high-quality video, so you can invite a group onto a 'call' and see and hear each other. Everyone can speak, hear and contribute.</p> <p>Zoom is an industry-standard tool and comes with more features than a group will need, but the quality of video and audio is higher, which is one of its key benefits.</p> <p>To use it, all users will need to download Zoom onto their computer or device, but once it's been downloaded once this is a very simple option.</p> <p>Zoom offers a free account, which limits your calls to 40-minutes. To remove that limit it costs AUD20.99/month. This amount is only payable by the 'host', your group participants don't need to pay anything, but may need a user guide to help get them set up for the first time.</p> <p>If you decide to use the free version, you could plan for two 40-minute calls, with a comfort break and tea break in the middle, to make it feel more natural.</p> <p>For more information go to https://zoom.us/</p>	<p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> You can host large numbers on Zoom. There are no limits to the number of meetings you can have Break-out feature allows participants to break out into small group for discussions and seamlessly re-joining the meeting after You can join a meeting by using a web browser or a downloaded app Has recording and screen share features <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Groups would be limited to 40 minutes on the free version. However, the host can immediately restart and participants re-join the meeting to continue. ** there were concerns with regards to privacy/security issue of using the downloaded app, please ensure you have the latest version that has resolved this issue.....Update 24/4/20
Skype	<p>Skype has been around for a while and the majority of people are familiar with the name, even if they don't use it. Skype has continued to improve its call quality since it first launched and is a stable and useful tool.</p> <p>You don't need a skype account to use it. It's now possible to send a link to anyone, which they can use to access a group call. As with Zoom and Hangouts, you can use this on a mobile device.</p> <p>For more information go to https://www.skype.com/en/features/group-video-chat/</p>	<p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People are familiar with the name. Free for up to 50 people. Participants don't need a skype account. <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Layout and registration can be confusing.

<p>Google Hangouts</p>	<p>Google's option requires you to have a google account, which is free to create. It works in the browser, but also has mobile and tablet apps you can download.</p> <p>The group leader starts a call and can either invite people in or can circulate a link to group members that they can click on and join the video call.</p> <p>For more information go to https://hangouts.google.com/</p>	<p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hangouts is free, and if you're use to using Google and Android products, it can be a very natural fit. • Meeting restricted to only those in the Group • Fully integrated to gmail and also works for non-gmail users • No need for Meeting ID and password • No limits on participants and no timeout • Anyone on the Hangout group can start an online meeting • Chat history in a Hangouts group is kept permanently unless you leave the conversation. They can be read at any time (great for those late-comers to catch up). <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google Hangouts works with your existing contacts, but you can share a link to your group if you don't have everyone's google email address. • Video quality is not as high as Zoom. • No recording feature
<p>Facebook Messenger</p>	<p>Facebook Messenger is more than just a chat feature. It also has the ability to allow groups and individuals to create a video call, without charge.</p> <p>For more information go to https://www.messenger.com/</p>	<p>Pros</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses a platform that many are already use to. • Can work easily if your group already has a private Facebook Group. • Free • Works with up to 50 people <p>Cons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You can only see 6 people at a time on the screen. • You need a Facebook account to use this and not everyone uses Facebook, so this may make this option inaccessible to some.

Appendix: Fun Ideas

Some Icebreaker Ideas

TEMPERATURE	PAR 2	CHANCE
HEART	COLLAR HOT	THE HEAD SAND



What will replace Question Mark?

If
 $2+1=23$
 $3+1=34$
 $4+2=26$
 $6+3=29$
then
 $7+1=?$

SHARE IF YOU
COULD FIND IT :)

01. "If you're in a group of 23 people, there's a 50% chance that 2 of them share a birthday. If you're in a group of 70 people, that probability jumps to over 99%."

"The way I see it, if you want the rainbow, you gotta put up with the rain."
— DOLLY PARTON —
Parade



Word Puzzles www.thinkablepuzzles.com (bamboozables)

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Choose your favourite dog picture