

# SMALL GROUPS - *How to Meet While Social Distancing*

***Connection with Each Other is our Goal! We want to help best equip you to create connection online.***

New to hosting a group or class online? An online group is an incredible tool to help people connect with each other when an in-person group may not be possible. You can encourage each other's faith, share authentically, 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 format and work out all of the kinks. Please don't give up too quickly if your first few meetings are a bit of a challenge.

As you look into launching a group online, or having your group try it out for a week, this page will help you figure out the platforms to use, best practices for a good online experience, and what a typical group meeting might look like.

## HOW GROUPS INTERACT

**Home Base:** Conversation portals that allow community interaction at any time [[Facebook Group](#), text thread or [WhatsApp](#), [GroupMe](#)]

**Meeting Space:** Conversations that happens at a specific time with members of a group. [[Zoom.us](#), or [Google Hangouts](#)]

There are a variety of platforms that this could happen on. But we are going to focus on primarily these few options.

## HOME BASE

Conversation & community portals that allow community interaction at any time.

Classes, programs, and studies are easy to walk away from, but relationships are not. Connections with the members of groups should go beyond your designated meeting times. As a leader you will set the pace with this, but you don't have to do it alone. Be sure to invite the entire group into the process of building a loving connection. Utilize things like a [Facebook Group](#), group text messaging, [GroupMe](#), [WhatsApp](#), etc.

# MEETING SPACES

Conversations & community portals that happen at a specific time with members of a group.

## GOOGLE HANGOUTS

- **Pros: Free. Unlimited time. Closed Captioning. Accessible via web browser on computer.**
- **Cons: Requires a google account for all participants.** (can sign up for one [HERE](#)). **Phone-in option not available unless you have a business account.** (If you have a [G Suite business account](#), you can also share a phone number for people to call into the meeting if they don't have access to a computer or smartphone. GSuite accounts are free till July 1, 2020.)
- **Capacity (25 Participants/Devices)**
- **How to use:**
  - Open Google Hangouts in [web browser](#) or mobile app ([apple device](#), [android device](#), [chrome web browser extension](#))
  - Login
  - Click "Video Call" button
  - Click "Invite People" and type in their email address (If they don't have a google account it will send them an invite to setup an account)
  - You can also schedule a meeting on your google calendar and send an invite to join you at a specific time, including a link to your online meeting. ([See Instructions](#))
- Watch 6 minute [YouTube tutorial](#).

## ZOOM

- **Pros: Free. Only hosts are required to have a Zoom account. There is a phone-in option.**
- **Cons: Limited to 40 minutes unless you have a paid account (\$14.99/mo) NOTE:** As of 3/16/20 this has been temporarily lifted due to COVID-19. **Have to download Zoom application to phone or computer.**
- **Capacity (100 participants/Devices)**
- **How To Use:**
  - 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"
  - 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 Instructions](#))
- [Watch tutorial videos in Zoom video library.](#)

## BEST PRACTICES/ONLINE ETIQUETTE

- 1. Recommend group members to download meeting software prior to meeting.**
- 2. Make sure your face has sufficient lighting.**
  - Lighting works best in front of your face, not behind.
- 3. Make sure your face is centered in the video camera.**
  - We don't want to see your forehead, or neck, or miss you all together.
  - Position the camera to eye level or slightly above.
- 4. Select the quietest room/location you can find.**
  - Turn off anything making noise in the background (TV, radio, appliances).
  - Put pets in a different room or have them in a place where they will be most quiet.
  - Places like a coffee shop or restaurant can work but sometimes background noise can be an issue. Noise canceling headphones can help with this.
- 5. Only use one device per household.**
  - When two devices are used in one location it produces feedback (really annoying noises).
- 6. Mute your computer unless you're talking.**
  - 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. So the best policy is to mute yourself when you are not talking.
  - If you are muted, make sure to nod your head and listen well so people can recognize you are following them.
  - You will be muting and unmuting A LOT, so get used to it.
  - Also, you'll get called out if you don't unmute, so don't be offended.
  - Or maybe, the moderator will mute you, so don't take that personally.
- 7. Be an assertive moderator.**
  - 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.
  - Redirect the conversation or mute participants as necessary. This may feel rude but is necessary to manage a good online experience.
  - The moderator should talk 20% of time and listen 80% of time.
- 8. Create a plan for participants to indicate they'd like to talk.**
  - You may try something like raising a hand, answering in a specific order, or another signal.
  - Since participants will often be muted, having a plan will help you know when to mute and unmute.

## 9. Give full attention, don't multitask.

- When participants are not giving their full attention it can be a big distraction online just like an in-person group.
- When talking, spend some time looking at the camera, not just the screen.

## 10. Stay in touch afterwards.

- Assign prayer partners to call each other after group is over and pray with them.
- Or text each other in gender specific text chats to share requests.
- Leverage [GroupMe](#), [Facebook Group](#), [WhatsApp](#), etc. as a place to stay connected and keep the conversation going throughout the week.

# FORMAT/SCHEDULE

## • Practice Session/First Meeting (30 minutes)

- It can be helpful to have a 30 minute practice session together, or take the first half of your first online group get everyone acquainted with how an online group will work.
- Review online etiquette/best practices (listed above). You may want to review some of these talking points the first several meetings until people figure it out.
- Help people learn how to use the technology and answer any questions.
- If you are a new group, make sure to introduce yourself, share you name, and share how you got connected with Northridge and the online group.
- End by sharing prayer requests; have 1 person pray.

## • Typical Meeting (45-60 minutes)

### ◦ Connect - 15-20 minutes

- Welcome people as they login (people tend to arrive late online, just like in-person groups).
- Begin ice breaker.

### ◦ Discuss - 30-40 minutes

- Discuss sermon discussion questions or topic you've chosen, leaving plenty of time for application questions.

### ◦ Wrap Up - 5 minutes

- Ask for any prayer requests.
- Have 1 person wrap up in prayer.
- Encourage people to text each other afterwards for further prayer requests and to pray together. (Prayer Ideas: men's group text, women's group text, whole group text, prayer partners.)