



Guide to Taking Youth Ministry Online

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Introduction

Welcome



This guide was created by Angela and Paul Gorrell in partnership with the Yale Youth Ministry Institute. In light of the pressing concerns of COVID-19 and the demands of physical distancing, we have moved swiftly to develop this resource to help as best we can. We tried to keep in mind the multiple denominations and differing abilities/special needs of the people who may use and be a part of youth ministry inspired by this guide. We also worked to create a guide that can live beyond the crisis that dominates our present times. Additionally, this guide is a useful tool to engage youth in summer months. In this resource we hope to empower and equip you to engage the youth you serve in creative, compelling, and connective ways online.

Young people have pressing concerns that are keeping them awake at night, things like disappointment, anxiety, dread of failure, and loneliness. Many young people feel trapped. Yet Galatians 5 provides good news. There is freedom. The Spirit of God can be their guide. They can be sustained by the fruit of God's Spirit. This fruit is for their good, the good of their household, and the good of all of humanity. We believe, if you do online youth ministry that directly confronts the concerns of young people, they will be more likely to come to the table you set online.

Even if you are not a technology person or have never done youth ministry online, we want you to know, you really can do this.

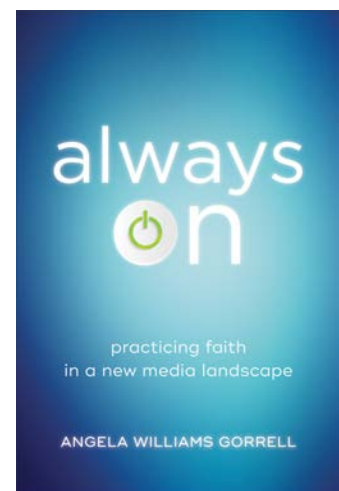
If your church already has a plan for doing youth ministry online, uses a lot of new technology or even has livestreaming options, you can also use this guide. We hope it will inspire you, encourage you, and stimulate other ideas for doing youth ministry online.

If you are unsure of how new technology and social media relates to ministry and the way people live out their faith, read [always on: practicing faith in a new media landscape](#). The book is pictured below.

Blessings on you, your ministry, and your leadership as you seek to meet youth where they are: online.

Peace to you,

Angela & Paul



Youth Ministry & Contemporary Concerns of Young People

Youth ministry is at its best when it:

- Helps youth to sense God's presence
- Aids youth in understanding and imitating the life and teachings of Jesus and thus love God and their neighbors
- Assists youth in identity formation by encouraging them to see themselves as made in the image of God
- Supports youth in seeing their lives as filled with meaning and purpose by being connected to a larger story
- Nurtures joy in youth's lives by helping them to realize and feel connected to others, beauty, truth, and goodness
- Encourages youth in the midst of difficulty and helps them to understand where God is during human suffering
- Helps youth to connect their everyday concerns to the larger story God is telling through their lives and in the life of the world

You can use new media and online gatherings to get teens talking about the most pressing concerns of their lives. Often, during mediated communication, teens (like adults) can be more honest and open than during in person conversation. Youth leaders can use online and mediated communication to invite teens to be vulnerable and truthful about the things that are keeping them awake at night.

When we get teens talking about the things they are most concerned about, we have an opportunity to help them connect their concerns with Christian faith. We have the ability to help them to see why spiritual practices and being a part of a Christian community is vital for them.

Getting teens talking about pressing concerns and helping them address them in a meaningful way gives youth leaders a launch point for connecting their lives to Christian faith, which provides opportunities to then help youth to discuss difficulty and human suffering, feel God's presence, imitate Jesus, love God and their neighbors, see the image of God in themselves and others, recognize their life has meaning and is connected to a larger story, and feel joy.

Contemporary Concerns of Youth

The conversation starters in this guide are designed to help you to develop meaningful conversations about the deepest concerns impacting the lives of teens. The concerns in this guide include: disappointment, anxiety, loneliness, pain, jealousy, shame, anger, and social media. In this section, you will encounter a brief description of each concern and a prompt to get your youth talking.

Disappointment

Youth experience myriad disappointments regarding numerous aspects of their lives: goals, grades, sports, college admission, relationships, loss. In spring 2020, disappointment is especially pervasive.

Get Youth Talking:

When have you been really disappointed? What happened?

Anxiety

Anxiety is one of the most googled terms. Anxiety is one of the most common words I hear young people use to describe the way they feel.

Get Youth Talking:

When you hear the word, “anxiety,” what comes to mind for you?

Loneliness and fear of rejection

Linda Lee, a student at Harvard, in an op-ed for her school’s newspaper, discusses how the pressure to produce contributes to loneliness:

“But we now run on a different kind of Harvard Time, one in which no minute can go to waste, one that pushes the limits of the 24-hour cycle and prioritizes ceaseless productivity over emotions and relationships. Harvard Time now runs on loneliness, and the seconds that tick by are heard by no one until it is too late” (article, [“Harvard Time Runs on Loneliness”](#)).

While millennials were recently called, “the loneliest generation,” it is not just millennials who are dealing with loneliness. When Americans in every generation surveyed were asked about why they find it difficult to make friends, over half said that the reason is shyness (article, [“Millennials are the loneliest generation”](#)). Shyness is connected to excessive self-focus that manifests as fear of rejection (article, [“Shyness”](#)). There are studies that show that rejection activates the same pathways in the brain as physical pain, which is why Tylenol can make people feel better after rejection. The second reason people gave for having difficulty making friends in the survey related to loneliness was that they do not feel like they need friends.

Get Youth Talking:

- Where and with whom do you feel like you belong?
 - Have you ever feared that you might be rejected by other people?
 - You could also read the Linda Lee quote and ask whether it resonates.
-

Pain

Pain is a natural part of life. Young people experience pain in all sorts of ways, loss, death, trauma, and relationships and circumstances. It is important for young people to learn to recognize God’s presence in the midst of suffering and for them to believe that they are not alone in their pain.

Get Youth Talking:

- When you think about pain or suffering that you have seen, what comes to mind?

Jealousy

Jealousy is something young people struggle with because they are developing their identity, which involves comparing themselves to others. They are constantly wondering things like, “Do I fit in? Can I do that too? Am I as good-looking as so and so? Should I also use that word? Should I ask my parents if I can...” Groups of young people often compare youth to one another as well, online and in person, making youth even more self-aware/self-conscious. Online, jealousy is cultivated by passive scrolling and passive following of other people online that youth do not know well or do not know at all. Passive scrolling is scrolling through a social media sites content but rarely contributing, posting, replying. Passive following is closely watching the posts of another social media user but never engaging with them (talking with them, replying, messaging). It is important that young people know that comparing themselves to others is normal, but also can cause jealousy. It is also critical that young people learn how destructive passive internet use can be for their mental health.

Get Youth Talking:

- What kinds of things cause jealousy?

Shame

Shame is a feeling that follows disappointing or failing others, God, and ourselves. It is also the feeling youth get after trauma. Trauma lowers self-worth and can make youth feel inadequate, unworthy, and insecure. It is critical for young people to know that they do not have to live with shame. If they have shame from disappointing or failing, they need to know that apologies and forgiveness are possible for them. Youth also need to know that God’s love is unconditional. Youth who struggle with shame after trauma need to know that they can heal from their trauma through the care of a pastor, psychologist, psychiatrist, and/or social worker.

Get Youth Talking:

- Why is shame such a difficult thing for people?
- Where does shame come from?

Fear/insecurity, fear of failure

Our youth have grown up in a post-911 US. They have also grown up during an era of widespread mass shootings. They have grown up with mass shooting drills, being taught to remain vigilant at all times, which can make youth feel like they live in a world that is unsafe. Some youth have grown up in communities where gun violence is a regular occurrence and where many community members feel unsafe. Feeling unsafe nurtures fear—fear of other people and fear of unfamiliar places, unconscious fear. Fear is an emotion that needs to be addressed in our Christian communities on a regular basis. People need to have space in your community to talk about their fears and work through their fears.

Many young people also fear failure. Young people can also believe that failure is not an option (even though it will happen at some point during their lifetimes). Your youth group can help to normalize failure and help youth focus on what can be done after you fail, rather than fearing it or assuming it will not happen.

Get Youth Talking:

- Have you ever been afraid of something or someone? If so, what?
 - When I say the word, “failure,” what comes to mind?
-

Disputes/anger

As youth grow up, they learn that conflict happens. However, many people are not taught that conflict is a neutral, natural part of life. Conflict happens. Youth need to learn how to respond to conflict productively both online and in person. Youth also need to be able to talk about anger. It is a natural human emotion. Even Jesus got angry sometimes. They need space in your youth group to discuss what makes them angry and why as well as how to express anger productively. Youth need to know if they get angry, youth leaders in your group are willing and ready to help them navigate it.

Get Youth Talking:

- Have you ever argued with someone online or through text? What happened?
 - How do you express your anger?
-

Social media

I discuss social media at length in [always on](#)—its possibilities and challenges. Young people need opportunities to reflect on their social media experiences. They need to be able to talk about the ways it brings them happiness and the ways it hurts them. Young people need guidance for how to connect their Christian faith to their use of new media. They need guidance on how to use it well so that their social media use can contribute to their own flourishing and that of others.

Get Youth Talking:

- How does being on social media make you feel?
- What opportunities does social media offer?
- If we were to spend all of our time on social media, what would we miss out on?

Fruit of the Spirit

The right and needed response for each of these concerns is a life lived intimately with God. This type of life is a life that is connected with God’s own Spirit. As we find in Galatians 5, the presence of God’s invisible Spirit becomes discernible through the fruits/expressions/gifts of God’s Spirit.

[Galatians 5:13-23 The Message Version](#)

Consider using the message version of this passage. We have found that the message version of this passage is especially meaningful and accessible to young people. The Galatians 5 passage is a helpful pairing with contemporary concerns of teens. Their concerns are real, legitimate, and most will continue to happen and need to be dealt with throughout their

lifetimes. At the same time, there is a larger story being told. The Spirit of God allows us to also experience and live toward a good, meaningful life.

The table below pairs each fruit of the Spirit, from Galatians 5, with a prompt to get your youth talking.

Fruit of the Spirit	Get Youth Talking
Love (affection for others)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell about a time when you realized you really loved someone else.
Joy (exuberance about life)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell about a time you felt unspeakable joy.
Peace (serenity)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does it mean to be at peace or have peace? • What or who helps you to be calm?
Patience (willingness to stick with things)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who has taught you about patience? • Tell about a time you were patient.
Kindness (sense of compassion in the heart)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell about a time someone showed you kindness.
Goodness (a conviction that a basic holiness permeates things and people)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tell about a time when someone was good to you or when you realized something was truly good.
Faithfulness (involved in loyal commitments)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What or who do you consider yourself to be loyal to and why?
Gentleness (not needing to force our way in life)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • From your perspective, how might gentleness be related to strength?
Self-control (able to marshal and direct our energies wisely)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kinds of situations make it hard for teens to be wise, to practice self-control?

Teaching youth about the work of the Holy Spirit

Many young people feel alone. It can be comforting to know that they have a guide, a companion, who is always with them. It can be comforting to recognize that while life is disappointing and painful, it is also full of love and joy. And while they may experience anxiety, loneliness, and fear, there is still kindness, gentleness, and faithfulness in the world. While life involves jealousy, failure, and arguments, it also contains goodness and it is possible to grow in our capacities for self-control and patience.

The Holy Spirit can be our companion in all aspects of life—teaching us; reminding us; empowering us; encouraging us; revealing truth to us; praying on our behalf; telling us what to say; setting us free; making us holy; and, thus, inviting human beings to be receptive to and share in God’s loving, reconciling ministry in our hearts and in the world.

The important thing is that the Galatians 5 passage is saying that the fruit of the Spirit is a life of freedom, not entrapment.

It is actually in allowing the Spirit of God to cultivate the fruit of the Spirit in our lives that we begin to live more freely.

Questions you might ask to get teens talking about the Spirit:

- Why is it called fruit of the Spirit?
- What does it mean to live by the Spirit?
- How do we live by the Spirit?
- When have you felt the Spirit telling you to do something?
- When have you felt the Spirit helping or teaching you?

Section One: Doing Youth Ministry Online



In this section, you'll find concrete, interesting ways to engage youth in conversation, invite them to live out their faith, and take important elements of youth ministry into digital spaces.

[In section three](#), we provide recommendations about what tools to use to do online ministry and provide guidance on how to use various tools.

Creating Small Groups for Online Gatherings

If your youth group has more than twenty youth, I encourage you to create small groups for synchronous online gatherings. That way, as many youth as possible will be able to truly participate, share their gifts and stories, and respond to questions.

Through what is described below, you can also reach out to each one of the youth in your youth group and ask about what devices they have access to. It is important to make sure every youth group member can participate and also knows how to use the platforms/online tools you choose for your youth group activities.

You may also need to begin this process by determining what tools youth leaders need to learn to use.

I have listed three ways to do this below.

Way One

If your youth group has existing small groups, you can use these for the online services.

If you decide to use small groups you already have, **still use way two or way three below** to invite youth to participate who are not already in small groups and also to find out what devices youth have access to and what tools they need help learning.

After you have done this, make sure to also review what is listed under Wrap Up below.

Way Two

Create an Excel spreadsheet.

- The first column will be for someone's first and last name.
- The second column will be for yes or no.
- The third column will be for devices.

- The fourth column will be for titles of tools the youth needs to learn how to use.
- The fifth column will be for an email address. If you already have it, type it in.
- The sixth column will be for a phone number. If you already have it, type it in.

Email, call, or text every youth to ask if they want to be put into a group for online gatherings. If you have a large group of youth, divide up the names and have multiple leaders call the youth.

- Type their name into the spreadsheet.
- Ask if the youth would like to join an online worship group.
- Type yes or no in the second column.
- If they say yes, ask if they have access to a smart phone and/or laptop and type in the third column what they have access to: smart phone, laptop, computer, flip phone or type “no device.” If they don’t personally have a laptop or smart phone, ask to talk to their parents/caretakers and see if they are willing and able to let their child use a device for youth group activities. Hopefully parents who have a laptop or smart phone will allow youth to borrow a device for participating in youth group activities.
- If the youth does not have access to a laptop or a smart phone (only a flip phone or landline), tell them they can still join a Zoom gathering by calling in.
- You may want to group youth together that don’t have access to a computer or smart phone and invite them to participate in asynchronous activities that are tailored for sharing through word text and phone calls.
- Ask if the youth needs to learn how to use (names of platforms/online tools you plan on using).
- Make a note of what they want to learn in the fourth column (Zoom, GroupMe, or any other tool you want them to use).
- You can also tell them a team member from your technology team will be in touch with them if they need to learn how to use a particular tool.
- If you need the youth’s email and/or phone number, ask for it. These things will be given to youth group leaders to contact them for participating in the group.

After you have made an excel spreadsheet, work with other youth leaders to create groups. I don’t think groups should have more than 10-15 people so everyone can participate in each online gathering.

Keep in mind people with differing abilities/special needs. For example, if someone needs another person to do American Sign Language for them during the service, be sure to put them in a group where this is possible.

After you have done this, make sure to also review what is listed under Wrap Up below.

Way Three

This way is only suitable if you know most of your youth have access to a laptop and you already communicate with a large number of your youth through email or on Facebook.

Create a Google form that can be shared with the youth through email and/or Facebook messaging. On the Google form, create questions that: ask youth for their name, whether they want to be a part of a group (yes or no), to choose from a multiple choice list what devices they have access to, and to choose from a multiple choice list what tools they need help learning how to use (based on what tools you plan on using in the coming weeks).

If you look at the list of those who have filled out the form and notice names of regular attendees are missing, email or call them and ask them the questions (see way two above).

After you have made a data sheet integrating data from all of the submitted Google forms, work with other youth leaders to create groups. I don't think groups should have more than 10-15 people so everyone can participate in each online service.

Keep in mind people with differing abilities/special needs. For example, if someone needs another person to do American Sign Language for them during the service, be sure to put them in a group where this is possible.

After you have done this, make sure to also do what is listed under Wrap Up below.

Wrap Up—last things to do before your groups start gathering online

After you have done way one, two, or three, engage in the final steps of Group creation.

Designate a leader for each group who is in charge of contacting youth and their parents/caretakers to let them know they are in their group, creating Zoom meetings for the group (and informing parents/caretakers when the meetings are), and inviting youth to contribute to the gatherings. Of course, the groups could also all meet at the same designated time/regular youth group time each week.

Email the technology team the names of youth and youth leaders who need help learning how to use any online tools you have chosen. It would be good to do a test Zoom gathering with any youth or youth leaders who have never used it before.

Email the list of groups and the leader of each group's name and phone and email to all of the youth and parents/caretakers of the youth.

Provide an email or phone number on the church website youth group page and/or Facebook page so that youth who are not part of a group can contact youth group leaders to join one.

Planning Your Online Gathering

As the team plans your online gatherings, do your best to give options that will include youth that call in or only have access to a smart phone as well as youth of various abilities. Start simple for the first couple of weeks. As the weeks go by, you can add activities and invitations.

Example of an Online Synchronous Gathering Plan

- Engage The Arts (choose something from [The Arts section](#))
- Introduce the Topic of the week (choose something from the [Contemporary Concerns section](#))

- Get Youth Talking (choose a question provided in [Contemporary Concerns section](#) related to the topic you chose or choose one of the ideas from the [Get Youth Talking section](#))
- Read the Galatians 5 passage (choose an idea from the [Ideas for Reading Scripture section](#))
- Reflect on Galatians 5 passage with youth, provide encouragement related to the concern the group discussed
- Pray (choose an idea from the [Prayer section](#))
- Invite ([choose a Christian practice](#) for youth to try out and tell them to share in the GroupMe or on your private Facebook page how it went or explain they can share next week during the online gathering how it went)
- Invite (choose an idea from the [Play section](#) or the [Connecting Across Generations section](#) for the youth to get involved with asynchronously this next week)
- Announce how youth can get [pastoral care](#).
- Announce how youth can get involved with helping plan the next online gathering, like doing something from [The Arts section](#).

Get Youth Talking

Conversation during an online gathering:

Storytelling

Tell about a time when...

Ask the youth and youth leaders to tell stories related to the topic by filling in the line above. For example, if you are asking about anxiety, you could say, "Tell about a time when you have felt anxious..."

Advice

If you were going to give someone else advice about (fill in topic/concern/issue/situation) from a Christian perspective, what would you say and why?

Fish bowl

Invite 3 youth to be "in the fish bowl." Only these three youth can talk initially. If a youth is not "in the fish bowl," they cannot talk, they need to be muted. They have to wait until everyone has spoken and then ask someone in the bowl to leave before they can join.

Ask the youth “in the bowl” a compelling question about (fill in topic/concern/issue/situation). Everyone else listens to the youth have a discussion. Youth cannot simply use the chat box to say whatever they want or unmute themselves and start talking. They have to be “in the bowl” to ask a question, reply, or share. After the youth who are in the bowl have talked for a little bit, other youth can join by typing into the chat feature “join” and then typing the name of the person they would like to replace “in the bowl.”

Moderate the discussion.

Say something like “Adam wants to join the fish bowl. Adam please unmute yourself and join the fish bowl. Keisha, please mute yourself and exit the fish bowl.”

Photo

Ahead of the online gathering, tell the youth and youth leaders what the topic is. Ask everyone to take a photo that represents the topic for them. Ask everyone to text their photo to the youth group’s GroupMe chat or email them to a youth leader.

To get them from GroupMe: Save each one of the photos to your smart phone. Connect the smart phone to your computer.

To get them from Email: Save each one of the photos to your desktop.

Create a slideshow of the photos or make it so you can easily click through them. During the online gathering, “share” your computer screen with the group and go through the photos to introduce the topic.

You could also invite youth and other youth leaders to unmute themselves when they see their photo to tell the group its their photo and to talk about it—how it relates to the topic and what comes up for them when they see the photo.

Feelings

In general, what are two feelings you experience when you think about (fill in topic/concern/issue/situation)?

Movies

What movies address (fill in topic/concern/issue/situation)? What is one way the filmmakers of the movie got it wrong and one way they got it right?

Asynchronous conversation about a topic. You could invite the youth to do any form of chatting above whenever they like by:

- Sharing with the chat group on GroupMe
- Sharing a Video response on GroupMe or on the Private Facebook group page
- Starting a Facebook message thread with the prompt and having everyone reply back to the message

Christian Practices



In this section on Christian practices, there are ideas for how you can invite youth to engage various Christian practices. “Discerning” is distinct in that it is a practice a youth leader would need to teach first and lead youth through for at least the first time. After discerning, the directions are written in such a way that you can simply share them with youth exactly as they are written.

Discerning

Scripture: James 1:5

Invite someone in the group to talk about a difficult decision they need to make (e.g. where to go to college, what summer job to get).

As a group, ask someone to pray to ask God for guidance. Ask the person who has a decision to make to share their questions and whatever else is on their heart. Then, everyone else in the group listens without judgement and offers their own questions, reflections, and/or observations. Consider also asking group participants to share what passages from Scripture could be helpful to remember as everyone considers the decision.

Go into another time of prayer asking God for guidance. After the prayer ask the participants if any images, thoughts, or reflections came to their mind and heart. Ask the person who is making a decision if they have any other thoughts at this time. Commit to praying for this person in the coming weeks.

Thanking God

Scripture: Psalm 100.

Create a list of things or a collage that reflects all the things you are grateful to God for. Then take the list or collage and hang it in your home, in a special place.

Thanking Others

Scripture: Ephesians 1:15-16

Create a text, Facebook post, Instagram story, or a Snap where you express gratitude for someone in your life each day of the coming week.

Listening

Scripture: Proverbs 19:20, James 1:19

Ask your parents or grandparents about themselves. Consider asking them about how life is going, their work, and/or stories from when they were your age. Take some time to give whomever you ask your full-attention.

Feasting

Scripture: Exodus 5:1

Tell your household that you are going to prepare a meal for them. If you could use help from a family member, ask for it. Look online for ideas and create a three-course meal, using the food that you have available in your pantry and fridge. Also consider making name cards for each guest, setting the table in a beautiful way, and creating an atmosphere of joy.

Fasting

Scripture: Acts 13:1-3

Choose a block of time or a day this week to fast from something (e.g. food, social media). Throughout the time when you would normally be doing whatever you are fasting from, take time to pray for your family, friends, and community.

Celebrating

Scripture: Philippians 4:4

Go online and find one person to rejoice with. Reply to them. Message them. Or share their post. Or go the extra mile and call them.

If you don't use social media, call a friend or a family member and ask what has brought them joy in the past week. Rejoice with them.

Rejoicing and Mourning

Scripture: Psalm 77, Romans 12

Read Romans 12. Paul is explicit about the kind of relating children of God should embody. In verse fifteen, Paul encourages readers to "Rejoice with those who rejoice and to mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15). Go online and find one person to rejoice with and one person to mourn with. Reply to them. Message them. Or go the extra mile and call them.

Draw a picture (or make some sort of creation) of something you are lamenting in your own life or in the life of someone else. Share your creations with us in a group chat in a week and read Psalm 77.

Truth-telling

Scripture: Philippians 4:8-9

Get on social media for a period of time or spend your day being intentional about looking for people to affirm and stories to share that focus on what is right and good in the world.

After a designated period of time, youth could share about what happened online or through an app like GroupMe. Youth could respond to questions like: What did it feel like to look for what

is right and good in the world? How did you affirm what is right and good? What did it feel like to affirm it? What are your criteria for goodness and rightness?

Promising

Scripture: Matthew 5:33-37

Be thoughtful about every 'yes' and every 'no' to which you commit yourself to during this next week. Next time we gather, we will reflect on the experience of what it means to keep your commitment to others.

Forgiving

Scripture: Matthew 5:43-48.

If someone has recently hurt your feelings or made you angry, pray about your hurt/anger this week. Reach out to someone else and talk about how you are feeling. Express how you feel to the person who has hurt you or made you angry. Express that you desire clarity, an apology, and if possible, reconciliation and/or to offer forgiveness.

If you get angry with someone online or at your house this coming week, get offline or walk away and take 5 deep breaths. Ask God to help you to be a person of love and to ask good questions and not make assumptions. After you have had time, ask questions. Seek understanding, and take ownership. Say, "I am sorry" if you need to. Express that you desire clarity, an apology, and if possible, reconciliation and/or to offer forgiveness.

Prayers

This section on prayers is written to youth leaders to assist you in encouraging youth to learn to pray, to practice prayer, and to help them be more comfortable praying during an online gathering.

Invite Prayer Requests

Create a way youth can share their prayer requests. You could invite them to share through chat in GroupMe, text, email, group Facebook message, or a Google drive document you set up (see technical help section for the beginner's guide to Google documents). You could also ask youth to share requests using the chat feature of a synchronous online gathering.

Write Prayers

Invite the youth to write a prayer in groups or as individuals before the next time you meet together online and to share the prayers they wrote aloud. The youth could also share the prayer through GroupMe, Facebook message, or on your groups' private Facebook page.

Find Written Prayers Online

Invite the youth to find a prayer online to share in the group's next online gathering. The youth could also share the prayer through GroupMe, Facebook message, or on your groups' private Facebook page.

Group Prayer Reading

Invite the youth to each read one line of a prayer that a youth leader writes or finds online.

Play-doh Prayer

Invite the youth to find play-doh or clay (paper and drawing materials could be substituted) and be ready to use it during the next online gathering. Click [play-doh prayer](#) to view a guided meditation a youth leader could lead during the gathering. Have a youth leader read the steps and invite everyone to do them alongside one another from your various homes.

Examen

Directions: Lead the group in the following steps during an online gathering and use a smart phone as a timer.

1. Presence. I invite you to get into a comfortable position and spend time in silence in God's presence for a minute. (1 min)
2. Invitation to the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit, I pray your guidance is felt by each person. (1 min)
3. Gratitude. I invite you to think back over the previous twenty-four hours (online and in your house) with gratitude. (2 min). What are you thankful for?
4. Review. I invite you to think back over the previous twenty-four hours again, objectively, without judgment and without justifying, taking time to experience all the range of emotions in the presence of God. Think about these questions. (2 min)
When was I most loving/most able to receive love? When was I hurtful/unloving? When did I not feel loved?
5. Examine. I invite you to think back over the previous twenty-four hours again, examining your thoughts and experiences (online and in your house). (2 min)
When was God present to you? When were you present to God's activity?
6. I invite you to open your eyes.
7. Would anyone like to share what came up for you?

Ideas for Reading Scripture

This section on ideas for reading scripture is written to youth leaders to assist you in imagining different ways to read scripture during an online gathering.

Responsive reading

Do a responsive reading of the text. Choose one person of the group to be the leader and the rest of the group will be the community. The leader reads a line of the text and then everyone else in the community reads the next line. Go back and forth until you have finished reading the text aloud together. Invite anyone who is able to stand for the reading.

Act it out

Choose someone to read the text aloud and then choose group members to act out the text for everyone.

Imaginative Prayer

Imaginative prayer works best with a biblical text that is a story. Imaginative prayer is a way to help individuals or groups imagine being a part of the stories in the Bible.

1. Invite everyone to close their eyes and get into a comfortable position.
2. Invite participants to pay attention to the details—the sights, sounds, tastes, smells, and feelings of the event—as they are listening to the story.
3. Read (biblical text) aloud. Ask participants to silently reflect on questions like
 - What do you see in your surroundings?
 - What do you smell?
 - What sounds are you hearing?
 - What can you taste?
4. Read the story aloud again. Ask participants to silently reflect on questions like
 - Who are you in the story?
 - Is anyone or anything near you?
 - What are you feeling?
 - Do you want to say something that has not been said in the story? If so, what do you want to say and whom are you talking to?
5. Read the story aloud a third time. Ask participants to silently reflect on questions like
 - What happened before this?
 - What is going to happen next?
6. Invite the group to share aloud what they experienced.

The Arts

Each of the following activities in this section could be done synchronously or asynchronously. You could have youth or youth leaders share during a synchronous online gathering or through GroupMe, Facebook message, or on your groups' private Facebook page. The ideas in this section are written to youth leaders to help encourage people in your community to share various art forms as a way of connecting with God and each other.

Music

Invite youth and other youth leaders to share their musical talents with the group by playing a musical instrument or singing a song or playing and singing live or making a video.

Spoken Word

Invite youth and other youth leaders to share a spoken word poem or other type of poem they have written or that is close to their heart live or by making a video.

Viewing Art

Choose an art piece for youth to look up online and view and discuss together. Or ask if any of the youth or other youth leaders have an art piece that they have created that they would like to share with the group.

Pastoral Care

We encourage you to make sure youth know they can get pastoral care during the coming weeks.

Every week, share in the GroupMe chat or on your private Facebook page how youth can set up a time to talk with you and other youth leaders (e.g., phone calls, FaceTime, or video conference: Zoom or Skype).

Consider sharing an email and phone number where youth can contact someone if their family needs food, diapers, or medicine etc. or someone to help care for someone they regularly assist (children, elders, people with differing abilities/special needs).

Section Two: Using Technology to Create Community

Asynchronous Conversation Starters



Creating Community necessitates interesting, meaningful conversation and reflection on things that matter to young people. Below are conversation starters. Conversations like this work well on an app like GroupMe.

There are multiple ways to do this. Here are a few:

Each week, you can invite 5 different youth to take on one subject: one person can share how they have served, another can share a song they are listening to on repeat, another can share a video they created, another could share their hobby, and another youth could share an interest they have. You could pick the 5 youth on a Sunday and say, "This week, share on GroupMe." If by Thursday, a youth has not shared, give them a nudge.

You could also do one theme a day. You could still pick (or ask for volunteers) the 5 youth ahead of time, perhaps during the online gathering. You or another youth leader could text to the group's GroupMe chat something like, "Today, we are going to hear from (youth's name) about the song she is listening to on repeat." That will prompt the young person to share.

Whatever you decide, you will initially need a plan that involves scheduling youth to share in the time between synchronous online gatherings to keep everyone connected and building relationships with each other.

your Music

Directions to youth: What song are you listening to on repeat? Send a link to a YouTube video of the song to (name of youth leader).

Note to youth leader: You can choose one song a week to invite the youth group to talk about. Invite the youth to watch the video and look at the lyrics. Then start a conversation about the song by asking questions like, Why does this song resonate (or not) with you? What is true about these lyrics? Is there truth here that mirrors biblical truth? Do these lyrics lie about the way the world really is or what God has revealed to us?

your Video

Do you like to make videos? If your video is longer than 1 minute and 30 seconds, upload it to YouTube and share it with us. If it's shorter than that, just send it to **(fill in youth leader name and contact info)**.

your Hobby

What is your favorite hobby? What are you good at? Why do you like this hobby? How do you get better at doing your hobby? If we'd like to learn, what tips do you have for us?

Note to leaders: Be specific about where they should share this info. Perhaps the GroupMe chat?

your Interest

What topic matters to you? What do you care about? What are you advocating for or against? What should we know about this topic? Share articles, videos, Ted talks, or other kinds of information about something that matters deeply to you.

Note to leaders: Be specific about where they should share this info. Perhaps the GroupMe chat?

you Serve

Empathy

Choose an issue that impacts people's lives and learn more about it this week through reading articles, watching YouTube videos or Ted talks, or searching a hashtag. We look forward to learning from you!

Note for youth leader: Here are possible issues you can encourage youth to learn more about, homelessness in their community; fair trade clothing; incarceration trends in the United States; famine and food insecurity in east Africa; refugee crisis.

Compassion

Next time you see someone being mistreated online, speak up and reach out. Tell an adult if you see someone being bullied or harassed. Consider reaching out to the person who has been mistreated by messaging them and checking on them.

Give

Get online and use social media to recognize one of your friends or family members. Make a post or story affirming them. Tell the world how kind, fun, smart, brave the person is.

Or if you don't have social media, make a card and send it to someone in recognition of who they are and what they mean to you.

Hospitality

Look after kids or Look after Elders:

Offer to Zoom/Skype/FaceTime with someone's child/children and do an activity with them. Offer to talk on the phone or video conference with an elder in the church who lives alone.

Play

Another way to create community is to invite youth to play.

Online games

Note to youth leader: Break the youth group into smaller groups of 4 and have a time before or after your online youth group gathering for the youth to play a game with each other. Ideas for games and descriptions are here: <https://appamatix.com/10-best-apps-to-play-with-friends/> (This is a good list overall, but Evil Apples—the name gives it away—is *not* a game I recommend).

TikTok Challenge

Note to youth leader: Have a TikTok challenge of the week. Invite youth to make short videos based on different themes that youth and/or youth leaders come up with.

[About TikTok](#)

[How to Use TikTok - Complete Beginners Guide](#)

Wanderlust

Directions to youth and other youth leaders: Go outside. Find 8 different animals/insects. Find 5 different kinds of plants. Find 3 cool-looking rocks. Share your best photo from your adventure on the GroupMe.

Jumping photo

Directions to youth and other youth leaders: Go outside and create your best jumping photo. It's tough to jump high enough in the air and position the camera just right to make it look like you're super high off the ground. Who can do it best?

Create a video of your best jokes

Directions to youth and other youth leaders: Can you make us laugh? Send a 1 minute or less video of your best jokes to **(fill in youth leader's name)**.

Virtual Dance Party

Note to youth leader: Use Zoom to have a Virtual dance party. Ask the youth to send you song recommendations and then create a playlist and get it going next to the speaker of your computer speaker and then get everyone dancing. Start with the Cha Cha slide. Tell everyone to have a snack table at their house.

Ideas for Connecting Generations and Households

Create Mentoring Relationships between Older Adults and Teens

- You can have them write letters to each other for a few months.
- You could have them teach skills to each other through video conferencing (e.g. Google hangouts). Skills like knitting, wood working, drawing. The skills-sharing and teaching could go both ways, adults teaching and learning as well as youth teaching and learning.

Possible steps.

1. Email or call youth and ask who wants to have a pen pal or learn a new skill and/or is willing to teach an older adult a new skill.
2. Email or call households with older adults and ask who wants to have a pen pal or teach and/or learn a new skill.
3. Make a list and connect pen pals and skill sharers.
4. Give guidelines that protect youth. Tell everyone who their partner is.
5. Contact parents/caretakers about the mentoring relationships.
6. Monitor the relationships.

Create an All-Church Video Challenge

Post/email the challenge of the week. Have people submit videos by a certain day and time and then watch them and share some or all of them.

- Who has a great story to tell?
- Who can do stand-up comedy and give us all a good laugh?
- Who can make the most fun dance video?
- Who can create the most interesting music video?

Create an All-Church Photo Challenge

Post/email the photo challenge of the week. Have individuals, pairs, and households submit a photo by a certain day and time and then look at them and share some or all of them.

- Who can take the most beautiful food photo?
- Who can capture what it means to be a Christian?
- Who can take the funniest photo?
- Who can take the most inspiring photo?

Create Household Challenges

Invite households to share videos or photos of themselves finishing each challenge.

Possible Household Challenges:

- Conduct a photo scavenger hunt. The first household to post photos of everything on the list wins. Your list could include things like a photo of someone doing the Heisman stance, someone doing their hair, two people doing the running man and so on.

- Make wild cookies, something new, your own recipe.
- Memorize the books of the Bible and post a video of everyone reciting them together.
- Memorize five verses of the Bible about hope and share a video of them being read back to back.

Section Three: Technical Help

Create a Small Technology Team

Email church leaders and congregants and ask them to help you to identify 2 people who can help you, youth, and youth leaders at the church to use technology well, troubleshoot technology issues, and use online tools like video conferencing.

Contact each of the people named and ask if they will serve on a technology team for the next two or three months. If you need more time from them, at the end of the period, you can contact them again and ask if they can give more time or ask other church members that were identified to take their place. People are more likely to volunteer when there is a clear beginning and end date.

Getting Youth Leaders on Board

Connect with your youth leaders and talk with them on the phone about doing youth ministry online and through mediated communication (e.g., texting, calls, emails). Share this guide with them. If they are open to helping, schedule a Zoom meeting (see how to do this in the section Learn to use Online tools below) so you can talk together and make plans for the coming weeks.

The zoom meeting will give them an opportunity to practice being part of a Zoom gathering if they have not done this before. Decide what tools you will use for your synchronous and asynchronous activities and make sure the youth leaders know how to use every tool. Limit the amount of tools your group uses to two or three. Be sure to connect youth leaders with your technology team members so they know who to contact for help for themselves or youth.

If you do not have enough youth leaders to help you do youth ministry online, reach out to other congregants and ask people if they would be willing to guide small groups for 2 or 3 months. People are more likely to volunteer if you provide a clear beginning and end date. Instead of doing an email to everyone in the church, consider asking specific people. Tell them you will give them a clear plan for an online gathering and why you thought of them—what gifts, passions, and so on they have demonstrated. People are also more likely to say yes if it is clear why you chose them.

Learn to Use Online Tools

I have listed and described many of the most popular tools, apps, and platforms below and made recommendations.

Click below to watch videos on how to use various tools.

Feel free to share these links on your church's website and to email the links to your youth leaders, youth, and their parents/caretakers.

I recommend using Zoom for synchronous online gatherings. The basic plan is free. However, you need to create an account and sign in, in order to schedule a Zoom "meeting." Meetings can only be 40 minutes long if you have a basic plan and do not have a school email

address. If a youth leader uses a school email address (because they are an educator or a student) meetings can go beyond the 40 minute time slot at the time of this guide's release (April 2020).

On Zoom, youth leaders can click "share" to share their computer screen with everyone in the group. Invite youth and youth leaders to mute themselves when they are not talking to limit background noise by clicking the microphone on the screen. Invite youth and youth leaders to click the chat button on the screen to type a comment or question to the group. I recommend making sure every person knows how to use these buttons during the first minutes of the first gathering.

At the time of this guide's release (April 2020), Zoom bombing has been occurring. Be sure to tell youth leaders to protect each gathering by (1) requiring a password to enter it and (2) making it so only the scheduler of the meeting can share their screen. You can do these two things when you schedule the meeting.

Beginner's guide to [Zoom](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2pq4l1urXA)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-2pq4l1urXA>)

I recommend using the app GroupMe for asynchronous activities. You can create a chat group for everyone in the youth group. If your group is larger than 20 people, create multiple chat groups. People can share videos, photos, articles, and text to the chat group. GroupMe can be used by any type of smart phone, iPad, and/or computer so it is better than using regular text messaging groups. Plus, if youth are sharing a device, this chat will be separate from regular texts and parents/caretakers won't have to view all of what is shared if they don't want to. Youth can simply open the chat group on GroupMe and see what has happened since they have last been on.

Beginner's guide to [GroupMe](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ9YSf5Qd0Y)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJ9YSf5Qd0Y>)
Use GroupMe for any smart phone, iPad and/or computer (<https://groupme.com/en-US/>)

Facebook:

You may decide to create a private youth group Facebook page instead of using GroupMe. However, not all youth have a Facebook account. Also, youth are more likely to text through an app like GroupMe than to post to a Facebook page. However, using a private Facebook page may be more appealing to parents/caretakers of youth. It may also be good to use a private Facebook page to update youth leaders and parents/caretakers of youth on what is happening with youth ministry.

How to [Create a Private Facebook Page](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DkxFhR4R90)
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-DkxFhR4R90>)

Facebook group messaging may be a helpful way to connect with youth leaders, youth, and/or parents/caretakers. You can share announcements in a message and easily get a private conversation going between multiple people. It is similar to text messaging but may be easier if multiple people are already Facebook friends.

[How to use Facebook messaging](https://www.facebook.com/help/257797861248430/?helpref=hc_fnav)
(https://www.facebook.com/help/257797861248430/?helpref=hc_fnav)

Google documents are ways multiple people can work on the same document from wherever they are. You can share the plans for each week's online gathering through a shared Google

document link. Make sure when you create it that anyone with a link can edit it, if you want youth leaders to be able to comment and make edits.

Beginner's guide to [Google documents \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e771f9YYh4s\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e771f9YYh4s)

TikTok (<https://www.tiktok.com/en/>) is a short-form mobile video app that is extremely popular among young people at the time of this guide's release (April 2020). You have to see the short videos people make to get it. It is a fun way to cultivate community among youth, families, and youth leaders.

Beginner's guides to TikTok:
Article

<https://www.wired.com/story/how-to-use-tik-tok/>

Video

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PyaZxrN_gM8

YouTube is a site where people can download and upload videos. You can learn to make a video and upload a video to YouTube in the Learn to Make Videos section of the guide.

[What is YouTube?](#)

It is best to just go to [YouTube](#) and check it out. Basically, there is a video for everything. Use the empty box on the site to type in your favorite song. There will likely be a video of it, even if it's just words and the music.

House Party (<https://houseparty.com>) is an app that can be downloaded to any smart phone. It is best for 4 or less people. People can use this app to play games with one another and talk to each other (like on FaceTime but without everyone needing to have an iPhone). House Party is very popular at the time of this guide's release (April 2020).

Skype is best for one on one conversations, but has no time limit and is free.

Beginner's guide to [Skype \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRcb3uB3Jac\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRcb3uB3Jac)

I do not recommend using the following as official platforms for youth group activities (for multiple reasons), but I think it's important to know what each of the following tools are and how youth use them:

FaceTime only works if everyone who wants to chat has an iPhone or other Apple device. iPhone users can use FaceTime to easily video chat with one or more people.

Beginner's guide to [Group Facetime \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSytFv0CRAI&list=PUrSvDunJEc1CME4-KvhW_3Q&index=182\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GSytFv0CRAI&list=PUrSvDunJEc1CME4-KvhW_3Q&index=182)

Instagram is the most popular app of 18-25 year olds and many younger teens use it as well. You can only post to Instagram through a smart phone. Instagram is similar to Facebook, but it is more of a visual site than Facebook. Generally, users use Instagram to post photos or memes ([what is an internet meme?](#)) or share a story. A story is a video or photo (or series of videos or photos) from the last 24 hours. You click someone's story to see what they have been up to recently.

Beginners guide to Instagram
Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= wo5C9qh4xE>

Article

<https://outofthe925.com/beginners-guide-to-instagram/>

SnapChat (<https://www.snapchat.com//en-gb/>) is the most popular app of teenagers at the time of the release of this guide (April 2020). It allows users to send messages, and photos (snaps) to one another. Wikipedia explains, “One of the principal features of Snapchat is that pictures and messages are usually only available for a short time before they become inaccessible to their recipients. The app has evolved from originally focusing on person-to-person photo sharing to presently featuring users' "Stories" of 24 hours of chronological content, along with "Discover", letting brands show ad-supported short-form content. It also allows users to keep photos in the "my eyes only" which lets them keep their photos in a password-protected space.”

Beginners guide to SnapChat

Article

<https://blog.hootsuite.com/how-to-use-snapchat-beginners-guide/>

Video

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bXEuhlhAd0> **Learn to Insert Hyperlinks**

Learn to Insert Hyperlinks

Learn how to insert a link “into” a word so it is clickable [here](#) (you can do this too!)

Basic directions for a mac for linking to a website or video by inserting a hyperlink into a word or several words:

1. Copy the URL/link of the video you want people to view.
2. Next, highlight the word or words you want the link to be associated with (scroll over the word/words to cover the words in a shade of light blue).
3. Next, click “insert” on the toolbar at the top of your computer screen.
4. A scroll-down menu will appear. Click “Hyperlink.”
5. Make sure “Web Page or File” is in blue. If not, click it.
6. Put/paste the link into the “Address” box.
7. Click “OK.”
8. The word/words should now be highlighted. When you click the word/s, it should take you to the website or video, whichever you have inserted.

Learn to Make Videos and Voice Recordings

If you have never made a video before, I encourage you to video chat with someone who knows how to make videos so they can walk you through the steps of creating your first one.

You can make a video on your smart phone.

If you don't have an iPhone, simply Google: “how to make a video on my (fill in the kind of phone you have) phone” to learn how to make a video on the kind of phone you have.

For an iPhone Video:

Click the “camera” icon.

Scroll with your finger to “video.”

Click the camera with arrows icon in the lower right corner to change the phone view to show your face.

Press the red button to begin recording and **press it again** after you have said what you wanted to say in order to end the recording. It will automatically be saved in your photos.

To email or message the iPhone video to yourself or someone else or to share it on social media:

Click the “camera” icon again.

Click the image in the lower left-hand corner.

Click the “All Photos” in the upper right-hand corner and then find the video you just made.

Click the video.

Click the icon in the lower left-hand corner that looks like a box with an arrow going north.

Click the icon you want to use to send the video, either the “message” icon, the “email” icon, or the icon of the social media platform you want to use.

Type in the person’s name or the email address and click the blue arrow to send.

If you want to send it through social media, follow the prompts after clicking the social media icon.

You can make a video on your computer

Record a video on QuickTime player on your mac by clicking this link: <https://canvas.uw.edu/courses/721562/pages/quicktime-player>

If you don’t have a mac, simply Google: “how to make a video on my (fill in the kind of computer you have)” to learn how to make a video on the kind of computer you have.

Upload Your Video to YouTube:

If you want to put your video on YouTube so you can give it a link and people can easily find it, you need to create a YouTube account.

You can also watch [this video](#) on **how to upload a video to YouTube.**

**Thank you for everything you do to invest in the lives of youth.
We are grateful for your partnership.**