

DIGITAL MINISTRY *in the new normal*

KEEPING CHRIST IN THE CENTER – EVEN VIRTUALLY

Zoom, Go to Meetings, Flocknotes, Facebook and other virtual web platforms are valuable tools to use with young people. However, we need to make sure that, just as when we gather in person, we recall our ongoing commitment to promoting a safe environment. This includes transparency and following specific guidelines. Communication with parents, our priests, and supervisors is paramount.

1 IT'S ALL ABOUT JESUS

"Christ is alive! He is our hope, and in a wonderful way he brings youth to our world, and everything he touches becomes young, new, full of life." (CV 1) Keep in mind the purpose of why you are doing this: to continue to help young people encounter Christ and grow in their Catholic faith. Appropriate professional behavior and a Christian example are the hallmark of great digital ministry.

2 USE THE RIGHT ACCOUNT

When using Zoom, Flocknote, Facebook, or other medium, make sure you are using a parish account. As our Safe Environment Policies require, personal accounts cannot be used. The pastor or his designated staff member must have admin and log-in rights to the accounts.

3 GET THE PARENTAL OKAY

This is a new way of engaging young people, so parents/guardians must give permission for youth to participate. This can be done via an online form that parents can fill out.

4 DON'T GO IT ALONE

Just like in-person gatherings, online live events must comply with safe-environment rules and have at least two adults present. Any break-out groups (rooms in Zoom) should also have two adults.

5 INVITATION ONLY

Access to online sessions must be controlled (e.g. by registration or password) and not open to anyone who is not specifically invited and approved by the adult minister. The adult minister has complete discretion to exclude any person from an online session. Many of these platforms offer an option to have a required registration where a password can be given – take advantage of that so unwanted people will not be able to come onto the call. If the platform has a "waiting room" feature utilize this. This option allows people to be held in a queue until the adult host comes onto the call and prevents unknown conversations from taking place.

6 SAFE SHARING

The chat feature in Zoom is great for youth to ask or answer questions, but it is important that all chats are viewable to all participants. Disable the private chat feature when setting up the Zoom. The chat feature in Facebook and direct messaging in Instagram must never be used. Only the adult minister can do screen, image or document sharing.

7 PLAN FOR SUCCESS!

Effective virtual ministry needs to have a plan – from the opening prayer to community building to the videos you may show. During this crisis, young people are truly looking for opportunities to connect with God and with each other. When your gatherings start, stay focused and on topic.

8 SAVE A RECORD

If you are using Zoom or similar program you should always record the session. This recording should not be saved on a personal computer but on a flash drive to be eventually stored at the parish. Participants should be told that the session will be recorded at the beginning.

9 SAFE ENVIRONMENT RULES STILL APPLY

All interactions in online environments must comply with Diocesan Safe Environment Policies. Know that failure to abide by the policies may result in disciplinary action, including but not limited to minors being banned from further participation in online sessions and adverse employment action for adult ministers.

10 FOLLOW UP

While on these video calls, if anything inappropriate is said or done, follow up immediately with the parents and teen – just as you would if it were an in-person gathering. Follow up with a call to Erin Neil, LCSW, Director of Safe Environment and Victim Assistance Coordinator in the Diocese of Bridgeport at (203) 650-3265 or via email at eneil@diobpt.org, regarding the inappropriate action and what you have done since. If the actions rise to the level of sexual exploitation, local law enforcement and child protection authorities should also be contacted. Login credentials and passwords for accounts should be given and kept on file with principals, pastors, or supervisors.



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