




Diocese of  
**Guildford**   
TRANSFORMING CHURCH  
TRANSFORMING LIVES

# Building an online faith community

April 2020

This guide explored ways in which to create a wonderful online space for your community to stay engaged and communicate with each other, in whatever way suits them

## Building an online faith community

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## Taking the online space further

You see the potential that social media and the online space has to be more than a tool to broadcast your Sunday message. As churches we get to be voices of hope, clarity and communication. The method may be different but the message and mission remain the same.

Online we have the opportunity to share our own messages or other people's messages, such as updates from local charities, govt health updates and messages from other organisations or people that are saying great things and sharing messages of hope. But there is so much more.

We can feel very isolated at home, away from the people we are used to seeing. Or we can become tired of the incessant Zoom invites. Whether someone wants to spend all their time communicating with others or sneak in and out of conversations to feel connected we can provide some of that positive interaction and community that is genuinely focused on people.

We know that people are spending a lot of time scrolling on their phones, they did before the pandemic and they will do after. However, now is the opportunity to create a wonderful online space for your community to stay engaged and communicate with each other, in whatever way suits them

Nona Jones, Facebook's Global Faith-Based Partnerships leader, said in a [recent US church leadership podcast](#), "If a community is filled with real people then it's real, whether it's online or offline."

## You front door or poster

Your Facebook page, Instagram, and website all fit under this category. They are not where the meaty, messy human community of your church happens, nor should it be. You wouldn't post personal prayer requests with the owner's name on your front door or on poster. Your outward facing Facebook page, Instagram and website are just as public and possibly get seen by even more people than your front door would.

This is where people first find you, it's your opportunity to show people what they could be a part of, clearly communicate important messages and updates or share encouragements. You may post your Sunday message there too. It's a real chance to speak to a much wider community.

## Inside the church

The easiest way to create an online space for all your community is by using Facebook groups. If your Facebook page is your front door then your Facebook group is inside the church. You need to make sure that your group is visible so when someone is on your page they can see that this group exists and ask to join, or members can invite people to join, sort of in the same way you find people come through the door of your church.

### About this group

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#### Description

[Edit](#)

A space for parish leadership in the Diocese of Guildford - ordained ministers, LLMs, Church Wardens, Pastoral Assistants, Children and Youth Workers, Administrators and Communications Officers. This is a place to share good... [See More](#)



**Private**

Only members can see who's in the group and what they post



**Visible**

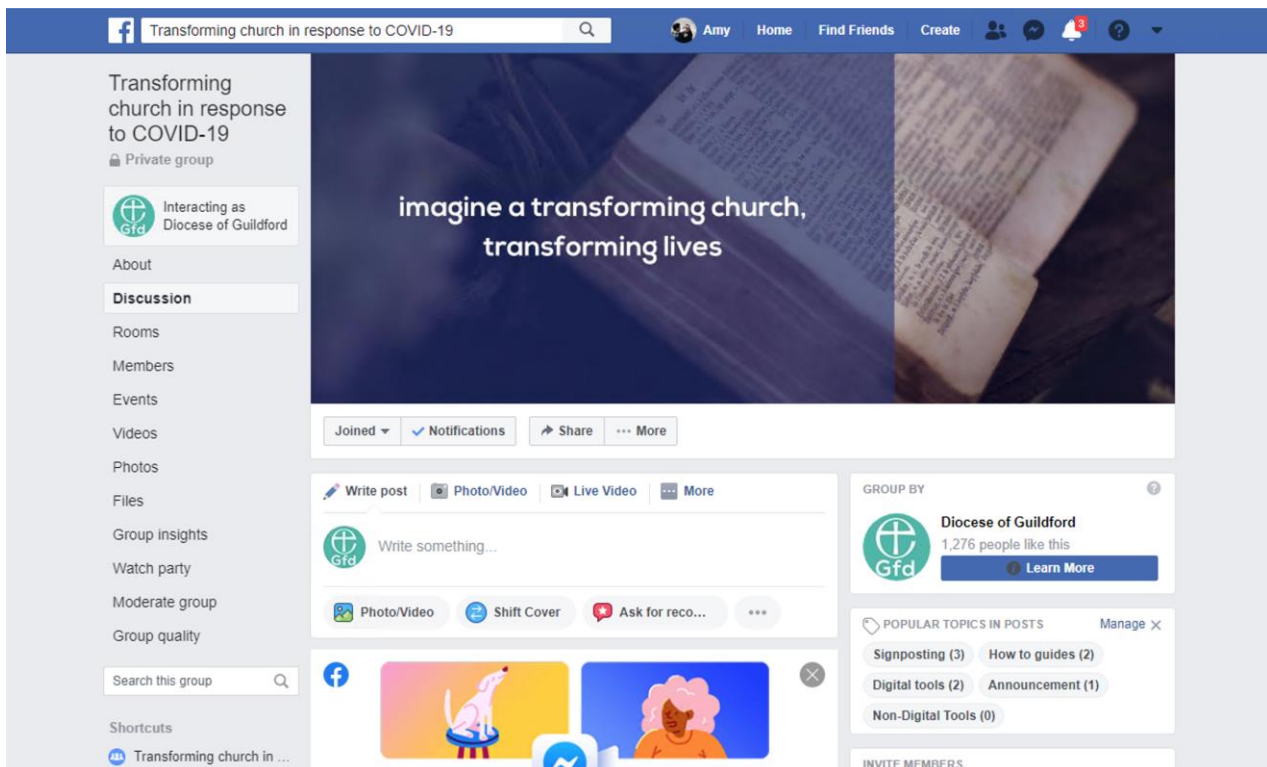
Anyone can find this group



**Work**

Groups have been created to be a place for community and so Facebook has tailored the platform to promote the activity in the group to the top of people's feeds, they don't even need to navigate to the group.

Groups are often seen as a safer space. People are more likely to share good news stories, prayer requests and updates about their lives. Just remember that you play a part in keeping the space safe.



**Top tips:**

- Link your Facebook page and you or other admins can post on the group as the page.

**Linked Pages**



Give your business, brand or organisation a voice on Facebook and connect with the right people. [Learn More](#)

[Edit Linked Page](#)

[Create New Linked Page](#)

- When someone asks to join the group you can set it up so that they have to answer some questions. This is both helpful in ensuring that you are admitting real people who actually want to be part of the community, and you can ask information that will help you disciple and steward them well. For example, you may ask how long they have been attending the church and how they answer will show you what kind of conversation will be helpful when you talk to them.
- Ask people to agree to group rules in order to be part of the group – this sets the tone and shows what you expect for a healthy and inclusive community culture.

#### Group rules from the admins

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- 1 **Be kind and courteous**  
We're all in this together. Let's treat everyone with respect. Healthy debates are natural and good, but kindness is required.

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- 2 **No hate speech or bullying**  
Make sure everyone feels safe. Bullying of any kind isn't allowed, and degrading comments about things like race, religion, culture, sexual orientation, gender or identity will not be tolerated.

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- 3 **No promotions or spam**  
Give more than you take to this group. Self-promotion, spam and irrelevant links aren't allowed.

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- 4 **Respect everyone's privacy**  
This group is a safe space to ask questions, requires mutual trust. Authentic, expressive discussions is great, but may also be sensitive and private. What's shared in the group should stay in the group.

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- 5 **Sensitive data**  
Please do not share any

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- 6 **If you're unsure, ask**  
We can direct you to the right place or person to answer your questions.

- Ask other people to moderate the group. This means that they help with the process of admitting people to the group, ensuring that everyone adheres to the code of conduct and make people feel welcome.
- Unlike people who have liked your page, the people in your group will receive a notification for posts in the group. They are a group of people who are already engaged with the church and you are going to get much more engagement in a group than on a page.

There is a lot of functionality in Facebook groups and these continue to be developed. You can create events, add learning units, upload and share files and the brand new messenger for groups – where you can create a room to hang out with other members on the video instantly.



Sections

**Social learning units**

In this tab, you can make group resources easier to find and help people learn new things. [Learn more](#)

Add

**Instant Games**

Group members can discover games and send and receive invitations within the group.

Add

**Jobs**

Add ways to post and apply to jobs in your group.

Add

**Watch party**

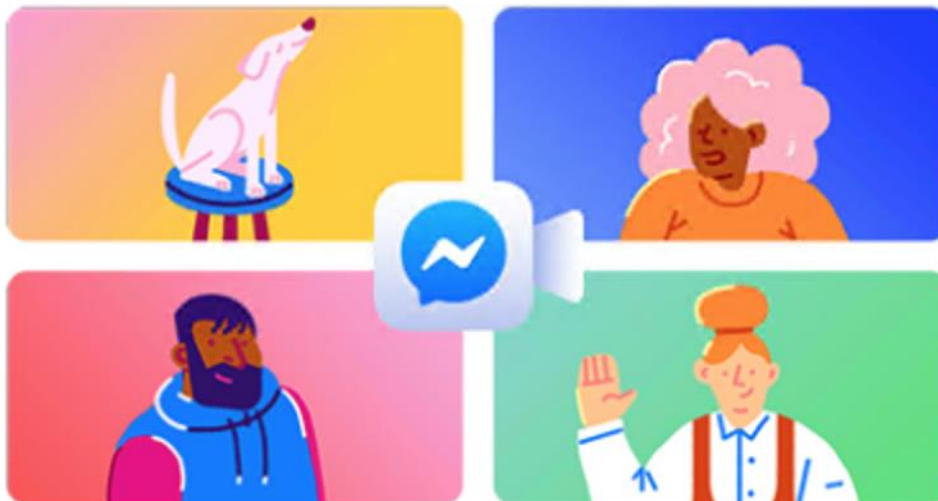
Watch videos together and comment or react to them simultaneously with others in the group.

Remove

**Rooms**

Rooms let group members chat and connect over live video.

Manage



## Introducing Messenger rooms for groups

Getting the group together has never been easier. Create a room to start hanging out with other members on video instantly.

### Create Room

Learning Units is a fantastic tool that creates sequential, modular content that you can schedule for release within your group. Imagine them as being perfect for an ongoing devotional or Bible

study. They could even be used for running volunteer training or a new-to-faith course.

There are a number of group types to choose from.

Group Type	What it Does
General	This is the default group type and includes the standard set of tools.
Buy and Sell	This sets the default post type in the group to sales listings, allows you to set a default currency and gathers all sales listings in one place in the group.
Social Learning	This allows you to create quizzes and lessons and track members' progress.
Video Games	This allows you to link your group to a specific game and host tournaments for members.
Work	This lets you post shifts you'd like other people to cover and gives you the option of allowing other members to contact you without being friends.
Job	This shows a list of all open jobs and includes templates with job salary, location and hours.

Have a play around. Join other groups, check out what other churches and organisations are doing.

### Space for smaller groups

Whether you already have midweek groups or not you can create a space for smaller groups to be together outside of the Sunday experience. You might have a group for:

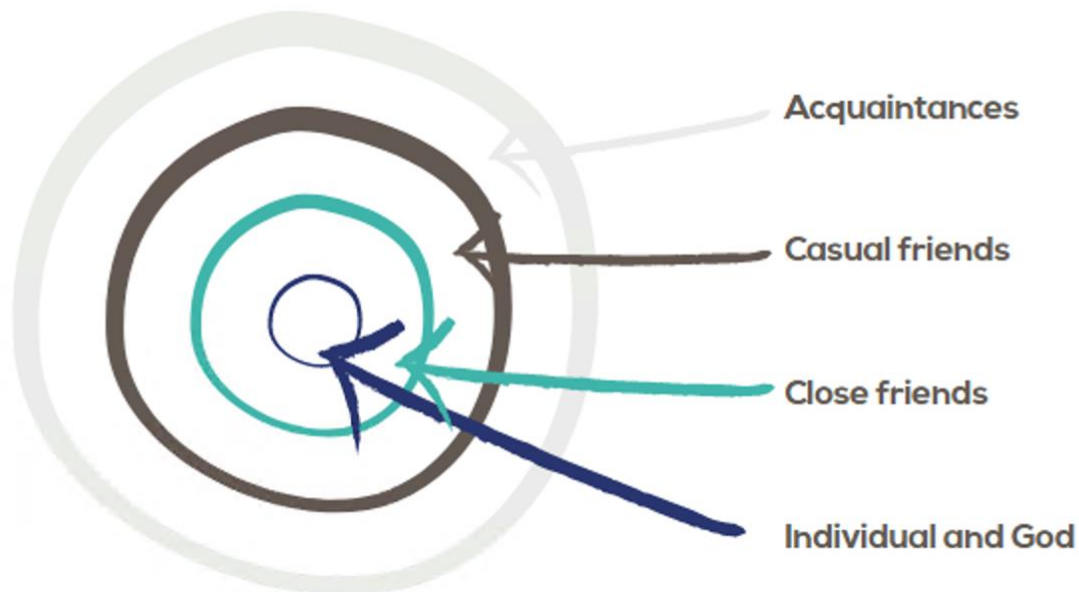
- all the small or midweek leaders
- each small or midweek group
- prayer
- a bible study
- coffee mornings
- social action

This list could really go on.

By creating more specific groups you can communicate specific information directly to the people in that group. You might want to share Bible study notes with your group leaders or even invite them to training.

By creating smaller groups you are facilitating closer connection. Specific groups also give your communities the space to talk about the things that matter to them with people who are likeminded or share a common purpose. They are more likely to talk openly with their close friends than their casual friends, and likewise more openly with their casual friends than with their acquaintances.





We would recommend that you don't take responsibility for running each of these, just as you probably wouldn't run 20 or so bible studies, four coffee mornings, a toddlers group or two and various specific interest groups. Find people who you trust to take ownership of these; they may be the people who ran them before lockdown and physical distancing or you may need to ask someone to come alongside who knows a bit more about technology. Remember that this may be a long term thing, even after we get back into our church buildings and normal service resumes these online groups could continue in addition to the actual physical meeting. You need to think about longevity. For example, you may have a prayer group that meets every other week but they may also want to share answers to prayer and request prayer at other times outside of that meeting as well.

There are a few different ways to create these smaller groups, and that may depend on the type of person that they include or what type of communication best suits the group. Before you go ahead and create lots of groups consider the purpose for each and choose a method that will best suit that purpose. Where are your community, go there.

### **Facebook groups**

These work in the same way as your larger groups but have more of a focus. Facebook has the ability to do a lot but it can become very noisy.

### **WhatsApp messaging groups**

WhatsApp messaging is a little more tricky as there are GDPR implications with sharing a phone number. But the messaging is more instant than a group or a video call.

### **Zoom**

We are all very used to Zoom and have seen it work well and be a massive flop. We can use Zoom to encourage people to gather rather than view.

- People can hang out on a Zoom call with their small groups while watching the Sunday message or after.
- There are lots of churches that push their congregations into smaller meeting rooms after the service to hang out, as we would when we have coffee at the end of a service in a church building.
- Midweek groups are happening on Zoom. And people who struggled to attend because of childcare, or other reasons, are now able to attend freely.
- Quizzes and other fun activities, and just about having fun.

Zoom allows your community to see each other face to face, which is a massive part of what we are missing out on at the moment. It will never quite replace it but it goes some way towards us feeling more connected,

There are lots of other ways we can create connection in a digital world and I would encourage you to share some of the fantastic ways you are doing that, or seeing others do that.

We would recommend using a mixture of methods to communicate with your people and create that online community.

### **Keeping the conversation alive**

Each community is different and will require different levels of input. There may be times of lots of activity and times that are quieter. And each person is different. You may have people who, for one reason or another, won't be part of the online group and their only contact may be the Sunday service or message. Be mindful of the different people in your community and how you can best serve them.

With that being said, you can help the conversation. We would encourage you to try something new, to remember to show your face, to comment on posts, share your news, share short messages of hope, lead a prayer. There are lots of ways to both encourage the conversation and

let people know you care. And where you notice someone is a little more quiet than usual or there may be something going on you can message them directly to offer hope and comfort.

### Invite people to serve

People who had roles in the weekly church activities may be feeling a bit left out. Create ways for people to serve, whether that's moderating a group, starting a new group, collating prayer requests, hosting a zoom chat or creating something to share with the wider church (such as a song, a poem or a graphic). You may end up with a bigger volunteer team when we go back to our buildings.

### Try new things

It can be scary to try new things, and we see people get things wrong. But we always learn in the process. Create a safe space for yourself, find people you can try out new things with and check out what other churches and organisations are doing.

### Keep showing up

Now is the time to keep showing up. People are spending a lot of time on their phones and computers. Make use of Facebook and Instagram Live and spread those messages of hope and invite people to join the community. You can take the opportunity to better connect with our people at this time, create lifelines for those in need and enhance your ability to communicate with your church as we look forward to the time when we can meet again physically.

### Looking into the future

Some people connect better over a digital screen than a coffee. And what about those that are housebound, can't get to a physical service regularly or aren't ready to make the bigger step into a physical church? Online church community is here to stay, but it can be a great on-boarder to physical connection and keeping connected throughout the week as well, rather than detracting from our corporate gatherings.

Remember, people want to gather. That's why we have massive music festivals, rather than only listening to the music on our own. And those that do watch them online often find it a driver to actually pay to go along. They want to experience the community live and in the flesh.

What you build now can set you up to reach a wider group of people in your community and help you stay connected with your community midweek. Try it now, see what works and get other people involved.

## Resources and references

- [Instructions for creating a group](#)
- [Changing group type](#)
- [Resources for page and group admins](#)
- [Hillsong online campus interview](#)