

Providing Youth Ministry in the Age of COVID-19

“Don't fear, because I am with you; don't be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will surely help you; I will hold you with my righteous strong hand.” (Isaiah 41:10 CEB)

But how do we share this non-anxious message of hope with youth when the church is canceling events and services? Thanks be to God we live in a digital age where we can stay connected, worship and grow in faith!

Some Michigan area youth directors met online and brainstormed some ideas for churches to continue connecting with youth even during this health crisis where meeting face to face is not advised.

Youth like to stay connected and there are many ways this can be accomplished. For more traditional programming (Youth Group, Sunday School and Bible Study) use regular curriculum creatively or find digital resources to use across these communication and social media platforms.

Communication Platforms:

Google Hangouts

<https://support.google.com/a/answer/9251886>

- Allows for video and regular calls
- Google based documents can be shared

Zoom

<https://zoom.us/pricing>

- Allows for video and regular calls
- Any documents and videos can be shared
- Breakout rooms allow for small groups during meeting time
- Free option is limited to 40 minute meetings, but upgraded plans can be purchased monthly or yearly

Facebook

www.facebook.com or <https://www.hubspot.com/facebook-marketing>

- Allows you to create events and chat
- Provides a platform for online streaming and interaction
- Well established social media platform for young adults and adults

Instagram

www.instagram.com or <https://www.hubspot.com/instagram-marketing>

- Create posts and engage with posts from others
- Provides a platform to share videos
- Well established social media platform for youth and young adults

This article provides a step by step process for creating digital small groups:
<https://youthministry.com/digital-small-groups/>

Digital curriculum resources available:

Sparkhouse Media <https://www.wearesparkhouse.org/sparkhouse-digital/>

- Digital resources for all ages
- Sharable newsletters and information to grow faith in families
- Includes online confirmation curriculum

Cokesbury <https://www.cokesbury.com/search?q=youth+digital&pagenumber=2>

- Limited digital options
- United Methodist Publishing House
- New digital options on the horizon

The Bible App: <https://www.youversion.com/the-bible-app/>

- App allows leader to create group and share verse recommendations
- Options for phones, tablets, and computers

Youth are also big fans of games. Here are some options available to make online youth group lots of fun!

Platform for a variety of online board games: <https://en.boardgamearena.com/gamelist>

- Create groups for free game play

Youth group games: <https://www.downloadyouthministry.com/>

- Low cost options for youth group games played online

Youtube playlist from Games for Youth Ministry:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCAkgTGSKZC4zFxSV-DgRK3g>

- Videos created for in person and online games

What about protection policies? How does a church stay safe while providing digital programming for youth?

- Protection policy still applies online. Please see each the church's specific policy to see what is required.
 - If two adults are required in a classroom then two adults are required for engaging with youth online. If policy allows for one adult with two youth then best practice recommendations are to allow another adult access and passwords to the digital platforms to provide accountability and transparency.
 - If an adult is not cleared to work with youth in the classroom (via background check and training) then they are not cleared to engage youth online through church programming.

Additional video regarding best protection policy practices online:

<https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/safe-sanctuaries-video-healthy-social-media-guidelines>

There are many youth activities that are much more difficult to convert to a digital format. Here are some ideas that may provide a starting point for creative ways to do “traditional” programming online.

- Continue doing mission work. Challenge youth to post information about the charity they like to serve alongside in real life. They can help people in their online communities know about the ministries they are passionate about in the community.
- Create connection with the people in the congregation who find themselves confined to home, due to COVID-19 susceptibility or other health issues. For the people who have email set up a clearinghouse email address where they can send email. Forward the messages on to a youth or homebound persons so they can stay connected. (A clearinghouse email is suggested to stay within the boundaries of protection policy best practices.)
 - For those without email encourage your youth to mail them pictures and notes to stay connected. Provide stamps and supplies for youth who are willing to correspond with the homebound.
- If a group is used to eating together encourage a communal meal where they sit and chat during their dinner.
- Start an online chess club or promote a time that people can log in and play games together.
- Create an online “Lock-In” with youth volunteers. Have a couple of volunteers provide leadership every hour with a different online activity. Send out snack kits the week before the lock-in and include games or supplies they need for the activities throughout the night.

Additional resources to help during this time:

Ways to be a non-anxious presence in your faith community and many additional resources from Rev. Kathy Pittenger:

<https://michiganumc.org/childrens-ministry-p/childrens-ministry-and-covid-19/?fbclid=IwAR0wbqspPOwMAGo4DEqLOqOuHCf2kKNdVETGzbifZIVi9095vXMBuHn5WUY>

Michigan Conference Website with Bishop’s Recommendations and News:

www.michiganumc.org

State of Michigan Recommendations for Non-Profit Communities:

https://www.michigan.gov/documents/coronavirus/MDHHS_Interim_Recommendations_for_COVID-19_final_683589_7.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1zKI-RGASVvkIXajvueN_9ZqcE79s03aJMMSEeYcrhdH5nQyqm5nypd0

CDC Recommendations for Non-Profit and Community Groups:

<https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html?fbclid=IwAR2NoA1MvdHBvZ3Debq3tjXxQQ7sKa-8r4b4A-3kwoXZNktoCQM1ZKDbrZo>

Contact Rev. Christy Miller White with questions, additional information or resources, or a person to process with at cmillerwhite@umcmichigan.org or 989.488.3347.

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