ONLINE GROUPS

A WAY TO GATHER AND GROW!

"LET US CONSIDER HOW TO STIR UP ONE ANOTHER TO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS, NOT NEGLECTING TO MEET TOGETHER... BUT ENCOURAGING ONE ANOTHER." HEB 10:24-25

What is an Online Group?

An Online Group is a chance for people to stay connected, "gathering" digitally once a week, to support each other through this time, as well as to grow together in faith by diving deeper into he resources and discipleship practices being sent out from St. Ann.

What are the qualities of the leaders of these groups? (The FACTs)

- **Faithful** – to Christ and the Catholic Church, they should be committed to personal prayer, a sacramental life, and to living as a disciple of Jesus Christ

- **Available** – have the time to commit to the leadership of the group

- **Contagious** – relevant, engaging, accepting, positive, and fun to be around!

- **Teachable** – have a disposition to learn, are humble and able to work well with the other leaders and to be willing to grow and accept feedback

ONLINE GROUPS

Who can be a part of these groups?

The leaders of the group can decide if they would like to keep their group focused on a certain stage of life (ie. young families, couples, young adults) or open to anyone. The groups can be "private" – meaning the leader or members of the group personally invite people to be a part of the group; or "public" - meaning they are available on the website for anyone to be able to join.

If your group is "public" people will be invited to contact you directly for more information. Please be sure to respond to every inquiry within 24 hours when possible. Be sure to give all of the information to all who are interested in the group including date and time, which digital tool will be used, and any instructions they need to be able to join the meeting.

We should not presume that all members of the group are at the same stage of discipleship or understanding of the faith, but be open to accepting people wherever they are in their journey of faith so that we can all grow together!

What is the format of the online meetings?

Time - The leaders of the group will determine the day and time of the meeting. Groups typically meet every week. The meetings last approximately 1 1/2 hours. It is very important to honor people's commitment by beginning and ending on time, as much as possible.

Tool - There are many options for organizing your online meeting. Please see pg 11 for more information on the digital formats.

Meeting Structure -

WELCOME (5 min) – As people join the meeting be sure to welcome them, try to engage in small talk, put people at ease

OPENING PRAYER (5 min) – Lead the group in a simple opening prayer, or as the group becomes more comfortable consider inviting one of the members ahead of time to lead the group in an opening prayer

ICE BREAKER QUESTION (10 minutes) – Have everyone go around and answer a fun icebreaker question so people can get to know each other better and have fun. See pg 10 for sample questions.

CONTENT SUMMARY/RECAP (10 minutes) – using one of the discipleship topics or practices from St. Ann in the past week have someone summarize the main points. See pg 8 for suggestions on how to use the St. Ann content.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (30 minutes) – Give people a chance to share highs/lows from the week as a way to grow together and be able to "check-in" on each other. Use the discussion questions provided from the St. Ann content from the past week. Pg 9 includes some practical tips on how to host a great discussion.

PRAYER (20 minutes) – end with a time of prayer
- You could consider playing a YouTube video with a song of worship to begin the time of prayer. See pg?? for a list of suggestions.
- Invite people to voice any intentions out loud. Or with some digital formats people can also post them in the "chat" if they are uncomfortable praying out loud.
- Close praying the Our Father

Abundant Hospitality

- If you were hosting in your home you would be sure to have a presentable, welcoming space. In a similar way, pay attention to what people will see behind you, be sure you don't have a lot of background noise, and be presentable in your appearance. You can dress casually... just don't look like you are ready for bed!
- Give a warm, but not overwhelming, welcome to people as they join your meeting. Be sure to quickly learn everyone's name.
- Kindly remind people about online etiquette, inviting people to "mute" when appropriate to keep distractions and background noise to a minimum.
- As the meeting ends be sure to thank everyone for coming and say goodbye individually as they log off.

Hosting Great Discussions

- Create a non-judgmental atmosphere where people are invited into conversation Remind people of the discussion guidelines for the first few meetings, found on pg 9.
- The role of the Group Leader is to facilitate discussion. This is not time for the Leader to do all of the talking, or to do more teaching, but instead to try to help people share their thoughts and feelings honestly and openly.
- Direct questions that are asked back to the rest of the group. Leaders are welcome to share briefly from their own experience, but should always be trying to cultivate the shared wisdom of the group. As questions are asked you can pose it to the rest of the group by simply asking: "What does everyone else think?"

- Affirm people after they share. This can include simply saying things like, "thanks for sharing that," or "thank you for that perspective." It is also important to affirm people when they have been vulnerable with the group. Something like, "I'm so sorry you experienced that" or "that must have been very painful."
- Don't put people on the spot by calling them out directly. Allow people to be quiet and listen if that is how they are most comfortable. If it is visually obvious that someone is trying to say something, though, then do please invite them to speak so they have that opportunity.
- If someone tends to dominate the conversation you may need to speak with them individually at some point. Thank them for their contributions and ask if they would be willing to help you in encouraging others to speak by allowing someone else to speak first.

Kick-off Meeting

The goal of the first meeting is to help people to be as comfortable as possible, to feel connected and not so isolated, and to have a great time!

WELCOME (5 min) – Introduce yourself as people join the meeting, make people feel comfortable by thanking them for joining, explain that you will get started after everyone has joined, if time ask them about themselves

After everyone has joined the group explain that this first meeting is really just an introduction for people to meet each other and learn more about how the group will work.

OPENING PRAYER (5 min) – Lead the group in a simple opening prayer.

INTRODUCTIONS (20 min) - Invite each person to briefly share about themselves and an interesting fact. The leader should go first to model that this isn't time for long introductions, but just the basics. So for instance, "My name is…, my job is …., I have … number of children… and something interesting about me is…"

GROUP FORMAT SUMMARY (10 minutes) – explain the purpose and format of the group. You may want to include the following points:
- Glad everyone could join, know that it is strange to form a new group digitally, but also an incredible opportunity to come together during this time
- The purpose of the group is to gather and grow - so hoping people can get to know each other a little bit and support each other, a well as grow in faith together

- We will meet at this time every week. Know that things can come up so understand if you have to miss, or join the group late, but please try as much as possible to be committed to this time.
- Go over the format for the meetings -
  - Will gather and begin with an opening prayer
  - Will be diving deeper into some of the discipleship resources that are being put out by St. Ann. If you aren't already receiving those you can sign up at www.stannparish.org/be-the-church
  - Will spend some time in discussion on those topics
  - Will close in prayer
- Group Guidelines -
  - Digital etiquette like muting when you aren't speaking
  - Discussion Guidelines
- Share from your heart about why you wanted to start a group and what you hope for during this time.

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION (30 minutes) –

1. What brought you to join this group? OR What are your hopes for this group?
2. Are there other ways you are experiencing community right now?
3. What do you see as the challenges to a digital community? The benefits?
4. What has been the hardest part for you about this pandemic?
5. What is one way you have experienced God during this crisis?

PRAYER (20 minutes) – end with a time of prayer

ONLINE GROUPS

Meeting Content

St. Ann is creating wonderful content that can be used individually or in groups for growth in discipleship. After the kickoff meeting of your group, we encourage all online groups to focus
their meeting on either the practice from the Sabbath Guide or the digital resource for the week. These can be found at www.stannparish.org/be-the-church.

To prepare for your weekly meeting:

- Decide if your meeting will focus on the Sabbath practice or the digital resource topic for the past week.
- Message your group about the topic for the upcoming meeting. Share the link to the practice or video with the members of your group a few days before to give them a chance to review it if they are not already receiving that information from St. Ann.
- During the meeting after the Icebreaker Questions have someone share a recap/summary of the topic. It can be the leader or you could invite someone from the group to do it. Just be sure to ask them ahead of time to give them time to prepare.
- After the recap, move into group discussion.
  - Begin the discussion with "highs and lows" from the past week so people have a chance to share honestly about how they are doing.
  - Use the questions that were provided with the Sabbath Guide or the digital resource to host the conversation.
  - Ask people about the specific practice that was highlighted. Consider questions like: Has anyone already done anything in response to the practice that was suggested? How did that go? What was challenging about it? Are you aware of the Lord moving in that way?

Discussion Guidelines

- Be willing to share and listen. - No one has to talk. Only one person talks at a time. Try not to dominate the discussion or go too far off of topic. Be willing to take small steps to be honest and open.
- Show mutual respect for one another and for everyone's opinion. - Everyone comes from different backgrounds and perspectives. Even if we don't always agree we are still called to respect others opinions which includes being charitable in our conversation.
- No one is here to "fix" anyone else in the group. - The purpose of this group is not to solve problems or tell people what they should do, but instead to listen and care for each other.
- Conversations are confidential - To create a comfortable environment for sharing everyone is asked to keep conversations confidential.

Considerations for Larger Online Groups

If your online group is larger than 8-10 members there are some additional things to consider:

- Zoom is the best platform for hosting larger groups. It allows for the group to break off into smaller groups for the discussion.
- An Icebreaker question to the whole group may take too long, but you could still ask the question to each member as they join the call. Not everyone will hear everyone's answer, but still helps people to connect and become engaged.
- Be sure to share any discussion questions with all members of the group so they have a focus to their discussion.
- Consider regathering after small group discussion for large group processing before moving into prayer. You can invite anyone who would like to share any main insights from their discussion with the larger group.

Ice Breaker Questions

- What's your favorite place to visit? Or Where is one place you'd love to travel to if you could go anywhere?
- When you were a kid what did you want to be when you grew up?
- Beach or mountains? Why?
- What are three adjectives that describe you?
- What's one thing that really irritates you?
- If you could have dinner with any three people (other than Jesus) – living or deceased – who would you choose?
- If you could choose your age forever, what age would you choose and why?
- If you were to create a slogan for your life what would it be?
- Who is the most inspirational person to you?
- What was the best birthday or Christmas present you ever got?
- What's your hidden talent?

Digital Tools for Online Groups

SKYPE - skype.com
Free and simple to set up via the web browser, desktop app, or mobile app. Share your link and allow others to join from any platform.

GOOGLE HANGOUTS - hangouts.google.com
Requires all participants to have a Google account. Each Hangout allows up to 10 people per phone call for an unlimited amount of time via the web browser or Google Hangout app.

FACEBOOK MESSENGER - messenger.com
A free option from Facebook that allows for individual or groups of people to video chat via the web browser and the Messenger mobile app.

ZOOM - zoom.us
By signing up for a free account, Zoom users are allowed to host free video meetings up to 40 minutes on a desktop or mobile device. Additional time requires a paid plan. There is more information on how to use Zoom on pg 12

FACETIME - apps.apple.com
A free option for Apple device users. This app allows for multiple participants to join one call via an iPhone, iPad, or Mac desktop app.

JITSI - meet.jit.si
A free online software for Chrome web browsers. Users can create a meeting, then share the link for others to join online or via the Jitsi Meet app.

Tips for "Zoom" - for the Host

If you don't already have a Zoom account, you can purchase one for $15 a month.

There is also a FREE option, that allows you to hold 40 minute meetings, but you can schedule multiple meetings in a row.
- Send both links and make it clear which one is the 1st and 2nd call

The following links give a great overview of how to use Zoom. They were designed to help people with an Alpha course, but are applicable to how Zoom would be used for online groups, as well.
- Getting Started with Zoom - https://vimeo.com/398319991
- Running your online Alpha with Zoom - https://youtu.be/_SPo-L4kNjk

As the host of the meeting you can mute and unmute everyone, or unmute specific participants. It is very helpful to be able to mute everyone at certain times of the meeting, including announcements, the content summary, and during prayer. Just invite people to unmute if they would like to speak.

Breakout Rooms" allow for the larger group to break into smaller groups for discussion:
- If you want your group to be able to break off into smaller groups for prayer and discussion you must have a paid account to enable breakout rooms
- Only the host can assign breakout rooms. They are accessed on the toolbar at the bottom of the screen. Select the number of rooms you want, decide if you want the groups assigned automatically or manually and then press create breakout rooms. If you chose the manual option then assign guests to breakout rooms once they join the Zoom call.

- The host has the ability to post a message to all of the breakout rooms simultaneously. Just click "broadcast message to all" once you press the breakout room tab. This is particularly helpful to keep people aware of how much time they have in discussion, for instance to "broadcast" something like "You have 5 minutes left for discussion," etc.

Zoom has two view settings. "Speaker view" makes whoever is speaking large in the center of the screen. "Gallery view" allows you to see everyone who is on the call at the same time. To change views:
- On a Computer: upper right or left corner, hit gallery view or speaker view
- On a Phone: lower middle bar, hit more, then hit gallery view or speaker view

Use the "chat" (middle bottom bar) for discussion questions, verses, outlines, private questions, etc.
- You have an option to message the entire group or people individually
- You can not "chat" with everyone once they have been divided into small groups just your own breakout group. To communicate with people once they are in the break out room you will "broadcast" a message.

ONLINE GROUPS

Instructions to join a "Zoom" call - for Members

Below is the information that can be shared with the members of your group before the first meeting so they know how to join the Zoom meeting.

For Apple phone or iPad
- Go to the App store
- Search for Zoom Cloud Meetings
- Download the app or open the app if you have already downloaded it
- Click Join a Meeting
- Type in the meeting ID
- Click join
- Click join with video
- You may need to update the settings on your device. Go to settings and scroll
- down to the bottom until you see Zoom. Click on Zoom and then make sure your
- microphone and camera are turned on

For Android phone
- Go to play store
- Search for Zoom Cloud Meetings
- Download the app or open the app if you have already downloaded it
- Click Join a Meeting
- Type in the meeting ID
- Click join
- Click join with video
- Click call via device audio (if needed)

For Desktop or laptop computer
- Type zoom.us in your browser (Google Chrome, Safari, etc.)
- Click the tab on the top right of your screen which says Join a Meeting
- Type in the meeting ID
- Click join
- Click join with video