

COMMUNITY IN A TIME OF ISOLATION

A Guide for Online Faith Groups in the Face of **COVID19**



The unprecedented COVID19 pandemic presents massive challenges to people and communities around the world. Scores of people have fallen sick and far too many have died. Many have lost their jobs; universities are closing or moving online; companies and stores are shutting down; travel is suspended; and people are told to maintain a social distance. Tragically, just as many of us feel the need for community, and a connection to faith, we must isolate ourselves to stop the spread of the virus.

In addition to the medical, economic, social, and psychological dimensions of this crisis, the COVID19 Pandemic brings profound questions of faith.

- What does all this mean in the light of faith?
- What does it mean to “be a Christian” in this crisis?
- How can we witness to Christ when Masses are cancelled and church buildings are closed?
- How can we support the poor and vulnerable in the face of risk and uncertainty?

In the face of these questions, technology offers Catholic students and professionals an opportunity to make connections and break the barriers of social isolation. While it is not the same as in person meetings, technology presents the chance to gather in online small communities. Here, we present one model of organizing a small group online by using the **Review of Life Method**. This method can help us to develop an integrated Christian response to the COVID crisis by enabling us to better connect with others and to connect the different parts of our deeper selves (e.g., social, spiritual, physical).

As lay movements, IMCS (for students) and ICMICA (professionals and intellectuals) believe in the role and responsibility of all the baptized to take active roles in the church and in the world. Just because we cannot go to Mass, does not mean we cannot live out the vocation of our baptism. Just because the parish doors are shut, does not mean the church is closed. The church exists in the hearts and communities of the faithful, even online. Now more than ever, people need community.

We invite lay Catholics to reflect on how they can connect with others in this difficult moment. As movements, we remain ready to support **Catholic university students, professionals and intellectuals** and to continue to connect small communities with each other across borders and cultures.

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Preparing the Meeting

- Identify others to join your online community (friend groups, your local parish, university, etc).
- Choose a technology to use and practice it (Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, etc).
- Set a regular time to meet.
- Share with participants the method being used (like this Review of Life method).

Introductions (5 minutes)

Make sure everyone introduces themselves if they don't know each other very well. Give some time to "catch up."

Opening Prayer (5 Minutes)

Ask one participant to begin the meeting with an opening prayer. This could be the reading from that Sunday's Gospel or something more creative (songs, poetry, prayer of a saint).

I. Sharing Experience (See) (20 minutes)

Participants are invited to begin by sharing their own experience in the face of this virus.

- What new realities are happening in your life and community (personal, social, political, church) because of COVID19?
- What most brings you grief and anxiety?
- Who are most vulnerable?
- What brings you joy and hope?

Tips for the meeting:

- Ask participants to mute microphones when not speaking.
- Be flexible to respond to the flow of the discussion.
- Identify a moderator, timekeeper and someone to lead prayer for each meeting.
- Remind participants to ensure all people have time to speak.

II. In the Light of Faith (Judge) 20 Minutes

With an open and humble spirit, participants are invited to go deeper and examine our realities in the lens of faith. We should be ready to be challenged by the Gospel.

- One participant might be ready to bring to the table a reading, such as a scripture passage, a text of Pope Francis, or another theological text.
- How does this experience relate to the teachings of Jesus Christ and the Kingdom of God that he preached?
- How are sin and grace visible in this context? In our own acts of omission or commission?

III. Transforming Reality (Act) (10)

Here, participants are invited to reflect on some concrete actions to take in the face of the experiences.

- Given all the limitations of the present moment, what are we being called to do? As persons? As a group? As a movement?
- How might we link up with others around the world??
- How might we better respond to the Gospel in the present crisis?

Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

- Participants are invited to bring their hopes and sorrows before God in prayers of petition.
- Follow each prayer with a response, such as Lord Hear our Prayer).
- When it is clear the group is ready to close, the leader invites the group to conclude with the recitation of the Lord's Prayer.