

# Online Life Group Technology Platforms

**Thanks for continuing to lead your life group through this season.** It's more important than ever to stay connected and care for one another!

Online groups are an incredible tool to help people connect as a life group – you can encourage each others' faith, share authentically, and watch God work in ways you may not have dreamed possible!

**Your first few meetings will take some time adjusting** as everyone gets familiar with the technology and the format, and all of the kinks are ironed out. This document will help you make a decision about what technology to use. Why not try a couple of options with your group to see what will work best for everyone?

There are numerous platforms available in the marketplace, but the three most popular ones are **Google Hangouts**, **Zoom**, and Facebook **Messenger Groups**. Below you'll see pros and cons of each, as well as instructions for downloading and using these apps.

Where you see words underlined in blue, these are active links that will take you to relevant pages.

Platform	Pros	Cons	Capacity
<a href="#">Google Hangouts</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free</li> <li>• Unlimited time</li> <li>• Closed Captioning</li> <li>• Accessible via web browser on computer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires a Google account for all participants</li> </ul>	Max 25 Participants
<a href="#">Zoom</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free</li> <li>• Only hosts are required to have a Zoom account</li> <li>• There is a phone-in option</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Limited to 40 minutes unless you have a paid account</li> <li>• Have to download Zoom application to phone or computer</li> </ul>	Max 100 participants
<a href="#">Facebook Messenger Groups</a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free</li> <li>• Accessible via web browser on computer (requires Facebook account)</li> <li>• Can access without a Facebook account (download the Messenger app to your phone)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone-in option not available</li> </ul>	Max 6 video participants and 44 audio participants (50 total)

All of these options can be accessed via a computer, a tablet or a phone, and will use your device's built in camera and microphone. You may also be able to connect your device to a TV and have the chat screen on your TV – in this case, your device's camera and microphone will still be used.

Below are further details on how to access, install and initiate meetings through these platforms.

## GOOGLE HANGOUTS

### How to access:

- Open Google Hangouts in a [web browser](#) or mobile app ([Apple](#) or [Android](#))
- Create a gmail account (if you don't have one) or sign in use your existing username and password

### How to start meetings:

- Login and Click "Video Call" button
- Click "Invite People" and type in email addresses of those you want to invite (If they don't have a google account it will send them an invite to set up an account), or select "Copy Link to Share" to paste this into a text message, email, facebook message etc.
- Recipients of this invite can click the link sent via email, text message or facebook message to join the meeting (and install Google Hangouts if required)
- You can also schedule a meeting on your Google calendar and send an invite to join you at a specific time, including a link to your online meeting (watch the tutorial below for instructions)

### For more info:

- [Watch a 6 minute tutorial](#) on Google Hangouts at Youtube

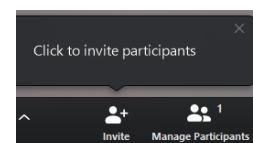
## ZOOM

### How to access:

- Open Zoom in a [web browser](#) or mobile app ([Apple](#) or [Android](#))
- Create a profile with a username and password

### How to start meetings:

- Login and Click "Host a meeting with video on"
- You may need to allow your browser to download Zoom
- Click "Invite" on the black bar at the bottom of screen and select how you would like to send an invite:
  - To existing Contacts in Zoom
  - Via Email (default email, Gmail or Yahoo)
  - Via the "Copy URL" or "Copy Invitaton" buttons at the bottom of the box to create a URL link or email invitation to paste into a text message, email, or facebook message
- Recipients of this invite can click the link sent via email, text message or facebook message to join the meeting
- You can also schedule a meeting on the Zoom website and send an invite and link to join the online meeting at a specific time ([see instructions](#))



### For more info:


- [Watch tutorial videos](#) in the Zoom video library

## FACEBOOK MESSENGER GROUPS

### How to access:

- Open Facebook Messenger on [web browser](#) or [mobile app](#)
- Login (with Facebook account or phone number)
- Click “New Message” button and add Facebook friends in the ‘To’ field
- Send everyone an introductory message, and then a panel will pop up on the right where you can name the conversation, and chat with others in your group

### How to start meetings:

- Click the “Video Call”  button to start video chat
- Others in the group simply need to select “Answer Call” to join in the video chat

### For more info:

- [Watch a 2-minute tutorial](#) on Facebook Messenger Groups at Youtube

*If you need any further assistance with these technology platforms, please reach out to your Life Group Coordinator or Mackenzie Discipleship Pastor, Christine Wood ([christine@gatewaybaptist.com.au](mailto:christine@gatewaybaptist.com.au))*

## Hosting an Online Life Group

Leading an online life group is a different experience to leading a life group in your lounge room. Here are some hints and tips to keep in mind for a smooth online group experience.

### ONLINE ETIQUETTE

1. **Recommend group members download meeting software prior to your first meeting**
2. **Make sure your face has sufficient lighting**  
Lighting in front of your face, not behind
3. **Make sure your face is centred in the video camera**  
Position the camera to eye level
4. **Select the quietest room you can find**  
Turn off background noise (TV) and put pets away
5. **Only use one device per household**  
Multiple devices can create annoying feedback
6. **Mute your computer unless you're talking**  
Get used to muting and unmuting A LOT
7. **Be an assertive host**
  - The host of the group will need to be welcoming and in charge. Make sure you jump on a few minutes early to welcome everyone
  - Redirect the conversation or mute participants as necessary. This may feel rude but is necessary to manage a good online experience
  - The moderator should talk 20% of time and listen 80% of time

8. **Create a plan for participants to indicate they'd like to talk**

Like raising a hand

9. **Give full attention, don't multitask**

When talking, look at the camera, not the screen

10. **Stay in touch afterwards**

Use Facebook Groups, Messenger chats etc. as a place to stay connected

## **GROUP FORMAT**

During this season, we are encouraging groups to meet more frequently, but for perhaps not as long as you would normally meet. Meeting every week for one hour will be a good balance.

Here are some suggestions for what your life group could look like:

### **First Meeting (30 minutes)**

- It can be helpful to use the first online group get everyone acquainted with how your online group will work
- Review online etiquette
- Help people learn how to use the technology and answer any questions
- If you are a new group, make sure to introduce yourself, share your name, and share how you got connected with Gateway
- End by sharing prayer requests; have 1 person pray

### **Typical Meeting (45-60 minutes)**

#### **Connect: 15 - 20 minutes**

- Welcome people as they log in (people arrive late online, just like in-person groups)
- Connect by sharing what has been happening in your world since you last met

#### **Discuss: 25 - 35 minutes**

- Use the questions provided in the life group resources available at <https://gatewaybaptist.com.au/media/series/>. If necessary, modify them for your own group's individual circumstances

#### **Wrap Up: 5 - 10 minutes**

- Ask for any prayer requests
- Have 1 person wrap up in prayer
- Close the online group chat and direct people to connect via phone, or video chat to pray for each other in pairs. If there are multiple people in a household, they could separate off and pray with someone else individually, or pray together

Encourage those who prayed for one another to connect once more during the week before you meet again.

Also, if your group has not already done this, consider setting up a Facebook Group chat or similar platform to stay in touch and communicate with one another between online life group meetings.

*If you, or anyone in your group, needs additional pastoral support, contact your local Campus Pastor.*