

SENDING FAITH HOME

**GUIDE TO  
HOSTING VIRTUAL  
PARISH EVENTS**

*by Paul Canavese*



The Pastoral Center

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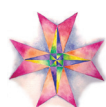
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**The Pastoral Center**

# 1 Embracing Virtual Events

## The Signs of the Times

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The need for physical ("social") distancing brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic has forced many organizations—including parishes—to embrace new technologies to stay connected to their members. The immediate need for most churches was to provide a remote Sunday worship experience. As the pandemic has extended, the pastoral needs have only grown.

While it is essential that we protect ourselves and especially our most vulnerable neighbors by *physical* distancing, we also should do whatever we can to reduce *social* distancing. How can we stay connected as the Body of Christ? How do we keep families connected to the parish and to each other? How do we continue to form and accompany? How do we all serve others and continue to bring about the Kingdom of God during this time? It's time to think creatively about how we can meet this challenge as a church!

The church is not a building. It is the People of God, present in the world!

## How Do We Choose to Respond?

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Change is hard. When the pandemic first began to restrict our worship services, few expected the impact would last beyond a few weeks or perhaps a few months. While many parishes began to provide video of weekly Mass online, many of us assumed that other forms of ministry could wait for the storm to pass.

Parishes began hurting financially and many began furloughing or laying off staff members. Budgets were frozen. Parishes went into semi-hibernation. It's understandable from a "business" perspective, but also sad for so many reasons.

What if the lack of imagination for how to respond to this situation led to the decreased donations in the first place? While so many businesses and organizations are creatively finding ways to reach out and fulfill their missions during this time, what does it say to our people if we give up before even trying? Many parishioners—stewardship theology notwithstanding—pay for what they feel they are getting, which may not seem like much if the parish has practically shut down.

On the other hand, some churches (across denominations) are *growing* during this time. They have embraced technology and used it as a tool for evangelization. They have found that a remote ministry model lowers the barrier for seekers to dip their toe in the water, even if they're hundreds or thousands of miles away. Regular members are inviting their friends to check out their church's online experiences. And from all the intentional pastoral effort, contributions flow in.

## You Can Do This!

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As a church leader, technology may not be your “thing.” That’s okay. You don’t have to be the one to figure out the technical details. In fact, it may be much easier than you presume to get local technical help and advice, as we outline in the next chapter.

But that doesn’t mean you are off the hook. Your job is to set the pastoral vision and to make the invitations and connections. It will be important for you to learn what the technology tools *can do*, so that you can help decide *how* to best use them for ministry. Then lean on others too implement your vision.

## What We’ll Cover

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The purpose of this guide is not to be an exhaustive reference on how to use video conferencing tools or hold an online event. Technology advisors and additional online resources can help you with these details.

Instead, we will focus on the unique situation of extending a parish’s ministry through online video technology. We will raise questions you need to consider from that perspective and what additional information you should seek out.

## It’s Not Over When the Pandemic Is Over

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What many churches are realizing is that the tools they are being forced to embrace in pandemic times will be essential for their ministry far beyond.

This time with COVID-19 is resulting in *permanent* changes in our society, whether we like them or not. Businesses are shifting some employees to permanently work more from home. Some retail stores and restaurants have permanently closed. Grandparents will continue to use video calls with their grandchildren. Online shopping will remain even more popular than before.

Habits have changed. In many ways, the pandemic has accelerated changes that were already in process.

What are the implications for us in parish ministry? Now, more than ever, seekers explore and evaluate churches online before they step foot on the parish grounds. Some people are more willing to attend a parish talk if they can stream it online. Older parishioners who are tentative about attending evening events in-person would be happy to connect through their computers or phones. I recently spoke to a pastor who said holding planning meetings virtually was so much more convenient for their team, and they won’t be going back.

Learn these tools not just for this year, but for the future as well.

## 2 Getting Advice and Help

### Setting Expectations

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If you simply want to hold a Zoom meeting for a simple virtual meeting, you don't necessarily need help. We certainly don't want to intimidate you. If you hope to host a simple, small "gathering" such as a small faith-sharing group, you could even temporarily set the technology issue aside and begin by making small group invitations. It is very possible that at least one member of any small group could take on the technology piece for you.

Then again, if you plan to offer a more formal presentation, share visuals through your screen, use music, or facilitate a larger group, you most likely should seek out some help. If you want to dream about what's possible, find someone with gifts in this area. Preparation, planning, and expertise can make a huge difference in how people experience your event and the parish.

Ideally, your parish would have one or more technology advisors (volunteer or paid) to help you navigate the challenges.

### Learn From Your Peers

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As a starting point, reach out to peers and friends in your local network and beyond. All kinds of leaders are dealing with these same challenges, and many may be ahead of you. Ask others what they have learned and brainstorm with them. What might they do if they were in your situation?

In particular, reach out to the following folks:

- ▶ **Teachers.** They were some of the first who had to quickly navigate video tools and use them to both teach and engage. If you are in catechetical ministry with children or teens, advice from other educators will be very helpful.
- ▶ **Those in the business world.** Consider who in your network may be using technology to facilitate group facilitation and learning.

### Learn from Other Churches

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We cannot stress this enough. This is an amazing time to virtually visit other churches and learn from them, *especially* those outside your own denomination. It is easier than ever, as even live church services are often recorded and made available for later viewing. However, we would also encourage you to be part of live experiences to see what it's like to be a visitor. You will learn a ton!

Here are some ideas of strong communities to visit online:

- ▶ Church of the Nativity, as featured in the Rebuilt series: [ChurchNativity.com](https://ChurchNativity.com)
- ▶ First Church Berkeley UCC: [FirstChurchBerkeley.org](https://FirstChurchBerkeley.org)
- ▶ Connexus Church, Ontario: [ConnexusChurch.com](https://ConnexusChurch.com)

Seek out some variety. It should be relatively obvious from a church's website if they are committed to being welcoming and if they are embracing technology during this time. You don't have to agree with the preaching or enjoy the music to learn from another community.

Seek out not only the primary worship service, but also other online opportunities (e.g. children's ministry or adult groups). Many of these will not be recorded, so you will need to make an effort to find how these churches are forming community online.

Don't be intimidated if another church seems light years ahead of yours. Look for principles that you can apply based on where you are now.

In our experience, leaders of other churches are also very happy to share what they have learned. Don't be afraid to ask what tools they are using behind the scenes or what they have learned along the way.

## The Ministry of Tech Advisor

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Beyond seeking inspiration and ideas from various sources, it can be very helpful to have one or more people who can work more closely with you. Since technology has become such a key way that we communicate in our society—and so much more so during this pandemic—the role of technology advisor may be just as important in your parish as a bookkeeper, maintenance person, or administrator.

When we think of ministry, whether paid or volunteer, traditional categories come to mind: eucharistic minister, usher, St. Vincent de Paul member, parish festival grillmeister. But technology help may be the gift we most need right now.

Fortunately, your parish is likely overflowing with this gift. Your parishioners have had to figure out how to use video conferencing for connecting with family members, work responsibilities, or their child's schooling. Many have become experts. Others always have been. Most would never consider that these gifts could be used in service of the church (as no one has ever suggested such a thing to them).

Some of your younger parishioners—teens, tweens, and young adults (20s & 30s)—may be an excellent choice to help in this area. They may have particular expertise, creativity, and interest, as well as available time.

Depending on the size of your parish and your technology plans, the best fit may be a volunteer, a stipended position, a part-time contract employee, or a parish staff member. It could also make sense to have a *technology team* to advise on getting started and/or to be on call for events.

## Task vs. Ministry

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It is essential for all involved to remember that this is *ministry work*, and it needs to be done in a way that fits into our mission as a church.

We will use technology differently than a company because we are the Body of Christ. Our priorities and goals are different. That doesn't mean we should be any less adept or masterful at using the tools, just that our purposes are different.

For this reason, we need to bring our technical and pastoral gifts together. We recommend that pastoral leaders work through this guide with their tech advisor(s). Begin by talking about what you hope to accomplish, and then what tools and processes will best help you to achieve those things.

## Defining the Role

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A technology advisor or team can help you in a variety of ways, from planning to hosting specific events. This can include:

- ▶ **Selecting your technology platform(s) and products.** Your advisors should help you choose what tools you will use, from online sites to cameras or microphones. Then they can help you understand what is possible using the tools and how to use them effectively.
- ▶ **Planning events.** Work with your advisors to brainstorm how best to meet your goals in a particular virtual event, using the tools at your disposal. This includes everything from the invitation phase through followup.
- ▶ **Hosting events.** Depending on the event and the technical comfortability of others in the event, it may be important to have an attendee who can just focus on the technical responsibilities. You may even share the phone number of that person with attendees beforehand so they can help those having trouble.
- ▶ **Following up.** Be sure to evaluate what went well or could be improved after an event and track behavior (how many people are tuning in to Mass each week? Are they watching the whole service or just jumping to the homily?).

## 3 Setting Your Goals

### What's the Event?

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In many parishes, the pandemic has forced all events online if they are to continue. While not an ideal situation, there is a silver lining. We have an opportunity to reflect more carefully on *why* we hold these events and what is most important about them. We can become more creative about how we minister and build community.

Parishes have experimented with hosting the following types of experiences online:

- ▶ Sunday and weekday Masses
- ▶ Small faith-sharing groups
- ▶ Youth ministry sessions
- ▶ Child or family faith formation events
- ▶ Prayer groups
- ▶ Parish planning meetings (pastoral council, finance committee, etc.)
- ▶ RCIA meetings
- ▶ Presentations or talks
- ▶ Retreat-like experiences
- ▶ ...and many more

### Why the Event?

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It's helpful to step back from time to time to remember the goals of our ministry. Our actions can become rote, and we may just go through the motions. Clarifying the purposes of an event will help us offer it online effectively.

Most of the time, the events we hold are just as much for building community and connection between participants as they are about transmitting information. They are about communal prayer and letting the Spirit move within the Body of Christ. They are about letting us transform each other in the moment: being Christ for each other.

Therefore, we need to be concerned about the same sort of issues as with in-person events, such as:

- ▶ **Environment.** Is the event easy to find? Is the "space" warm and inviting?
- ▶ **Hospitality.** Are we welcoming—especially to anyone who is new to the community—and do we make a personal connection? Is there an opportunity to meet others?

Imagine you are a newcomer and the event will be your first experience of the parish.



- **Personal sharing.** Is there an opportunity for all who attend to participate beyond simply listening, even if it is in subtle ways?

As this pandemic is teaching us, there is much that we took for granted during in-person gatherings. For example, consider the subtleties of Sunday Mass. While the role of the assembly may not seem to be particularly active sometimes, the Catholic Mass is a very communal event. We may not have realized how much this was the case—overlooking how much the gestures, movements, spoken responses, handshakes, singing, and smiles affect us—until we tried to watch Mass through a screen.

## The Hunger for Community

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One aspect of the parish experience that people are missing the most is the community of familiar faces and voices. A danger of this time is that the parish can come to seem impersonal: only about the virtual Mass (which itself is decoupled from the community) or the faces of priests and staff members.

It will take some extra effort and creativity, but there's no reason we can't keep parishioners connected, with a strong sense of belonging.

## Levels of Engagement

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Online video tools provide us with three basic levels of interaction: watching a pre-recorded video, watching a live video broadcast (perhaps with the ability to text chat), or sharing two-way video (conferences in which everyone can interact live). None of these options is better than the others, but it is important to use the best tool for the event at hand.

**Pre-recorded video** has the advantage that it can be viewed at the convenience of the viewer. It is a good tool for informational content, especially in short bursts. It can be very engaging, but there is no live, shared experience.

One good way to use pre-recorded video is to coach families so they can create their own experience. For example, we do this with our [Worship@Home](#) family services, in which we provide a weekly online script, each with a few embedded videos of songs and short reflections. This works well because the worship is an in-person event led by the family. The music videos help them to sing together and the reflection videos provoke thought before they enter into faith sharing. The family is active throughout!

Another example is the way some parishes are recording videos to coach parents for at-home catechesis. Our [Growing Up Catholic Faith Stories](#) and [Sacramental Preparation](#) resources are designed so that parents can lead their children through the process step-by-step. But some leaders wanted to help them a little more and show a familiar face that would connect families back to the parish. So they either filmed an introductory video explaining the process or a video that stepped them through key parts (prompting families to hit pause at certain points).

Don't worry about the technology details of these approaches at this point. We will cover that in a later chapter.

Another issue with pre-recording is relevance. We know a church that records their Sunday Mass on the prior Tuesday. When a major event occurs in the interim, it isn't referenced in the homily or Prayers of the Faithful.

On the other hand, Mass should generally *not* be pre-recorded. It is meant to be a live, communal, shared experience.

**Live video broadcast** is best suited for events when a large number of attendees is expected and their shared participation by video or audio would be disruptive. This method is an obvious choice for Sunday liturgy, and is much better than a pre-recorded service, but it still results in a diminished sense of community.

Some platforms have a feature that allows for communal text chat, which can help bridge the gap. You can prompt participants to use the chat during a service or event. For example, ask them to say hi before the service starts, or perhaps to also mention something they're thankful for from the previous week. During the Prayers of the Faithful, ask participants to type in intentions.

But don't rule out the possibility of a two-way video experience for worship or other large events. We have participated in some very engaging services by Zoom, where participants were mostly muted but visible. It was refreshing to see others whom we were worshipping with.

**Live, interactive video** should be used whenever more active participation is important (most of the time!). It can be a little messy and perhaps more complicated, but that's also what happens when people are *physically* present.

## Combining Approaches

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Often it will make sense to use multiple video approaches to meet your goals. For example:

- ▶ Before or after a live video broadcast, offer an opportunity for live, interactive conversation. This could be a **virtual "coffee and donuts"** offered on another platform.
- ▶ **Use pre-recorded video in your live broadcasts.** This can make it more practical to involve more people, and to make your events more dynamic. A Mass might include recordings of different parishioners proclaiming the readings, reading the prayers of the faithful, making announcements, etc. Before or after a Mass or other event, include short video clips of parishioners waving while music plays.
- ▶ **Virtual watch parties.** A popular pandemic activity is the "Netflix watch party," in which multiple friends/families watch the same movie at the same time, while being connected by video or text chat. We can do something similar by watching some kind of pre-recorded video, text chatting during the video, and then discussing it afterwards. (You will need to consider copyright issues if you are using an outside video.)

## 4 Best Practices

### Putting It into Practice

You will need to be intentional to achieve the kind of goals that we outlined. This chapter will outline best practices and tips for video experiences. Use them as a starting point for your own brainstorming and learning.

### Promoting and Sharing the Event(s)

Work backward from your planned event and consider how your participants will discover it. Make sure links on your church website are prominent and clear. They shouldn't be hidden three clicks deep. In fact, you want people to *stumble* over your event if they are viewing your website.

Share links through all your communication platforms (email, social media, etc.) and make it easy for others to share with their friends. A good image that includes the details will help.

Be absolutely sure that the link will work on the day of the event. There is nothing worse than getting an error message when trying to connect to an event. The best link to share may be to a page on your website that will itself include the link to the event. That way you can change/fix the event link as needed.

If you have someone available to provide tech support during the event, publish their contact information right next to the event link.

Whenever you experience a video event (secular or faith-based) as a participant, learn from it! Pay attention to the techniques the leaders use. Note what works well and what doesn't.

Note the screen capture below from the McFarlandUCC.org home page, clearly showing all the weekly options for streaming events in one place.



**Online Sunday  
Worship**  
(10am)

<https://zoom.us/j/97010988439>

*(You can join the meeting beginning at 9:45 am if you'd like to visit with others and make sure you are set up correctly on zoom)*



**Bible Study**  
(11:45am, Sundays)

<https://zoom.us/j/262314649>

*We ALWAYS have a provocative, often fun, and meaningful discussion as we explore a biblical reading together.*



**Daily Devotional**  
(8am, Monday - Friday)

<https://zoom.us/j/94276813637>

*Join Pastor Bryan every morning for daily encouragement, centering, and prayer.*



**Bible Study &  
Discussion**  
(6:30pm, Tuesdays)

<https://zoom.us/j/95481817891>

*We engage in rich, meaningful conversation with a nice combination of deep insights and humorous quips. There are no taboo questions or thoughts*



**Midweek Inhale**  
(6:30pm, Wednesdays)

<https://zoom.us/j/123020606>

*Learn & develop personal "spiritual practices" that help deepen spiritual life.*

## Sharing Materials

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Consider if there are any materials you would like your participants to have on-hand at the event. This could consist of anything from a printed text to craft materials.

- ▶ **Electronic materials** could be delivered by email or posted to your website for download (right next to the event link). You may want to suggest that they be printed out prior to the event, as it may be difficult to fit them on the screen at the same time as the conference itself. However, not everyone has access to a printer at home, so also offer to send copies out physically.
- ▶ **Physical items.** These can be sent by postal mail or made available for pickup at the parish. Even if some items are commonly available, it can be a gift to participants to gather them together for them (especially since pandemic limitations can make shopping more of a burden).

## Practice, Practice, Practice

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Until you are very confident with your tools and process, you *must* practice beforehand. The event itself is not the time to work out technical issues.

Lean on co-workers, family members, and/or your core team to do a trial run. Share the same exact contact information as you would with participants. If possible, make sure people are testing with different kinds of devices (tablet, laptop, iPhone, Android phone, etc.).

You should definitely prepare and practice all the content on your own, but you don't have to necessarily run through it all with others. Do test out all the technical procedures (playing audio, showing videos or slides, using chat, switching to different presenters/speakers, etc.).

## Coach Your Participants

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Just as it is important to point out the locations of the restrooms at an in-person event, help your participants familiarize themselves to the features of your video event platform at the beginning of your event. Don't assume they know anything about the platform. Tell them how to get to the chat if you will be using it. Explain how you will be handling audio muting and what the procedure is if they would like to speak. Be aware that the interface may look different on a phone app.

## Contact Info

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For certain events, it may be helpful or necessary to require pre-registration. If you can, leave open the possibility of last-minute attendees. Visitors or those on the margins of your parish may be more likely to decide just before the event.

For these cases or for public events (such as Sunday services), provide a way for attendees to sign a virtual guest book (with contact information) so you can follow up later. This can be as simple as a sign-up form that is linked in the comments section. Warmly encourage visitors to fill out the form during the broadcast itself.

## Setting the Environment

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Have you ever been the first to show up to an in-person event and it felt too quiet or cold or empty or just awkward? Joining a video gathering can feel this way, too, with the added confusion of perhaps not knowing if you are connected correctly. Be intentional about what your attendees will see and hear when they join.

We recommend that you play some background music as folks gather to fill any silence and give them confidence that their audio is working.

If the group is relatively small, greet people as they join and have some informal conversation. But this can be challenging with larger groups. Throughout the event, avoid making any assumptions about participants and be welcoming to all.

Consider the visual experience also. You may choose to display a slide with an appealing image and the title of your event. Or you might train a camera on a prayerful scene, such as table top with a candle lit, open Bible, etc.

## Visual Presentation

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Video is a visual medium, so consider creative ways to use it to its fullest. For example:

- ▶ Display **Powerpoint slides** to easily share visual elements. Images and light text are preferable to busy slides with lots of small text. Imagine you will be reading the slides on your phone.
- ▶ Play pre-recorded **video clips**, whether created by your team or elsewhere. If you can play it on your computer, it should be possible to share it over the video session. (Be sure you have copyright permission.)
- ▶ Use **visual props**. Telling a story or making a point with a physical object can capture your audience's attention in a unique way.
- ▶ **Change the perspective**. Be intentional about where you present from. Would your presentation be more effective if you were outside? In the kitchen? Inside a pillow fort? If you are using the camera on a laptop or mobile phone, you could even easily change settings during the session.
- ▶ **Provide the words**. If you will be inviting participants to sing along or pray certain words aloud, display them on the screen. This will be much easier for them than sending as separate files.
- ▶ **Look at the camera**. If you look right into the camera while you present then participants will see you looking at them.

As an example, our *Hands-On Gospel* resource offers "object lessons" related to each Sunday's Gospel reading, usually using some kind of prop.

## Visual Interaction

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Likewise, consider how your participants can interact through the visual medium, even if it is a large group. With live, interactive video events, participants can see each other. Turn that into an advantage that builds community. However, be respectful of those who are not comfortable or able to share video. Here are some examples:

- ▶ Poll participants via **gestures**. For example, ask a yes or no question and ask everyone to answer with a thumbs-up or thumbs-down.
- ▶ Equip participants in advance with markers and index cards or paper. Ask them to answer a question by **writing or drawing their response** and then holding it up to the camera. (Some platforms offer a way to draw through the computer, but sometimes simpler is better.)
- ▶ Engage through **movement**, such as by holding a mini dance party or teaching gestures to accompany a song/prayer.

## Visual Representation

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Another strategy is to pre-record video of others to give a broader representation of the community. This can be done in many ways, but here are some ideas:

These sort of ideas can drive a lot of excitement within your group/ community. Participants will also really want to tune in to the event so they can see themselves in the final video.

- ▶ **Candle-lighting montage.** Ask members to record short videos of themselves lighting a candle off the left side of the screen and then moving it off the right side of the screen. Edit the clips together so it appears that each person is lighting the next person's candle. Mute the video and add a background song. This idea was popular for Christmas, but is also a great idea for Epiphany, Easter, or at other times. Find an example tutorial at [this link](#). Like so many other things, this idea may have originated with our [Jewish brothers and sisters](#).
- ▶ **Prompt-response montage.** In a similar way, ask your members to send photos or short videos of themselves holding up the answer to some prompt. For example, you might ask them to clearly write down one thing for which they are grateful from the past week/month/year and then hold it up to the camera. Stitch them together into a montage.
- ▶ **Photos.** Early in the pandemic, an Italian priest asked his parishioners to email him selfies, which he printed out and taped to the pews, so he wouldn't be so lonely when presiding. See a video at <http://bit.ly/mass-selfies>. You could do the same and even film a video focusing on one photo at a time while music is playing. Another example, using a photo montage to illustrate Scripture, is this "Christmas Tapestry": <http://bit.ly/christmas-tapestry>.

## Text Interaction

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Your attendees can also participate through their keyboards. For example:

- ▶ One of the simplest ways to prompt interaction is to ask for responses in the **text chat**. It's simple, easy, and right in the screen they are using.
- ▶ The website [Kahoot.com](https://kahoot.com) helps you easily set up custom **surveys or quizzes** that your participants can fill out in real time. It's a great way to get instant feedback, even from a large group, and to share it back with them. Some video conference platforms may also have a similar "poll" feature.

## Discussion

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If faith sharing or other forms of discussion will be part of your event, carefully manage the process.

- ▶ **Splitting the group.** If part of your session is sharing such that everyone can participate, only so many people can be in each conversation. On Zoom, the breakout rooms feature allows you to group participants into smaller sets for a period before joining them all back together. Other platforms have similar features, or you could set up separate conference sessions for each group. Generally, we suggest groups of six to eight participants. It can be helpful to have a facilitator in each group.
- ▶ **One voice at a time.** Think beforehand about how you can help the group from talking over each other. If the group is small enough and there is little audio delay, you may not have to do anything. However, if it becomes a problem, one leader could be responsible for calling on speakers one at a time. Participants could raise their hands (if on video) or type in a chat box if they would like to speak. Some platforms have a "raise hand" feature built in.

As with any faith sharing interaction, you will want to review ground rules for respectful discussion.

## Managing in Real Time

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It can be difficult to both present and manage a streaming video event, so we recommend having a second person in the background who can handle any issues that come up. This does not necessarily have to be a technical expert (although those skills could come in handy). Work out a way for the background person to communicate with the presenter (by chat/text or by talking to you from off camera).

The sort of issues you may need to handle include the following. Prepare for and practice them in advance:

- ▶ **Muting** and unmuting participants. Decide in advance how you will handle audio participation. Be ready to mute anyone who turns their microphone on by mistake (they may not know how to mute themselves again).



- ▶ **Manage the chat.** Pass along any important information or questions to the presenter. Answer questions as possible. Paste information or web links to accompany the presentation as arranged in advance.
- ▶ **Be the bouncer.** Be prepared to handle any bad actors who might join and try to disrupt your event, just in case. Different platforms give you different ways to handle the security of your event.
- ▶ **Support the presenter** by advancing slides, playing videos, etc.

## Next Steps

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Consider possible next steps and follow-up from the beginning. For example, you could gauge the group's interest in similar events or actions and/or get feedback about the event that just occurred. This could be done through a [Kahoot.com](https://kahoot.com) or other survey link.

## Evaluation

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Check in with your team afterwards to learn from the event. What went well? What could be improved? Follow up with anyone who you expected to attend, but didn't (especially to learn about any technical difficulties they may have had).

Take advantage of analytics tools in your platform to learn about who you are reaching and how they are behaving. For example, YouTube will tell you not only how many people have watched one of your videos, but also at what points in the video many people drop off. You can also learn where your viewers are geographically, what devices they are using, and much more.



## 5 Platform Basics

### Choosing Your Platform(s)

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You will need an online service or "platform" to host your virtual event videos. This is the service that your parishioners will connect to in order to participate in your events. Choose a platform that provides the type of hosting you need.

- ▶ **On-demand video.** This is the simplest case, in which you pre-record a video, upload it to a hosting site (such as YouTube) and then allow your members to view them on their own schedule.
- ▶ **Live broadcast video.** In this case, you will provide a one-way video stream that people can watch live. You may also have the capability to record the feed and post it for viewing later. This is a common approach for live-streaming Masses.
- ▶ **Live interactive video.** This option is an experience in which all participants can share their video and interact, such as with the popular Zoom platform.

There is a pretty big range in how complicated your setup will need to be. Your laptop and a Zoom account may be all you need for simple events, but a more professional broadcast will require more. See Chapter 6 for links to articles that go into more detail.

### On-Demand Video Platforms

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[YouTube.com](https://www.youtube.com) is the dominant platform for on-demand video because it allows anyone to create an account and post videos for free. It funds its business through ads that may run before or while your video plays. Alternatives do exist, such as [Vimeo.com](https://vimeo.com), which gives you more control (for a subscription fee).

These platforms can allow the public to comment on videos. Consider whether you want to allow this on your videos or not. If you do, be sure to monitor for questions and comments, responding as appropriate. Especially keep an eye out for abusive comments, as you do have power to police them.

On-demand platforms also track analytics to tell you helpful information about not only how many people watch each of your videos, but when, where they are from, how much of the video they watched, and much, much more.

This type of video can easily be embedded in any webpage or shared through social media. Take advantage of these features so more people will discover your videos.

### Live Broadcast Video Platforms

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These platforms empower you to broadcast your events live, and can also provide a text chat box so that participants can interact live. You should also have the option to record your live event and post it for later viewing.

Major live broadcast platforms include Facebook Live, YouTube Live, and Vimeo LiveStream.

## Live Interactive Video Platforms

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There are many free or low-cost platforms for video conferencing. The pandemic brought these tools to the forefront as businesses and extended families sought to replace in-person meetings with video chats. Zoom (<http://zoom.us>) is one of the most popular options for hosting meetings and has a free tier (with limitations). If you are seeking out a platform yourself, many online articles can help.

## 6 Practical & Technical Tips

We outline here some key practical issues that will make a difference. Explore them further online and/or with your technical helper.

### Internet Connection

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If you are acting as a presenter or leader on a virtual event, be sure that you have reliable internet service at the location you will be using. It will need to have enough bandwidth so that your audio and video quality will be acceptable. Be sure to test this beforehand. You may also want to limit other members from your household streaming video at the same time if you may hit bandwidth limitations.

The apps at [SpeedTest.net](https://www.speedtest.net) can help you measure your internet speed whenever you want from any device.

### Video Quality

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Tips for looking good:

- ▶ **Be well lit.** Believe it or not, the biggest difference between poor and excellent video quality often comes down to lighting. Generally, you want stronger lighting shining on you from the front than from behind. It can be a problem if you have a window behind you. (You'll look more like a shadow, but your yard will look great)
- ▶ **Camera choice.** The best option for streaming video is usually the camera built into your computer or a connected webcam. If you choose to use a phone camera, use the one with the highest quality (there are often two). The camera on the back of phones is usually higher quality than the one that faces you while you view the screen.
- ▶ **Clothing choices.** Avoid bold patterns such as stripes or plaids. If you are using a green screen behind you (to replace with a different background), do not wear anything green.
- ▶ **Avoid background distractions.** Pay attention to what participants will see behind you. While the idea of custom Zoom background images might seem cool, the flickering serves as a distraction.
- ▶ **Fit in the frame.** Back up so viewers can see your head and torso. This lets your body language come through and keeps your face from being distorted.

### Audio Quality

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Tips for sounding good:

- ▶ **Pick a quiet spot.** Find a location where there will be minimal ambient noise and distraction. Also avoid spaces with echo. If possible, turn off/down fans,

air conditioners, phone ringers, and anything else that could compete with your voice. Avoid jewelry or other items that could make clicking noises as you move.

- ▶ **Microphones.** Whenever possible, use an external microphone or wireless (Bluetooth) headset. Be sure not to touch or let your clothing rub against the microphone.
- ▶ **Speak slowly.** This is a good practice whenever presenting, but even more so when your participants' video and audio quality could be a bit choppy.
- ▶ **Check the platform audio quality.** Zoom and other platforms compress the streaming audio quality so it will use less bandwidth. This can make music quality in particular very poor. Especially if you will be playing music, consider enabling high-quality audio on your platform (Zoom allows for this).

## Music Copyright Issues

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Be aware that if you are playing recorded music or performing it live, you may have to make special arrangements to meet copyright requirements. Music publishers have additional licensing requirements for use in video/streaming. Contact your parish music director to learn more.

Note that some video platforms can even automatically detect use of copyrighted music and de-list your video or stream. We have seen this happen to some churches this year.

## Safe Environment

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If your event is ministering to children or teens, be sure to learn about your diocese's safe environment guidelines over video. You probably need to be sure two adults are present in each event.

One way to simplify this requirement is to offer whole family events, so that parents are present with their children.

## Security & Abuse

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With the prevalence of streaming events has also come abuse, some specifically targeting churches. "Zoom bombing" is when an outsider joins and disrupts your video event. They may shout out or text profanity or other offensive language. Or they may even share inappropriate images over their video connection.

There are a variety of ways you can protect yourself against this kind of intrusion, depending on which platform you use. Read up on security approaches for your own platform.

## 7 Dig Deeper

Here are some helpful links providing more detail on hosting video events. They come from a variety of sources

### General COVID-19

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- ▶ **COVID-19 Resources from USCCB:** <https://www.usccb.org/committees/communications/covid-19>
- ▶ **COVID-19 Church Resources:** <https://www.acts29.com/covid-19-church-resources/>

### General Video

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- ▶ **Vintage Church Video Tips:** <http://bit.ly/church-video-tips>
- ▶ **A BBC reporter on how to be a video conference rock star:** <https://blog.dropbox.com/topics/work-culture/a-bbc-reporter-on-how-to-be-a-video-conference-rock-star>
- ▶ **Our BBC reporter returns: How to present in a video conference:** <https://blog.dropbox.com/topics/work-culture/our-bbc-reporter-returns-how-to-present-in-a-video-conference>

### Live Streaming

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- ▶ **Live streaming resources (National Association of Pastoral Musicians):** <https://npm.org/livestreaming-other-technology-resources/>
- ▶ **Livestream guide (Diocese of Charleston):** <https://charlestdiocese.org/office-of-multimedia/online-guides/livestream-guide/>
- ▶ **How to livestream your church service: A practical guide:** <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/livestream-church-service-practical-guide/>
- ▶ **How to live stream: A beginner's survival guide:** <https://www.epiphan.com/blog/how-to-live-stream-for-beginners/>
- ▶ **How to live stream Mass from your phone (a video tutorial for Facebook Live):** <https://www.facebook.com/spiritjuice/videos/235617347831453>
- ▶ **How to Broadcast a Facebook Live event in 7 Easy Steps:** <https://blog.techsoup.org/posts/how-to-broadcast-a-facebook-live-event-in-7-easy-steps>
- ▶ **Getting started live streaming on YouTube:** <https://support.google.com/youtube/answer/2474026?hl=en>