

Church Online Hosts: Complete Guide



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Introduction

If you think about your online ministry like your physical building, Hosts are like your welcome, next steps, and prayer teams—all in one. They play the important role of greeting attenders in the chat, answering questions, sharing helpful links and resources, and praying for people through one-on-one prayer.

Hosts can be members of your church staff or volunteers, and the number you need each service depends on if you use features like Chat, Moments, and Live Prayer as well as how many attenders are in your service.

This guide will help you and your online hosts understand the crucial role they play and equip them to do ministry online. The information provided is based on what's worked well for us at Life.Church—feel free to tweak as needed to suit your style and community.

What Hosts Do

So, what do Church Online Hosts do? They do three easy but powerful things—welcome, discuss, and pray.

Welcome

Hosts welcome each new guest into the chat area. A friendly welcome can be made even friendlier by using exclamation marks, emojis, and a follow-up question to get to know them.

Example: *Hi @johnfromuganda, welcome to our church! We're so happy you're here today. How's your day going so far?*

Discuss

Next, Hosts can spark discussion in the chat area. Asking icebreaker questions, recapping key points from the message, or posting a quote using the Quote Moment is a great way to engage attenders in the chat. Open-ended questions—those that can't be answered with a “yes” or “no”—and questions beginning with who, what, when, where, why, or how are always great conversation starters, too.

Example: *I love that Pastor Craig just mentioned _____. That's so powerful! How do you think we can apply this into our everyday lives?*

Pray

Finally, Hosts can offer prayer to guests in the chat area. They can pray with people right in the chat area or encourage them to click the Live Prayer button if they'd rather talk and pray with a volunteer privately. It's amazing to see how loved people feel when someone reaches out to pray with them!

Instead of simply replying “Thanks for sharing; we'll pray for you!” we found that typing out the prayer is a better way to meet the attender's need.

Example: *Hi @martha75, I'm so sorry to hear that you lost your grandfather this week. Could we pray together here for you and your family? Let's pray: God, we lift up Martha and pray that you would be with her and her entire family today. We ask that you would bring them your perfect peace and comfort, and that you would surround them with people who can encourage them in this season. Thank you for loving us and being with us in every difficult moment. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.*

How to Schedule and Onboard Hosts

Scheduling Hosts to Serve

There are a variety of ways you can schedule Hosts to serve, but this functionality is not built into the Church Online Platform. Hosts will serve inside the Platform, but you'll want to use another method to schedule them to serve. Many churches incorporate online ministry roles into tools like Planning Center.

Leading Hosts

Just like any volunteer role at your church, you'll want to provide clear expectations and resource your team well. Below are a few best practices for leading your online Hosts.

Before your Experience:

- Check in with your Hosts to see how they're doing—this can be via email, social media, or a mini-huddle using video software
- Inspire your Hosts by reminding them about the ministry they are part of
- Share important information with them via the Host Chat—the private chat exclusively for Hosts. Remind them of the specific impact they have and the role they play.
- Pray over your team and the experience

Tip: To help Hosts understand their assignment, some churches assign Hosts based on role—welcoming, discussion, or praying. Others have assigned Hosts based on the color of the attendee's avatar (example: Josh responds to green, Mary responds to purple, etc.)

During your Experience:

- Encourage your Hosts when they do a great job serving
- Have a plan in place for Hosts to report major technical issues they encounter, and equip your Hosts to respond to attendees well. Prep some answers to common questions so Hosts can copy/paste the responses.

After your Experience:

- Debrief with your Hosts: how did the experience go?
- Thank each Host for serving
- Build and nurture relationships with Hosts throughout the week

Equipping Hosts to Serve

- Train them on the tool.
 - If it's a Host's first time serving, make sure they understand how to use the Church Online Platform. You could invite them to attend your service first or record a video of you engaging with attenders during an experience.
- Share with them how to respond.
 - There are lots of situations that can come up via church online—be sure to train your Hosts in how you want things to be handled and who they can turn to if they need help. You can create chat prompts and share them along with key scriptures and other content in the Host Tools. These chat prompts can be example ways to greet guests, questions to ask based on the sermon, the list of worship songs, and answers to any commonly-asked questions about your church or the service.
- Resource them with prayers.
 - Help your Hosts engage with attenders through prayer. Later in this guide, we provide a few common prayer starters and scriptures to reference for specific needs or you can download our complete “Church Online Hosts: Prayer Resources” guide from open.life.church.

Communication Tips for Hosts

Beside the message video, communication at Church Online is primarily written, so it lacks some of the nonverbal cues we typically use in face-to-face conversations, such as facial expressions and tone of voice. Share these tips with your Hosts to help them hone their communication skills online.

1. Avoid all caps. TYPING LIKE THIS can come across as virtual yelling, so use standard capitalization and be sure your Caps Lock is off.
2. Use proper punctuation. Proper punctuation prevents misunderstandings, helps Google Translate accurately translate your messages into other languages, presents your church in a tidy light, and clarifies meaning for non-native English speakers.
3. Use emojis! Written communication can sometimes seem emotionless or impersonal, but it doesn't have to. To convey joy, sorrow, or virtually any other emotion, try adding some emojis to your posts!
4. Avoid using slang or churchy words that can cause confusion, such as "What's crackin'?" or "sanctification." The best approach is to use simple language and provide explanations for any words or jargon that unchurched guests might not understand.
5. Tag a person or use someone's name when responding. You wouldn't want someone who just said in chat that their dog died to see your "That's amazing! Praise God!" comment and think it was meant for them. @ tagging or using the person's name helps make it clear exactly who you're talking to in chat.

Remember, in the online realm, our communication truly *is* our ministry—that's why we strive to make it as excellent as possible. Learn from your teammates, have fun, and never forget our mission: to lead people to become fully devoted followers of Christ!

How to Handle Sticky Situations

Critics of online ministry often say accountability is missing in an environment where people can hide behind anonymity. But we've found that oftentimes people will share more openly online than they might in face-to-face conversations. Church Online attenders often tell us they were too hesitant to attend a traditional church setting, worried about what people might say or think. But they felt comfortable enough to try Church Online, and when they did, they found a place they could belong before they believed.

With anonymity can come messiness—people saying or doing things that may not happen in a physical building. But, as believers, we embrace the messiness and use those opportunities as a way to minister to people in need.

Here are a few situations we have experienced at Life.Church and the process we follow. Develop a process that works well for your church and train your volunteers on it well.

Disruptive Behavior

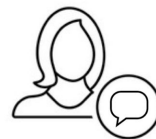
If a guest continually exhibits inappropriate behavior, Hosts have the ability to mute them through the Church Online Platform. *Muted guests can still watch the message and see chat.* They will also see their own posts appear, but their posts will not show up to anyone else. Before a Host mutes a guest, they should be given a friendly reminder in both public chat and then in direct chat if needed. Remind them that this is an open and welcoming space for all.

Muting should be a last resort—and sometimes it's hard to know if it's the right thing to do. Here are a few things to remember:



Mute A Guest When...

- they continue to use profanity after being asked not to do so
- they post pornographic links or phrases
- they continue to post racist or hateful remarks
- they bully others



Don't Mute A Guest When...

- they discuss off-topic things
- they Have a weird username
- they say they don't like God or Christians
- they annoy you

Suicide

When we learn that someone in our community is contemplating suicide, the church can respond to their need and introduce them to the hope of Christ. To determine how to respond, discuss with your leadership team and consider seeking the advice of outside counsel. We have included a few things we've learned along the way, but the information doesn't constitute legal advice or best practices, and you should not consider this information to be a substitute for the advice of a licensed attorney in your area. It also does not replace having a conversation with your team to determine how to respond.

Watch for Warning Signs:

There are several red flags that indicate someone may be considering suicide. We watch out for the following types of warning signs, among others:

- Verbal: saying things like, "I just want to end it all," "I feel trapped," "The pain is unbearable," "I don't have a reason to live," or "I'm just a burden on people now."
- Mood: exhibiting signs of depression, anxiety, apathy, or rage.
- Behavioral: bingeing (alcohol, drugs, or other destructive behaviors), giving away prized possessions, withdrawing socially, oversleeping, and self-harming (e.g., cutting).
- Emotional: feeling intense self-hatred, hopelessness, shame, bottled-up anger, or desire for revenge.
- Medical: being diagnosed with a mental health disorder or having a history of previous suicide attempts.

Other potential precursors to suicide may include a history of abuse (particularly sexual abuse), lack of a strong support system, job stress, divorce, legal trouble, chronic illness, financial strain, the death of a loved one, and trigger dates (anniversaries of important events, holidays, etc.), among others. These factors don't necessarily cause suicide, but failing to cope with them in a healthy way can lead to thoughts that suicide is the only option to end the pain.

Assess the Risk Level:

How does someone know how serious a suicide threat really is? The truth is, they can't—so we *always* take a suicide situation seriously, even if it's possible it might just be a cry for attention.

Here are four factors which may indicate professional intervention is needed right away (these are just some examples):

- Intent: "I want to end my life."
- Plan: "Here's how I'm going to do it."
- Means: "I have access to what I need to do this."
- Timeline: "I have picked out a day and time for this to happen."

If these factors are present or if the person says they are in immediate danger of committing suicide, Hosts urge the guest to contact emergency services, and then the Host immediately gets in touch with a pastor. If the Host or pastor knows where the individual is and believes self-harm or harm to others is imminent, that Host or pastor considers contacting local emergency services directly

Take Action:

In a Host's interactions with a suicidal person, we have found it is valuable to provide a listening ear, a caring prayer, and helpful resources. These steps are some of the ways we've learned to guide the conversation:

Ask → Notify → Listen → Pray → Resource → Follow up

1. Ask:

If a Host suspects someone might be suicidal but isn't sure, it's all right to talk to them about the concern. It's a myth that this will plant the idea in their mind—in fact, they're often hoping someone will ask, since it's a difficult subject to bring up. One example of a way to approach this topic sensitively is by saying something like, "I'm worried about you. Have you ever thought about harming yourself or taking your life?"

2. Notify:

If a Host encounters a suicide situation, they notify a team leader/pastor immediately. They will let the leader know if the person has expressed intent, a

plan, access to means, and/or a timeline, or any other factors they feel relevant. If the attender is comfortable with it, Hosts may invite the team leader/pastor into the conversation so they can all talk together.

3. Listen:

Hosts can encourage the person to tell them as much or as little as they're comfortable sharing about their situation. They can show empathy by repeating what the attender says back to them and telling them how proud they are for opening up. We've found that a Host can keep the attender talking by asking clarifying questions and questions about their life. Above all, the Hosts show care and loving concern for the person and the difficulties they're facing.

4. Pray:

Hosts let the person know that God cares about them and their situation and that they'd love to pray with the attender to ask for His help. Here are some suggestions of things to pray for:

- That they would know how much God loves and values them.
- That God would bring them healing, comfort, and hope for the future.
- That they would have the strength and courage to seek help when they feel overwhelmed.
- That they would know that God is always in control, even if everything else in life seems out of their control.
- That today would be the first day of a brand new chapter in their life.
- Anything else that God brings into their heart or mind as they're praying—let the Holy Spirit guide!

5. Resource:

Before ending the conversation, Hosts can provide the person with some helpful resources to support them. Here are some resources that may be helpful:

- Relevant Bible verses, such as [Philippians 4:6-7](#), [Isaiah 41:10](#), [Matthew 11:28-30](#), [Psalm 139:14](#), [Jeremiah 17:14](#), [1 Peter 5:6-7](#), and [Psalm 94:18-19](#).
- A YouVersion Bible Plan, such as [Overcoming Thoughts of Suicide and Self-Harm](#) or [21 Days to Beat Depression](#).
- A message series from your church

- An invitation to join your online community
- [You Can Overcome Suicidal Thoughts](#) blog post on [Finds.Life](#).
- Other websites, such as [To Write Love On Her Arms](#) and [Project Semicolon](#).
- Resources for U.S. only:
 - [Crisis Text Line](#): text 741741.
 - [The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#): call 1-800-273-8255 or click the blue “CHAT” button in the top right corner of their website.
- Find a local counselor: <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>.

Of course, these resources can be combined with practical next steps and ways to partner with the person in achieving them.

6. Follow Up:

People in crisis situations need continual support, so it’s important to follow up after the service. Hosts often let them know that they’d love to continue the conversation, and ask if they can have the attendee’s email address or any other contact information. Hosts and Leaders can work together to develop a follow-up plan to continue praying for the person and suggesting additional resources. Continued support and friendship mean more than you know.

Final Thoughts:

While our support can’t (and shouldn’t) ever take the place of professional help from a licensed counselor, God can certainly use Hosts to impact a person in crisis. We love it when our Hosts cover their serving time in prayer, and we make sure Hosts always know how to reach their leader or pastoral staff.

Life.Church is pleased to provide these complimentary materials to your ministry. These materials are based on the specific needs of Life.Church’s ministry and are provided for informational purposes only. Please be aware that laws, rules, and regulations may differ by country, state, county, city, and municipality. These materials should not be construed as legal advice or best practices for your ministry, nor does this create any attorney/client relationship. While we intend to provide information that is helpful, you should not consider this information to be a substitute for the advice of a licensed attorney in your area.

Prayer Resources

One of the most powerful things we can do as believers is pray for one another. Through the Church Online Platform, your church has access to tools like one-on-one prayer that allow you to easily connect with and pray for attenders.

To help you train and equip your Hosts to minister to others through church online, we've compiled prayer prompts and scriptures that address specific issues your attenders may be facing and emotions they may be feeling. These resources are meant to empower you to engage in a quality prayer conversation that includes a warm and empathetic introduction, an authentic and compassionate prayer, and helpful next-step suggestions.

Here are a few resources for prayer—to find even more, download our free PDF Church Online Hosts: Prayer Resources available at open.life.church.

Experiencing Grief

There are many ways people can be in grief and they all involve the same thing: loss. Most likely it will be the loss of a loved one but often it can involve a job, a divorce, or some other personal tragedy. There are several stages to grief (some sources say seven while others say four), and they are not always linear. Often a person will cycle back to an earlier stage to resolve it.

Stages of grief are:

4 stages	7 stages
Shock and denial	Shock and denial
Intense concern	Pain and guilt
Despair and depression	Anger and bargaining
Recovery	Depression, reflection and loneliness
	The upward turn
	Reconstruction and working through
	Acceptance and hope

Possible things to pray for:

- Pray for them to experience God's comfort.
- Pray for people to be available to them to talk through their grief
- Encourage them to keep faith in God and what He can do.
- Pray that God will help them with strength and courage to make it through this time.
- Let them know God does care for them.

Verses to share:

- Matthew 5:4 (NIV)
 - "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 (NIV)
 - "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God."

- Isaiah 41:10 (NIV)
 - “So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.”
- Psalm 23:4 (NIV)
 - “Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.”
- Psalm 34:18 (NIV)
 - “The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.”

Financial Struggles

People faced with financial difficulties can experience fear, guilt, uncertainty, and desperation. They may doubt God's goodness and promises. They may be seeking direction, hope, and peace. Imagine how you would feel in a financial crisis, and respond with gentleness and empathy. Pray boldly and in faith, confident that God promised to provide for His children.

Possible things to pray for:

- Provision for basic needs of food, shelter, clothing and utilities
- Wisdom for income-producing activities, debt repayment, budgeting, sources of community assistance
- Faith to trust in God's promises to meet needs and provide guidance
- Thankfulness that all of our resources belong to the Lord; we are managers of them, but not owners
- The Holy Spirit to reveal the work God may be doing through this crisis (ie: refocus our hearts on heavenly treasure)
- Forgiveness for financial carelessness, if they acknowledge that

Verses to share:

- Philippians 4:19 ESV
 - "And my God will supply every need of yours according to his riches in glory in Christ Jesus."
- Luke 12:22-24 NIV
 - "Then Jesus said to his disciples: "Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat; or about your body, what you will wear. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothes. Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable you are than birds!"
- Philippians 4:6-7 NLT
 - "Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

- James 1:5-6 ESV
 - "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind."
- Deuteronomy 28:12 ESV
 - "The Lord will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow."
- Malachi 3:10 ESV
 - "Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, that there may be food in my house. And thereby put me to the test, says the Lord of hosts, if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you a blessing until there is no more need."
- Proverbs 3:9-10 NIV
 - "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine."

Guiding Someone Through a Salvation Prayer

Seeing people surrender their lives to Christ is one of the greatest joys as a church leader—in fact, it's why we do what we do! As you serve, you may encounter people who are ready to make this life-changing decision. Check out the guide below for a few tips on leading someone through a salvation prayer.

Before Praying

Use Scripture to explain your foundational beliefs on salvation:

- All of us have sinned and fallen short of God's standards. (Romans 3:23)
- The just punishment for our sin is eternal separation from God in hell. (Romans 6:23)
- There's no way we can ever earn our way into heaven. (Ephesians 2:8-9)
- Jesus, the Son of God, lived a sinless human life among us. (Hebrews 4:14-15)
- He died on the cross then rose again, defeating sin forever. (1 Corinthians 15:3-4)
- Because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice, we can be reconciled with God and spend eternity with Him in heaven. (John 14:6, Galatians 3:26, John 3:16)
- Salvation is God's free gift to us, but we must accept it. (Romans 10:9-10)

Praying Together

Emphasize that there is no magical prayer you must pray—it's more about the condition of your heart. Some important components can be remembered with ABC: **A**dmit that you are a sinner in need of a Savior, **B**elieve that Jesus died for you and rose again, and **C**ommit to live the rest of your life for Him.

Here's one example:

Heavenly Father, forgive me of all my sins. Make me brand new. I believe Jesus died for me and rose again so I could live for you. Fill me with your Spirit so I can know you, serve you, and follow you the rest of my life. My life is not my own—today I give it to you. Thank you for new life! In Jesus' name I pray, amen.

Next Steps

Once someone has made the decision to surrender their life to Jesus, celebrate with them and let them know how excited our community is for them! Then, encourage them to let your team know so we can get in touch and provide them with some next steps in their new faith.