

# US DISASTER PROGRAM

## Using Online Affinity Groups To Address Isolation



Affinity groups are useful for coordination, to address specific topics or to debrief traumatic experiences

### THE PURPOSE OF AFFINITY GROUPS

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Episcopal Diocese of New Jersey sought out ways to maintain connection within its congregations and members as individual households began to practice physical distancing. The diocese decided to use online affinity groups, similar to foyer or small groups. These groups focus on particular shared interests and experiences, such as online gatherings for first-responders or educators. These groups were facilitated by diocesan staff members, but this model could be replicated by deaneries or even congregations, as long as there are facilitators available to convene the gatherings and provide referrals if needs emerge beyond the capacity of the group. Based on the existing ministries and the need created by the pandemic, the diocese decided on the following:

### EXAMPLES OF AFFINITY GROUPS

1. **Pastoral Response:** Spiritual support for clergy, lay leaders and mental health professionals responding to the increased level of anxiety in communities and congregations, as well as end of life and other associated issues
2. **Health Care Providers/First Responders:** Spiritual support for health care providers, first responders, their families and those who care for them
3. **Lay Leaders Town Hall:** Lay people only spend time with the Bishop to share concerns and ask questions
4. **Clergy Town Hall:** Clergy only spend time with the Bishop and each other to share information, raise concerns and ask questions
5. **Bible Study:** Once a week online discussion of the coming Sunday's gospel reading
6. **Online Worship:** Planning, hosting and/or participating in online worship services
7. **Outreach Ministries:** Sustaining and growing congregational outreach ministries
8. **Hispanic Ministry/Community Support:** Specifically for those engaged in ministry to and with Hispanic people
9. **Financial Resources:** Promoting and developing congregational financial sustainability
10. **Communications:** For persons responsible for congregational, diocesan or ministerial communications
11. **Youth Ministry:** For those engaged in ministry to youth grades 6-12
12. **Children's Formation:** Sunday School and online formation for children
13. **Adult Formation:** Online formation for adults

### RESOURCES

Episcopal Relief & Development offers several resources that can be of use in affinity groups including Bible Studies, Prayers and Liturgies and others related to self-care for clergy and caregivers. Visit [episcopalrelief.org/resourcelibrary](https://episcopalrelief.org/resourcelibrary).