

The Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America (“GOARCH”) already has Policies for the Safety of Children and Youth (the “Policies”) in place. Nothing stated in these guidelines for virtual or online ministries is intended to nullify the Policies. Virtual or online programming provides the opportunity to build and expand on these Policies, but it is important to continue to follow current protocols and practices to keep our children and youth safe.

■ VIRTUAL OR ONLINE VIDEO-CHAT MEETINGS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Suddenly, we live in an age of the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID19) and government ‘shelter-in-place’ orders, ‘lock down’ Executive Orders and the like encouraging or even requiring us to stay in our homes and not congregate in groups.

Because of this, many Parishes, Metropolises, and GOARCH have begun sponsoring or encouraging virtual or online youth retreats with groups of children.

GOARCH believes these meetings will continue to be commonplace in the future of the Church, even after the end of this pandemic.

■ ALL VIRTUAL CHURCH MINISTRIES ARE INCLUDED:

The ministries included as virtual or online may include but are not limited to, Sunday School, Greek Language Cases, Hope, Joy, GOYA, Folk Dance, Youth Choir, Retreats and other Virtual get-togethers of children and youth of all ages.

It is Best Practice to establish registration processes for all Youth Ministry Programs, both those done virtually and those done in-person.

■ WHICH YOUTH WORKERS MUST BE TRAINED FOR VIRTUAL MINISTRY:

For both in-person ministry and virtual ministry; **Clergy** (deacons, presbyters, and bishops), **Lay Workers** serving any Youth Ministry Programs and Events, including **Event Chaperones** and **Drivers** must be registered, trained, and screened before entering in ministry with Children and Youth.

Again, all church sponsored ministry workers are required to be registered, screened and trained as ‘Youth Workers.’ To be completely clear, no one may assist with Youth Ministry Programs or Events, whether online or in-person, without first being registered, screened, and trained.

■ WHY SHOULD ADULTS CONDUCTING GROUP VIDEO OR GROUP ZOOM MEETINGS STILL BE TRAINED AND BACKGROUND SCREENED?

As an organization, GOARCH wants to ensure that those interfacing with our children are not registered sex offenders, and are trained and prepared to identify

abuse risks to our children. At the very least, we are allowing and encouraging these participating adults to build relationships with our children under healthy parameters. As such, all laity working with youth ministry programs within the Archdiocese must be Registered by the parish, have a criminal background screen completed and reviewed and pass the required training courses.

There is no exception to this policy whether the program is virtual or in-person.

■ CONDUCTING VIRTUAL MEETINGS WITH MULTIPLE YOUTH WORKERS

Zoom-type Virtual Meetings MUST have multiple adults that are Registered, Trained, and Screened under the Policies as certified Youth Workers. As with in-person meetings, ensure you have enough adult supervision.

For example: AT LEAST two adult Youth Workers per virtual meeting should be viewing/participating in every virtual meeting, in addition to any clergyman if a clergyman is participating. It is Best Practice to designate one of the participating adult Youth Worker to moderate the meeting and the other participating adult Youth Worker to observe or supervise verbal language, gestures and potential bullying as well as content of chat boxes (if not deactivated).

- HOWEVER, neither Youth Workers nor youth participants should not be utilizing private 'chat' conversations.
- Please note: It is important for the host of the virtual event to disable the private chat feature at the beginning of the virtual meeting or event.

■ NO MEETINGS ALLOWED BETWEEN ONE ADULT AND ONE CHILD: VIRTUALLY OR IN-PERSON

In the Policies: in-person meetings between one adult and one child are strongly discouraged. Youth Workers should never be PHYSICALLY or VIRTUALLY alone with a child.

It is suggested that Youth Workers keep and maintain a copy of written electronic messages such as group texts, emails, and other forms of social media.

■ VIRTUAL MEETINGS: RECORDING AND POSTING

As a general rule, DO NOT RECORD zoom-type or other virtual online group meetings for archival purposes; including but not limited to webinars, teleconferencing and group video-chats. If for insurance or legal reasons, a metropolis or parish decides to record 'for archival purposes' a virtual meeting or event, then this is done at their own cost and must be stored in a secure manor. Such a recording may not be shared with the written permission of the parents or guardians of all participating minors.

Such virtual meetings, chats, and events MAY NOT be posted to any form of social media accounts without written consent from all parents or guardians of participating minors.

Additionally, any recordings or screen shots with images of minors may not be posted that include the names indicated of the participating minors. Even with proper written consent from the parents or guardians, it is best practice to only post screen shots which DO NOT include the names of the children and minors.

Please be aware that it is possible for a people to be using a visible phone or camera to record the meeting without the knowledge of the Host or other participants. It is advisable, at the beginning of the meeting, to state that the meeting is not being recorded and ask that no recording are made by participants.

■ **IN-PERSON MEETINGS: RECORDING AND POSTING**

Recording In-Person meetings have the same standards as virtual meetings. Such In-Person meetings, chats, and events MAY NOT be recorded and/or posted to any form of social media accounts without written consent from the parents or guardians.

■ **REGISTRATION PROCESS: VIRTUAL MEETINGS**

As part of Best Practices, all virtual youth meetings should be done by registration and with a password as stated in the document “Zoom Security Measures.”

■ **REGISTRATION PROCESS: AGE VERIFICATION**

Age Verification is considered a Best Practice for virtual meetings. As part of the registration process, a YES or NO question regarding the age of the participant should be included. If the youth participant is 12 or under, then the parent or guardian must give permission for the youth to participate. If the youth participant is 13 through 18, then the youth participant may give his or her own permission for participation and data collection.

This is based partially on policies as established by Facebook and the American Camping Association.

■ **REGISTRATION PROCESS: RECORDING RELEASES**

If a decision is made to record an in-person meeting or a virtual/online meeting, a statement should be included in the registration process stating: 1) that a recording is being made; and 2) asking if the recorded meeting or a screen-shot may be used for posting and/or sharing. This statement can be as simple as: “I hereby give permission for GOARCH or the Metropolis of (insert name) to record all virtual programming sessions.”

■ **REGISTRATION PROCESS: CODES OF CONDUCT**

It is Best Practice to include: 1) a ‘Code of Conduct’ for the Youth Workers; and 2) a ‘Code of Conduct’ for the participant and their parent or guardian. ‘Code of Conduct’ statements signed in advance by Youth Workers and also by both parents and youth participants provides proper communication of expectations, especially in the event that it becomes necessary to exclude a participant due to inappropriate behavior.

■ **REPORTING POLICIES**

Reporting of inappropriate conduct, be it verbal, gestures, or facial reactions during the virtual meeting, is mandatory. This reporting of inappropriate behavior includes the behavior of the youth participant and the youth worker. All policy statements regarding bullying, swearing, inappropriate gestures and other inappropriate behavior is to be enforced, regardless if the meeting is in-person or virtual. Inappropriate language, inappropriate behavior or bullying must be reported within the Church structure to maintain an emotionally safe event for the children and youth.

Incident Reports/Notices of Concern can be fillable PDF’s, hand-written, or emailed; but should be immediately sent to supervisor of the meeting. Additionally, it is important to ensure that parents, who are not in the virtual meeting, are notified if their child breaks the code of conduct

■ **YOUTH WORKERS ARE ROLE MODELS**

Concerning verbal interactions: Youth Workers must continue to be mindful that their words and the words of the youth participants on these types of church sponsored video meetings are important and can positively or negatively change lives.

In other words, as a Youth Worker one must enforce the policy against name-calling, off-color or sexual jokes, shaming, belittling, cursing or any other inappropriate verbal interaction by either adults and/or youth participants.

■ **PROGRAM ACTIVITIES**

If your virtual program activities include physical activities, it’s important to ask parents or guardians to evaluate the space being used in the home to make sure it is free from hazards.

This should be part of the releases required in the registration process.

