

FAMILY REUNION INSTITUTE'S

STICKY REUNION SITUATION

2020 REUNIONS CANCELLED

April 2020

The Situation:

We celebrate two family reunions each year, one with my family and the other with my husband's. The first is on Memorial Day and the other is on the Fourth of July. Both are being cancelled this year because of the Coronavirus/Covid-19 pandemic. And while everyone understands and wants to be safe, we're all disappointed. Do you have any suggestions for what we can do as a family in-lieu of the reunions?

The Fix:



**Suzanne
Vargus Holloman**

With family reunions being cancelled due to the coronavirus, you're spot-on that families still need to stay connected now more than ever to encourage and support each other! Technology is the key to staying in touch. Consider establishing a private Facebook page for the family. Introduce a topic of discussion every week for the family to comment on. Facebook space can also be used to livestream a family gathering. With Covid-19, video meetings are now very popular and can be accomplished not only via Facebook but on a number of platforms including zoom.us and freeconferencecall.com. Here are some ideas for activities:

- Catch-up gatherings: The goal is to simply have a chance to see each family member and briefly hear from them. Each member would take a turn providing a brief update. In addition, perhaps the life story of an ancestor can be shared in each gathering as a way of learning the family's history. When we learn about the struggles of our forebears it reminds us that families can prevail despite today's challenges.
- Theme gatherings: Each meeting would have a theme such as sharing how to's on researching family genealogy, recipes, scrapbooking and other hobbies/activities. Perhaps a family member would like to start a weekly exercise class or meditation session. There are virtual games that the group can play; find family-friendly games that align with the meeting platform that you're using. Ask the group for the themes that they would find of interest.
- Another option is to offer movie nights via netflixparty.com. Pick a movie of interest to the family and while watching, the group can communicate via chat along with uploading photos and emojis. If you have elder family members in nursing homes, see if you can make arrangements with the home for the staff to assist the family member in joining the virtual meetings via their cell phone or a community computer. Also, consider organizing a family telephone campaign to call the senior family members.

The meeting venues mentioned above are free of charge. However, they have more robust levels available at a cost. A volunteer should establish the video account and run/monitor the technology during the meetings. An organizer(s) is needed to determine the meeting dates and topics as well as communicate the meeting information to the family. If your family has chapters the activities could be organized by chapter. If the meetings are national, check the number of participants the video venue has capacity for at the no cost level to ensure it can accommodate the size of your family. Please note that these platforms can be hacked so when choosing a service consider the security and privacy features.

You can have your virtual meetings up and running in very little time with just a few volunteers! The account for the meeting platform can be established in less than an hour. Set a date and topic, send out a notice to the family, and your virtual family meetings are on their way!

The Fix:



**Sylvia
Ford-George**

Suzanne is so right. Technology and social media are key to creating a virtual reunion when a live reunion is not doable. If you want to do something on the day the reunion was to take place to give your family that reunion day feel, you can use any of Suzanne's suggestions or the additional ones listed below. Remember to take the time to plan-out the activities and get information to the entire family before "reunion day".

1. Have family members "check-in" by posting current, individual or group pictures on your website, Facebook, Zoom, etc.
2. Before the reunion day, create an informational scavenger hunt that includes clues to questions about your family history, family members and/or the area where the reunion was to be held. Identify rules regarding how and when information is to be turned in, and how the winner will be chosen, etc. On "reunion day", distribute the scavenger hunt list and rules to family members online. Sample questions can include:

Family history...

How did the family reunion get started;
Where is the family hometown;
Who is the oldest known family member;

Family member related...

Who is the oldest living family member;
Who is the youngest family member;
In what states do family members reside?

Reunion location...

What is the area famous for
Name a famous person from the area
Who is the current mayor

Name a family member who...

Is in elementary school
Is in high school
Is in college
Is home schooled
Is a teacher
Is computer savvy
Drives for a living
Makes the best cakes
Fries the best chicken
Makes the best potato salad

3. End the night with an online dance party.

Under normal circumstances, I am not a fan of virtual reunions, because it's the conversations, greetings, hugs, smiles, shared love, camaraderie, face-to-face actions and activities that keep us connected. Today however, it's not safe for reunions as usual. So let's do the next best thing (virtual reunions) so that we can keep our families growing stronger, safer and connected.
