Guidance on using Zoom safely:
(Copied from UCAN Forum post)

Many churches are turning to Zoom as the technological means of keeping community going during the Covid-19 lockdown and in particular for hosting online gatherings such as prayer meetings or small groups. Zoom is a great tool for this, but it needs to be used in a safe manner as some risks do exist.

I experienced such a risk when attending an online prayer meeting at my home church yesterday evening. Sadly, the meeting had been infiltrated by an 'unknown' who was not there for prayer but instead used the opportunity to call out abuse and obscenities. This was distressing for all concerned and the feeling of being violated has stayed with me through to this morning.
This isn't totally unexpected in a church context. Being a city centre church, we've had many a church meeting where a welcome local visitor who has had 'one too many' calls out in an unexpected or rude manner during the service, or occasionally even tries to participate in the leading from the stage. However, the anonymity of yesterday's intrusion and unexpected interruption in the virtual world has certainly left me a bit unsettled.

This phenomenon is called 'Zoom-bombing' and if you search reputable news outlets online you will find many articles over the past week of this happening, particularly in religious settings. Some have been particularly distressing, especially when children were present in the gathering.

This 'Zoom-bombing' doesn't mean that Zoom should be avoided, but that it should be used carefully, with the appropriate security measures in place. Here are a few suggestions:

1. Don't ever publish the meeting ID or password to publicly accessible social media. This is important information and therefore should be treated with appropriate caution. Share only via private groups, messages and emails where you have confidence in the recipient list.

2. It would be good practice to review church mailing lists to ensure everyone is correct, up-to-date and that no disruptive factors are present.

3. Use a unique meeting ID for every meeting, specifically generated for that occasion as opposed to using a recurring ID which can be associated with your church. Zoom IDs are 10 digit numbers which provide the location of your meeting.

4. Zoom meetings can have meeting passwords. It can be helpful to use these, and best communicated in a separate communication to the message including the ID. (Please note using an automatic meeting invitation email may bypass the need for the password so instead of sending these out, just send out the ID and password separately).

5. Zoom meetings can have a 'Waiting Room' to act as welcome lobby. This allows the meeting host to screen and permit entry. A good way to check that names or faces are recognised before admitting them to an online gathering.

6. You can 'lock' a meeting once it has started, so that no new attendees can join.

7. The host can remove any participants who are misbehaving, and the settings for the meeting can prohibit them re-joining.

8. The host has the ability to mute attendees, automatically on joining and at any stage. In the meeting settings (bottom right) you can prohibit attendees for unmuting themselves if you wish.

9. In your account settings on the Zoom website (not downloaded app) you can customise various security settings, such as disabling chat, prohibiting pictures or files to be shared (very important for obvious reasons) and stopping participants sharing their screens.

10. Finally, if your meeting is a victim of 'Zoom-Bombing' and the gathering is disrupted by hostile input, please be encouraged to respond in a loving and compassionate way and immediately interrupt the meeting with prayer for the individuals concerned. However, distressing, our God remains bigger than the situation and if the visitor is trying to cause disunity and hostility it is best for them to be met with a sacrificial display of love, before being removed from the meeting (and then the meeting ended if appropriate). Last night I was humbled and impressed to see one of our participants pray lovingly for the intruder and I'm sure this brought glory to God. Let's pray for a reduction in Zoom-bombing but also healing and transformation for the perpetrators.