

# GETTING READY

THIS CHANGES EVERYTHING.  
2018 ELCA YOUTH GATHERING

A Youth Ministry Curriculum ramping up for the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering



Evangelical Lutheran Church in America  
God's work. Our hands.

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## GETTING READY RESOURCE INTRODUCTION

**C**ongratulations on being an adult leader for the ELCA Youth Gathering 2018 in Houston. This is a great opportunity and a blessed burden for you. Please know there are many people praying for you, your group and your preparation for the Gathering (while we are preparing to welcome you to the Gathering!)



This *Getting Ready* Resource has been created for your use by a group of dedicated youth ministers who, like you, are committed to making the experience of the Gathering fulfilling and Christ-centered. We know that going into something like this without any preparation leaves a void for the experience. With an eye to getting you and your group ready to go, we spent time asking youth what they're interested in learning, what they wonder about and listening to the ELCA Youth Gathering Team Leaders and what they are planning (based on past evaluations and insight from youth across the ELCA). We've put a lot of time and love into this resource to help you prepare your group to engage fully in the Gathering, ready to hear speakers, engage in Service Learning, Interactive Learning, Synod Day and being guests in Houston. We are excited to use this resource for our own groups coming to the Gathering.

With all this, we also acknowledge that not every youth from your congregation can be at the Gathering. We've heard this can be a difficult thing for leaders who are stretched for time and have limited resources. With that in mind, we have prepared these materials for you to use as your youth ministry curriculum for the 2017-2018 school year so you can have all the youth learning and engaging together, even those not able to participate in the Gathering. There are references to the Gathering and to Houston, but we believe this only further incorporates all youth in the experience, not just the group participating in the Gathering. Your whole group can then more fully engage before, during and after the Gathering (see "The Official Gathering Handbook," Page 71, for ways to include youth who are unable to attend while you are at the Gathering.)

Take it from a group of seasoned veterans of the Gathering, doing the getting-ready work enhances your group's Gathering experience exponentially! This truly is a labor of love for our partners working in this ministry with us!

Blessings,

**Chelle Huth,**  
**Manager, Curriculum Writing Team**



ANDREW BUCK + ZOE CLARK + JENNIFER CRIST + JEFF ENGROFF  
ED KAY + KEITH WEATHERFORD + ARIEL WILLIAMS

*And many others who consulted, read, answered questions, contributed in casual conversations, prayed and supported this process! Thank you!*

# HELPFUL LEADER INFO:

So much to say, so little space to do so! Here is a list of helpful pieces of information for you as you engage in this resource.

- **It looks like a lot. Well, it sort of is.** There are nine months included with two sessions for each month. There is a main session and a Going Deeper session. On the next page, you will see suggestions to help you use this resource in a variety of ways and times. (For example, if your group meets two times a month, or on Sunday mornings, or you can only do these materials in a weekend retreat, be sure to check out our suggestions.)
- **This resource has a strong justice emphasis.** We are called to action by Christ through our words and deeds. Youth want to make a difference in this world, make it a better place for everyone. We had this in mind as we wrote. Spend time before each session studying the materials and getting yourself ready to engage in the discussions and the work of the sessions.
- **The topics covered in this resource come from topics expected to be a part of the Gathering through Mass Gatherings, Interactive Learning and Service Learning.** This is why it's important to engage in this Getting Ready Resource, to prepare your group to engage fully in the Gathering.
- **The Going Deeper sessions will take your group into deeper learning of the topic beyond the initial session. Please try to use these.** Especially note that the March Going Deeper session is on human trafficking, a topic that will surely be addressed in various ways at the Gathering due to its looming presence over Houston.
- **The resources are built around the faith-formation process of devotion, caring conversation, rituals and service.** Each session incorporates these practices.
- **A ritual we encourage is lighting a Christ Candle at the beginning of the session during the opening prayer.** It does not need to be the Christ Candle from your sanctuary – and probably should not be. Just get a candle that will last through the year and keep it as a visual reminder of the light of Christ present for us and the world.
- **A warm-up activity is included with each session in which you will put on paper in large print a word or phrase.** You can have these printed on 24-inch by 36-inch paper at a copy store or office supply store, or you can write them on a newsprint sheet. Perhaps have a youth with a flair for art create it for you! You will post this on a wall and encourage the youth to write their responses on the sheet.
- **You can save these as the year progresses as a reminder of your learning and growth through the year.** Share these via social media after each session!
- **There are a lot of video links in the curriculum.** If the internet is available during your sessions, you can just click the link to play the video. If you do not have access to the internet during your sessions, download the videos to your computer before the sessions. You can also use YouTube Red on your phone or tablet; select "Save" to save the videos to an "Offline Videos" folder you can access without using the internet or data.
- **Each session has the same style sending for ritual.** The sending has youth standing up during the sending as a visual action. If you have youth in your group that are not able to stand, please be cognizant of this and create an inclusive way to use the sending. This also goes for any of the activities given in the session.

*If you need help thinking through this, please don't hesitate to contact the Gathering office ([gathering@elca.org](mailto:gathering@elca.org)) or Chelle Huth, Gathering Curriculum Manager ([chuth@uls.edu](mailto:chuth@uls.edu)) for ideas.*

## MEETING ONCE A MONTH:

Each session (main and Going Deeper) is written to be about 45-50 minutes long. If you are meeting for two hours, use both sessions, combining where it makes sense.

## MEETING TWICE A MONTH:

Do the main session at your first monthly meeting, then do the Going Deeper session at the second meeting.

## SUNDAY MORNINGS (ABOUT 30 MINUTES):

You will break all the sessions into two parts (using one part each Sunday.) Here's what that would look like:

### First Sunday:

- Have the large-print page up for the warm-up activity.
- Do the intro and gathering prayer.
- Do the experiential-learning piece.
- Explain the focus of the session.
- Do the sending activity.

### Second Sunday:

- Review the large-print page from the warm-up activity from the previous week.
- Remind them of the intro and do the gathering prayer.
- Do the word section of the session.
- Do the sending activity.

You will then do the same for the third and fourth Sundays, using the Going Deeper session.

# SUGGESTED USES, WAYS AND TIMES

## RETREAT:

### Friday:

- Do group-building activities and the Gathering for Community session.

### Saturday

- Combine the sessions on Gathering for Love and Gathering for Relationships for your morning session.
- Do the Gathering for Compassion session after lunch.
- Do the Gathering for Home session in the afternoon.
- Do the Gathering for Advocacy session after dinner.
- Do the Gathering for Justice – Going Deeper session in the evening.

### Sunday

- Do the Gathering for Purpose session.
- Do the Gathering for Purpose – Going Deeper session.
- Depart in love!

*For help with any of these suggestions, please don't hesitate to email Chelle Huth at [chuth@uls.edu](mailto:chuth@uls.edu).*

**SEPTEMBER:**

# **GATHERING FOR COMMUNITY**

**PART 1**



**C**ommunity is an important component to our identity as Christians. Christ called us into community, to live, share, serve and grow together through our baptism. As such, we need to do intentional work to build community within our own context so we then know how to be in community in the world. The focus for this month is Gathering for Community, written to help you create and continue to build community with your group.

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote:

**“THE MORE GENUINE AND THE DEEPER OUR COMMUNITY BECOMES, THE MORE WILL EVERYTHING ELSE BETWEEN US REcede, THE MORE CLEARLY AND PURELY WILL JESUS CHRIST AND HIS WORK BECOME THE ONE AND ONLY THING THAT IS VITAL BETWEEN US.”**

Building community is our calling to gather together to build up one another, sustain one another and deepen our relationships in the name of Christ. ***“For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20).***

You will engage in activities and discussion to help build community. You will also create a group covenant to be a reminder of how you agree to be in community with each other. May your work be a gift as you continue this important part of our identity in Christ Jesus.

Check out the group-bonding information in “The Official Gathering Handbook” on Page 26 and the information on group conflict on Page 48.



#### SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Take a group photo and Instagram it to @ELCAGathering #ELCAYG2018 #YourGroupName.

## GATHERING CONNECTION:

The Gathering is not an individual event. We are gathering with 30,000ish people for five days! This is the time to build community, stretch your boundaries and engage in new relationships. Group bonding is an important part of your pre-Gathering Getting Ready experience. By doing this work, you help the group grow stronger to engage in the rigorous days of the Gathering. (Rigorous but awesome!) We will be digging into some tough issues, and by building trust, you enable your group to be more open and honest as they engage and share. The Gathering will affect each of you that go (and even those who don't, through sharing from attendees) in ways you can't even imagine at this point.

You as a leader are called to this work and ministry. You may be feeling a bit freaked out, but remember God has called you to this. Read the story of the calling of Moses in Exodus 2:23-4:17. As you are equipped, know you are equipping your youth to engage in the Gathering. Through community, we are made stronger. Christ calls us into community.  
*Christ changes everything!*

## GATHER (15 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the phrase "Gathering for Community" (or use sticky notes and markers) to write down communities or groups that they relate to. Ask them to also write down important attributes of those communities.

Call the youth together as you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why these are important communities to them.

### The Intro

This session will help us begin to become a unique community in this time and place. A new school year brings the opportunity for new people to come together and recognizes that others may have moved on from the last time we gathered as a group. In our time together, we'll talk about some of the characteristics of being a community together, what it means to be in a community of people who have differences from one another, and how Jesus unites us across and in spite of those differences.

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

Gracious and loving God, gather us in. In the time we spend together today and in the coming weeks and months, bind us together as a community in Christ. Help us recognize the gifts that each of us brings to this place, that we may see the face of Jesus in and through one another. Amen.

### Experiential Learning: Pan Bang

This activity will involve the whole group to highlight what it can be like to both include and exclude people from a community or group. For this game, you need a sauce pan and a wooden spoon to bang against that pan – the more noise it can make the better.



## HANDBOOK TIMELINE:

**September 2017** | Get ready to register at the Early Bird Rate and submit deposits.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- printout of the "Gathering for Community" title page (or a newsprint sheet you have written those words on)
- markers
- sauce pan
- wooden spoon
- computer with Wi-Fi connection (or the video clip downloaded before the session)
- projector if available
- sample covenant in the appendix



Pick a number for how many times to bang the pan with the spoon, and participants will link arms with the number of people you have rung. For example, if you bang the pan four times, the participants will link arms with others to create a group of four. Anyone who is left out of a group of that number is out of the activity and should go off to the side of the room. Bang the pan again with a different number to form a different-sized group.



Alternate between banging the pan even and odd numbers of times to increase the likelihood of people being eliminated.

The object is to whittle the group down to a final pair, with everyone else being eliminated. The activity goes quickly, so feel free to play a couple of times, depending on how much time you have together.

### Process the Experience:

- What did you notice about how groups were formed?
- What was it like to be left out of a group? How did it feel?
- Is there anything from this activity that feels like real or everyday life?
- What do you think about how God wants us to act when that pan is banged?

Participants should be able to identify how it felt to have the community formed and reformed throughout the activity, both in being added to a group and being left out by a group. The activity seeks to illustrate what being left out looks and feels like, so the group can commit to working against exclusion as this community is formed throughout the session and year.

### Alternative Experiential Learning: Poison

Poison is a good physical game to get people moving. It's also not as dangerous as it sounds! Have everyone make a circle and hold hands. In the middle, place a chair, trash can or similar object.

The concept is simple: If you touch the chair (which is "poisonous"), you're out. It doesn't take long before one side of the circle will try to pull the other side of the circle onto the chair. Your job is to get others to touch the chair or object while trying to save yourself!

Variation: If the chain of hand-holding is broken, the two NOT holding hands are out. Gradually, as people are eliminated, the circle will get smaller. The last person standing is the winner!

Obviously, since this is a physical game, you need to keep an eye on safety to make sure people do not get hurt.

### Process the Experience:

- What did you notice about how people acted as the game went on?
- What was it like to be pulled into the chair? How did it feel?
- Is there anything from this activity that feels like real or everyday life?
- How would God want us to act in this situation?

The activity seeks to illustrate what being left out looks and feels like so the group can commit to working against exclusion as this community is formed throughout the session and year.



## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story – Scripture

- Ask: What is a community? What are some examples? Brainstorm all of the communities we are a part of – possible examples include home, family, neighborhood, school, dance company, sport teams, the church, etc.
  - *What are the best parts of the communities you named?*
  - *What are some of the challenges of being a part of these communities?*
- Watch a montage from the movie “Remember the Titans” about community.
  - *Here is a link to the movie montage: [youtube.com/watch?v=StlBPiMQQ28](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StlBPiMQQ28) (5:41 min.)*
- At the beginning of the clip, how would you define community? What are the communities?
- Read Acts 2:43-47. After the coming of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (the beginning of Acts 2), Peter preaches to the witnesses about the saving power of the resurrected Christ. In response, thousands are baptized in Jesus' name and begin to live in a community that cares about and shares with one another.
  - *What do you notice about this community? How does it seem unique?*
  - *How did they live in community with one another? Have you ever experienced something like this?*
  - *What would it be like to live in this kind of community? What would be the high points? What would be difficult?*
  - *How does this community contrast with what we saw in “Remember the Titans”?*

### Our Story – Living in Community

#### LEARN:

A group covenant is an important tool for your community building exercise. The covenant is not a list of rules handed down from the authority figure or adult leaders to the youth. Rather, this should be a collaborative effort among the group.

*HANDBOOK CONNECTION:* See Page 27 of the Gathering Handbook for information on group covenants.

#### LISTEN:

Use the templates and examples in “The Official Gathering Handbook” appendix, pages 86-91, to start the conversation about covenants, or turn your group loose with a blank piece of paper and brainstorm how you will covenant to be in community with each other.

#### CONNECT:

By signing a covenant, you are agreeing to live by certain expectations in order to be part of a community. Agreeing to a covenant is a choice. Granted, the alternative might be to not go on the trip or be a part of the community, but it's still a choice.

#### ENGAGE:

After your covenant is created, post it in the gathering room as a reminder of what the members of the group promised each other. Have everyone sign the covenant, whether it's one large sheet or individual copies.

Thank everyone for their participation and great work!



Be sure to use positive language as you create the covenant: “I will” instead of “I won't” or “We will” instead of “We won't.”

## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer, adding petitions that they deem necessary.*

### **Sending Prayer**

Great and loving God, we give you thanks for your presence among us in our playing and discussion, in our planning and our dreaming. Bind us together as your people. Freed to be disciples of Jesus in this world, living in community with one another in various times and places. Help us leave this place with the promise of your Spirit's presence going with us, that we may bring the best of who we are to those we encounter in this wide world. We pray for this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

### **Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)**

We will end each session with a blessing, sending you on your way. When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

The early church gathered together to break bread and to share with one another, to bring the gifts of the many and support any among them as there was need. Around bread and wine, prayer and singing, love and service, we are brought together to be a unique community of the church that gathers in Jesus' name.

As a part of this community:

**Stand up** – using your gifts to serve God.

**Stand with** – using your talents to care for God's people.

**Stand for** – using your passions to better God's creation and change the world.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God."

This changes everything!

Amen.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.

Thanks be to God.



**SEPTEMBER:**

# GATHERING FOR COMMUNITY

**PART 2:  
GOING  
DEEPER**

**C**ommunity is a rich part of our lives. Community shapes and forms our identity and our story. Our engagement in community means we engage with all those around us, not just those who think, act, look and believe as we do. Being in community draws us to action for our community and those that come along side our communities. This is called accompaniment, walking together in solidarity that practices interdependence and mutuality. The ELCA lives out accompaniment in relationships, striving to share God's love and participate in God's mission together through:

- 1. MUTUALITY:** All of us have gifts to support God's mission. There is no mission to, only mission with and among.
- 2. INCLUSIVITY:** We seek to build relationships across boundaries that exclude and divide.
- 3. VULNERABILITY:** Just as Jesus became vulnerable to us, we open ourselves to others.
- 4. EMPOWERMENT:** We seek to identify and correct imbalances of power, which may mean recognizing and letting go of our own.
- 5. SUSTAINABILITY:** To ensure local ministries last a long time, we seek to embed mission in ongoing relationship and communities.  
[elca.org/our-work/global-church/global-mission](http://elca.org/our-work/global-church/global-mission)

Going deeper will take the opportunity to SHIFT (see the next page) from serving to service learning, starting with looking at charity and service learning.



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

The ELCA Youth Gathering has a three-day cycle of Service Learning, Interactive Learning and Synod Day. Serving in the community is a calling for all Christians. Doing so strengthens the community and those in the community. As part of this cycle, the Service Learning team is inviting all youth and adult leaders (not just those taking part in the Gathering but all youth and adult leaders in the congregation) to SHIFT their view of service. The SHIFT focuses on Stories, Healing, Intersections, Faith and Togetherness as participants delve into their personal experiences, the reality of life for people in their communities and the call of faith to listen to our neighbors and work for peace and justice.

As you prepare for the Gathering, know that service learning can become a part of the lives of your youth and adult leaders every day. By making the SHIFT, we learn that it isn't always about swinging a hammer or holding a paint brush. It's much more than that; Stories, Healing, Intersections, Faith and Togetherness help us see the people we are serving and not just to do something so we feel good about ourselves. The Gathering is only one place where service learning occurs; look for the places beyond the Gathering where service learning can happen.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers

## GATHER (15 MINUTES):

### Warmup

Put the words "charity" and "service learning" in large print on the wall. Ask youth to use markers (or sticky notes) to write what they think each of those things are, the characteristics, etc. After all have gathered, explain this session.

### The Intro

This session will help us SHIFT our understanding of service as we are called to engage in our communities and make a difference in them.

- How did we define each of those words, "charity" and "service learning"?
- What is the difference?

### Gathering Prayer

*Invite someone to say the following prayer by Mother Teresa:*

Silence is prayer.  
Prayer is faith.  
Faith is love.  
Love is service.  
The fruit of service is peace. Amen.

Charity and service learning both begin with the aim of caring for someone else. Charity is primarily focused on resources and ends with a donation or gift. Service learning is about relationships and systems. As people of faith, we are called to move beyond charity and enter into relationships with people who are different from us, to walk alongside them in their mission, and to join them in building a better world. Engaging in service learning means you understand that everyone can benefit and grow from working together to change systems.

Service learning centers on the intersection of story and healing. In order to enter into a relationship with someone and grow together, you must be open to learning their story and to sharing yours. By building relationships, you are exposed to the hurt in your stories or someone else's, and serving together may bring healing to one or both of you as you grow in the experience.

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story - Scripture

Have someone read Philippians 2:3-4

Discuss:

- What do you hear in these verses?
- What mindset are we to have based on these verses?
- How are we doing with that?
- Why do you think we have such trouble with this as a mindset?
- How can we change our mindset?

### Our Story - Service Learning

#### LEARN:

Place matters. It shapes who we are and the way we experience the world in unexpected ways. Memories, the emotional recording of our life stories, are often tied to place.

Think about your life story. Where are the places you have experienced great joy or sadness?

Watch the following TED Talk about the "Danger of Single Story."  
[ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story) (18:49 min.)

- What did you hear in this video?
- What was eye-opening to you?
- How does this affect you?
- What are moments that define your view of the world?
- Where have you experienced healing?
- What role does my location play in my world view?

Invite the youth to share their stories as they feel safe to do so. Pay close attention to the fact that healing most often comes through meaningful, honest relationships and to the way our location can influence world views.

#### LISTEN:

As Chimadanda Ngozi Adichi said, there is danger in the single story.

- How might you hear different stories?
- For example: Houston has an Oral History Project. It is an effort to record and preserve the dynamic history of Houston through the stories and experiences of its residents. It is a collaboration among the mayor's office, the Houston Public Library and the University of Houston. The project consists of several parts. You can go online to [houstonoralhistory.org](http://houstonoralhistory.org) to hear many of Houston's stories.
- Does our city have anything like this?
- Do you know anything about the history of our city?
- How can we find out more to shape and form us in our own understanding of our community?

**CONNECT:**

- How will you use the mindset of service learning when you engage in serving?  
What about in Houston?
- How might the story of our city influence your perspective?
- How will you look for more than a single story in our community?  
What about Houston?

**ENGAGE:**

- Does your life have a single story?
- What is the danger of assuming a single story for people you will encounter during serving?

**SENDING (5 MINUTES):****Sending Prayer**

*Ask someone to say the following prayer:*

As people of faith we are called to move beyond charity and enter into relationships with people who are different from us, to walk alongside them in their mission, and to join them in building a better world. Guide us in our efforts to do this. Open our hearts and minds to hear the multitude of stories, not just one. In Jesus name. Amen.

**Go and Do Likewise – (Blessing and Sending)**

We will end each session with a blessing, sending you on your way. When I say, “Stand up,” we all stand up. When I say, “Stand with,” put your arm around your neighbor’s shoulder. When I say, “Stand for,” mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

The early church gathered together to break bread and to share with one another, to bring the gifts of the many and support any among them as there was need. Around bread and wine, prayer and singing, love and service, we are brought together to be a unique community of the church that gathers in Jesus’ name. As a part of this community:

**Stand up** – using your gifts to serve God.

**Stand with** – using your talents to care for God’s people.

**Stand for** – using your passions to better God’s creation and change the world.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” This changes everything!

Amen.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.



**OCTOBER:**

**GATHERING  
FOR REFORMATION**

**PART 1**





**T**his month we observe the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. (Martin Luther posted 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany, sparking the Reformation.)

## WE ARE A CHURCH FOUNDED ON CHANGE.

As we observe this milestone, we remember that we are to be an ever-reforming church, living into our daily lives as Christ has commanded us. This session will give a brief re-cap of the Reformation, look at where we are as a church today and ways we can move into the future, bringing the good news of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the world.



Check out the section "Plan for the Unexpected" on Page 44 of "The Official Gathering Handbook." (The world wasn't expecting a reformation!)



### SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Join the reformation! Tweet your ideas for how your congregation can continue to reform.  
#Reformation2017 #ELCAYG2018



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

The Reformation changed everything! It changed the way people understood faith, the Bible became accessible to more people, how church structure works changed, and it led to a break from practices that did not come from Scripture.

As we observe the 500th anniversary of Reformation, we are reminded how one person can start a massive reform. While the Reformation began 500 years ago, we are a church that continues to reform, reshape and renew in many ways. Reform isn't just one thing. It shapes our theology, our life, our worship, our thinking and our doing. The Gathering is a catalyst for reform. Your group will hear and see things that will spark something new in them. How will they reform your congregation or community upon returning from the Gathering? Look for ways to engage in new insights to continue reform into the future.



## HANDBOOK TIMELINE:

**October 2017** | shift from informational meetings to group bonding and growing spiritually.

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers

## GATHER (15 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the word "reform" to write down what they think it means or examples of reform they have seen or heard of.

Call the youth together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why.

### The Intro

This month we observe the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. The Reformation occurred during what is known as the Renaissance. It was a split in the Catholic Church by which a new form of Christianity was born. We know this as Protestantism.

During the Middle Ages, very few people other than monks and priests, knew how to read and write. With the Renaissance, more and more people became educated and learned how to read and write. Around that same period, the printing press was invented allowing for new ideas, as well as excerpts of the Bible, to be printed and distributed. People could read the Bible for themselves for the first time!

Martin Luther, a monk, began to question the practices of the Catholic Church as he studied the Bible. He struggled with many areas where he felt the Bible and the Catholic Church disagreed. On Oct. 31, 1517, Luther took a list of 95 points that detailed how he thought the church had gone wrong and nailed it to the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg, Germany. This began the Protestant Reformation.

Let's watch a quick video synopsis of the Reformation. [youtube.com/watch?v=1o8olELbNx&t=36s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1o8olELbNx&t=36s) (15:06 min.)

## Gathering Prayer

*Adapted from the Small Catechism*

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

Martin Luther's Morning Blessing:

We give thanks to you, God, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected us through the night from all harm and danger. We ask that you would also protect us today from sin and all evil, so that our life and actions may please you. Into your hands we commend ourselves; our body, our soul, and all that is ours. Let your holy angel be with us, so that the wicked foe may have no power over us. Amen.

## Experiential Learning: Match Game

Have some fun with this match game. Ask the youth to match the event with the date. Have them take turns until they get the matches correct. Write the following on sticky notes or note cards and tape them to the wall in a random order. On your signal have the first person attempt to put the items in order. Give them 45 seconds. Check their work and then send the next person to correct what they believe are the mistakes. Keep this going until several people have had a turn or the list is correct.

95 theses	<b>1517</b>
Luther translates New Testament into German	<b>1522</b>
Martin Luther born	<b>1483</b>
Luther goes to a monastery	<b>1505</b>
Studies at University of Erfurt	<b>1507</b>
Becomes professor of theology at Wittenburg U	<b>1512</b>
Becomes priest of Wittenburg Castle Church	<b>1514</b>
Inquisition of Luther begins	<b>1518</b>
Papal bull is issued	<b>1520</b>
Luther excommunicated	<b>1521</b>
Luther dies	<b>1546</b>

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story – Scripture

Martin Luther struggled as a monk with forgiveness. He didn't think he was worthy of God's forgiveness, even though he tried and tried to do all the things he was told to do to receive God's forgiveness. He went to confession multiple times a day to confess his sins and receive penance, but he still felt unworthy. In 1510, Luther was climbing the Scala Sancta (Holy Stairs) on his knees, saying the Lord's Prayer on each step. Each time anyone climbed them on their knees they got an indulgence of 15 years. An indulgence was a practice of the Roman Catholic Church. If you did a specific task, such as this, or paid a certain price, you could lessen your or loved ones' time in purgatory. Purgatory is described as a place where souls remain to atone for their sins in preparation for entrance into heaven. You could lessen your time in purgatory by doing certain acts approved by the Roman Catholic Church or buying indulgences from the church.

Luther, who doubted the legend about the stairs or the promises of the popes for less time in purgatory after climbing them, nevertheless went there one day to do this holy act. He was climbing the steps on his knees, earning at every step a year's indulgence, when he was startled by a sudden voice, which seemed as if it spoke from heaven, and said, "The just shall live by faith." Luther jumped to his feet in amazement. This was the third time he had heard these words in his mind with such emphasis. It was as if a voice of thunder had said them. It seemed louder than before, and he grasped more fully the great truth in those words. What silliness, he thought, to seek an indulgence from the church, which can last a few years, when God sends me God's Word – an indulgence that will last me forever! What a waste to do these acts when God is willing to forgive me of all my sins not because of the works I do, but freely, in the way of believing upon God's Son! "The just shall live by faith."

From this revelation, the doctrine, or belief, of justification by faith alone – salvation by free grace – stood out to Luther as the one great belief. Luther said it was by deviating from this belief that the church had fallen into sinfulness and had become corrupted under penances and works of self-righteousness. Luther believed that the only way the church could find its way back to truth and liberty was by returning to this belief. This was the road to true reformation.

Let's look at the passage Luther heard in that thundering voice.

#### Find **Ephesians 2:8-10**

Discuss the following questions:

- Why is it so hard for us to understand grace?
- What commonly held life principle does it demolish?  
(That if we do good things, we get into heaven.)
- Translate the words "grace" and "faith" into language a 10-year-old would understand.
- The ELCA Youth Gathering theme verse is Ephesians 2:8 and the theme is "This changes everything" – God's grace changes everything. What does that mean for us today?



Write out the responses from "God's grace changes everything. What does mean for us today?" and keep these posted during the year.

## Our Story - Gathering for Reformation

### LEARN:

- Ask the youth to name people who have reformed history in some way.
- Ask them to share what these people reformed and how. Ask for help from others to fill in the gaps.
  - *Answers could include Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, Nelson Mandela, Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Harriet Tubman, Albert Einstein, etc..*

### LISTEN:

Watch the following video clip and discuss what ELCA Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton hopes for the ELCA. [youtube.com/watch?v=tQYAkVe0Mtw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQYAkVe0Mtw) (6:02 min.)

Ask:

- What did you hear?
- What stuck with you?

### CONNECT:

Presiding Bishop Eaton shares information about Martin Luther and the Reformation. [youtube.com/watch?v=CmE0O33J-BY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CmE0O33J-BY) (6:12 min.)

Ask:

- What did you learn?
- What was interesting to you?

### ENGAGE:

The church is still reforming, it didn't just happen 500 years ago.

Ask:

- What are ways we see our congregation reforming here and now?
- What are ways we can encourage our congregation to continue to reform into the future?
- How can we get the congregation on-board with these ideas?



## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

### **Sending Prayer**

God of forgiveness, we give you thanks for those who work to reform our church and our society, and we recognize we are blessed by those who through your guidance work to improve our lives. We ask that you help us end injustice and inequality through the removal of faults or abuses. Together, we celebrate Martin Luther, the Reformation, and that it is by the gift of God's grace and through faith that we share in Christ's suffering, resurrection and eternal life. Amen.

### **Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)**

When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Presiding Bishop Eaton reminds us to live and grow in God's abundant love and grace. Stir us to a deeper longing for God in our lives that we may boldly bear witness to your Word in all the world.

**Stand up** – for reform, changing injustices.

**Stand with** – those working for reform for the benefit of all.

**Stand for** – justice meant for all people in all places.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Go in peace, continue reforming!

Thanks be to God.



**OCTOBER:**

# GATHERING FOR REFORMATION

**PART 2:  
GOING  
DEEPER**

October 31, 1517, is usually identified as the catalyst moment of the Reformation – its beginning. That is the day Martin Luther is said to have posted a protest in Wittenberg, Germany, where he served, against the Roman Catholic practice of selling indulgences. The events that occurred as result of this protest (his 95 theses,) sparked protests and efforts to reform the Catholic Church, which we now call the Reformation.

Luther saw the unjust practice of selling indulgences. There are many injustices in our world today. What are we to do as Lutheran Christians about these? As a church built on reform and justice, we are called to continue to be people of reform. This session will help your group understand the ELCA today and its movement into the future as we continue to be a church of reform through Jesus Christ.



**SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:**

Tweet something you would like to reform.  
#Reformation2017 #ELCAYG2018



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

The Reformation changed everything! It changed the way people understood faith; the Bible became accessible to more people than ever before; how church structure works changed; it led to a break from practices that did not come from Scripture. As we observe the 500th anniversary of Reformation, we are reminded how one person can start a massive reform. While the Reformation began 500 years ago, we are a church that continues to reform, reshape and renew in many ways. Reform isn't just one thing. It shapes our theology, our life, our worship, our thinking and our doing. The Gathering is a catalyst for reform. Your group will hear and see things that will spark something new in them. How will they reform your congregation or community upon returning from the Gathering? Look for ways to engage in new insights to continue reform into the future.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers
- computer with Wi-Fi connection or the video clips downloaded before the session
- projector if available

## GATHER (5 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the phrase "Reformed to ..." to write down things they feel we as a church need to pay attention to as we move into the future.

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why they feel these need reforming.

### The Intro

Martin Luther saw practice of selling indulgences was unjust. There are many injustices in our world today. What are we to do as Lutheran Christians about these? As a church built on reform and justice, we are called to continue to be people of reform. This session will help us understand the ELCA today and its movement into the future as we continue to be a church of reform through Jesus Christ.

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

*Martin Luther's Morning Blessing:*

We give thanks to you, God, through Jesus Christ your dear Son, that you have protected us through the night from all harm and danger. We ask that you would also protect us today from sin and all evil, so that our life and actions may please you. Into your hands we commend ourselves; our body, our soul, and all that is ours. Let your holy angel be with us, so that the wicked foe may have no power over us. Amen.



## Experiential Learning: True or Not

Write each item from the list below, on slips of paper (one item per piece.) On the wall have two category titles posted: TRUE and NOT. Explain that the youth are to decide what is true about the Reformation or Martin Luther and put those under the TRUE category. The things they believe were not true of the Reformation or Martin Luther should be put under the NOT category.

### HAPPENED DURING REFORMATION:

- Translated the Greek New Testament into German at the rate of 1,500 words per day
- Lived out his life as an "outlaw"
- Luther was a hit! Posters (woodcuts) sold out as soon as they went on sale
- The printing press helped the Reformation take root
- Pope Leo, upon reading the 95 theses, remarked "What drunken German monk wrote these?"
- Luther is said to have created the concept of the community chest, where money and needed items for the poor were collected and distributed
- Proficient at playing the lute
- Earned his bachelor's and master's degrees in the shortest times possible
- Wrote 60,000 pages during his life
- Married a nun who ran away from a convent to live in the Reformation
- Suffered from all kinds of stomach and bowel problems
- Wrote lots of music – more than 40 hymns

### DID NOT HAPPEN DURING REFORMATION:

- Michelangelo finished painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel (no – it was 1512)
- Christopher Columbus set sail from Spain (no – it was 1492 – Luther was a boy)
- Changed his name from Martin Looney to get more respect (no – it was Martin Luder, changed to sound more academic)
- Was studying to be a doctor (no – a lawyer)
- Almost died from a dagger wound to his leg and promised to live his life as a priest if he lived (no – this promise came from almost being struck by lightning, the dagger wound happened at age 19 but he was saved by a friend who quickly got a doctor)
- Was totally pumped when he finally got to celebrate his first Mass (no – he was so terrified of the presence of Christ that he tried running from the altar. He trembled so much he nearly dropped the bread and cup!)



## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story – Scripture

Have the youth read the story of the disciples traveling to Emmaus after Jesus' death and resurrection.

Read Luke 24:13-35

- What happened in this story?
- How are we like these disciples?
- The disciples perhaps lost hope but were reminded of the love of God through Jesus' life, death and resurrection. Hope changes everything!
- We are a people of faith and hope, but we struggle with this at times.
- Just like the disciples in the story, we are reminded of that hope and to share this good news.

### Our Story – Gathering for Reformation

#### LEARN:

Watch the following video clip about the ELCA.  
[youtube.com/watch?v=rNkBgGYZn0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rNkBgGYZn0) (4:45 min.)

Ask:

- What did you hear?
- What stuck with you?
- What does the ELCA mean to you?

#### LISTEN:

Watch the following video of Presiding Bishop Elizabeth Eaton.  
<http://www.elca.org/YouthGathering/details/get-ready/video>

- What did you hear?
- How does this inform your life as a Lutheran Christian?
- What excites you about being an ELCA Lutheran Christian?

#### CONNECT:

- Gather into small groups.
- Give each group a piece of paper and pen.
- Pretend you are in an elevator at the Gathering and someone asks what all these people are doing in Houston. You have one minute to tell them why. Your group has five minutes to create your "elevator speech."
- When the time is up, share the speeches.
- Post these on your walls as a reminder as you prepare to go to Houston.

#### ENGAGE:

- Encourage your youth to do "person in the pew" interviews next Sunday at your congregation. They should ask people what it means to them to be an ELCA Lutheran Christian.
- Come up with a plan to do this, tasks for people to do, and how these will be shared with the congregation and the broader church. If you share them on social media, be sure to include the hashtags #ELCA and #ELCAYG2018.
- Have fun with this!

## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

### Sending Prayer

*Gather around the Christ Candle, and ask someone to share the following prayer:*

God of hope, we give you thanks for those who work to reform our church and our society. Help us to be ever reforming, so we don't become stuck in our ways, but rather meeting our fellow humans where their needs are. Let us live out our hope in you and share that with all the people we meet. Together, we celebrate Martin Luther, the Reformation and the ELCA. We know that it is by the gift of God's grace and through faith that we share in Christ's suffering, resurrection and eternal life. Amen.

### Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)

When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

The early church gathered together to break bread and to share with one another, to bring the gifts of the many and support any among them as there was need. Around bread and wine, prayer and singing, love and service, we are brought together to be a unique community of the church that gathers in Jesus' name. As a part of this community:

**Stand up** – for reform, changing injustices.

**Stand with** – those working for reform for the benefit of all.

**Stand for** – justice meant for all people in all places.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Go in peace. Continue reforming!

Thanks be to God.

**NOVEMBER:**

# **GATHERING FOR HOME** PART 1

**THIS  
CHANGES  
EVERYTHING.**

2018 ELCA  
YOUTH  
GATHERING

**H**ome is something that can be taken for granted by so many of us. We know there are people experiencing homelessness, but most of the time we are not truly aware of how this happens or who it affects. Perhaps not ever personally knowing someone who has experienced homelessness.

The National Alliance to End Homelessness gives the following information (as of April 3, 2017):

Homelessness occurs when people or households are unable to acquire or maintain housing they can afford. While circumstances can vary, the main reason people experience homelessness is because they cannot find housing they can afford. It is the scarcity of affordable housing in the United States, particularly in more urban areas where homelessness is more prevalent, that is behind their inability to acquire or maintain housing.

By the numbers:

- In January 2016, 549,928 people were homeless on a given night in the U.S.
- Of that number, 194,716 were people in families.
- 355,212 were individuals.
- On that same night, there were 35,686 unaccompanied homeless youth, roughly 7 percent of the total homeless population.
- 77,486 (or one in five) were considered “chronically homeless” individuals.
- On that same night, 39,471 veterans were homeless.

Since 2007, homelessness has dropped by 15 percent (97,330 people) and between 2015 and 2016 declined by 3 percent (or 14,780).

These numbers come from Point-in-Time Counts, which are conducted, community by community, on a single night in January every other year. The Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) requires communities to submit this data every other year to qualify for federal homeless assistance funds. Many communities conduct counts more regularly.

Homelessness is a problem affecting all of us. Bringing awareness to this problem helps us use our voices and our hands to help bring an end to homelessness.

**“HOW DOES GOD’S LOVE ABIDE IN ANYONE WHO HAS THE WORLD’S GOODS AND SEES A BROTHER OR SISTER IN NEED AND YET REFUSES HELP? LITTLE CHILDREN, LET US LOVE, NOT IN WORD OR SPEECH, BUT IN TRUTH AND ACTION” (1 JOHN 3:17-18).**



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

Houston will serve as “home” for us for our time at the Gathering. Home is a priority for Houston. Since 2011, homelessness is down 75 percent due to the Houston Housing First Initiative. This is truly remarkable work that comes from a place of generosity and putting humans first. Jesus met the woman at the well and saw her – not her sinfulness, saw her – not her history, saw her – not her lack of understanding. Jesus saw her. Read her story in John 4:7-42. Jesus showed love, compassion and interest to this woman. Jesus’ love changed everything for this woman. How will our learning about homelessness shape us to respond in love, compassion and interest?

Check out “The Official Gathering Handbook,” Page 58, for help with preparing for service learning and prepare to engage in this way of living.



## HANDBOOK TIMELINE:

**November 2017** – Consider finalizing transportation to and from Houston.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers
- statistics and numbers copies (or written by hand)
- ELCA social message on homelessness link: [elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Homelessness](http://elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Homelessness)

## GATHER (20 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As youth enter, encourage them to use the large-print version of the questions (or use sticky notes) and markers to write down their thoughts on: What is “home”? Who or what do you think of when you think of the “homeless”?

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why.

Watch the following video, focusing on the humanity of people experiencing homelessness:

[youtu.be/jLbP-SpXAp](https://youtu.be/jLbP-SpXAp) (1:29 min.)

- What in the video made an impression on you?
- Did you have any stereotypes of “homeless” people that were challenged?
- Do you see yourself or any of your friends and family in this video, and, if so, where?

### Gathering Prayer

Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.

“Prayer for Homeless People” from a Mennonite [resource](#). Copyright Carol Penner, [leadinginworship.com](http://leadinginworship.com) (used with permission).

Hear our prayer today for all women and men, boys and girls who are homeless this day.

For those sleeping under bridges, on park benches, in doorways or bus stations.

For those who can only find shelter for the night but must wander in the daytime.

For families broken because they could not afford to pay the rent.

For those who have no relatives or friends who can take them in.

For those who have no place to keep possessions that remind them who they are.

For those who are afraid and hopeless.

For those who have been betrayed by our social safety net.

For all these people, we pray that you will provide shelter, security and hope.

We pray for those of us with warm houses and comfortable beds that we not be lulled into complacency and forgetfulness.

Jesus, help us to see your face in the eyes of every homeless person we meet so that we may be empowered through word and deed, and through the political means we have, to bring justice and peace to those who are homeless.

Amen.

## Experiential Learning: Guessing Game

There are many life circumstances that lead to people experiencing homelessness. Homelessness can be voluntary or involuntary. In this guessing game, you will search for your match.

*(All statistics from reports from "End Homelessness, Social Solutions" and HUD's Annual Homeless Assessment Report)*

Leaders will prepare by writing or printing the statistics and facts found at the end of the session onto separate 8½-inch by 11-inch pieces of paper. These pieces will be taped to the backs of the participants without peeking. They should not know what statistic or fact is on their back. The group will then try to match the statistics with the correct fact. Leaders will identify correct pairs as they are made, and the rest of the participants will shuffle around again searching for their correct match until all are matched correctly. Once everyone is paired correctly, the pairs can detach the paper, discover what their match was and hold the papers in front of them for group discussion. The group might want to sit in a circle on the floor with the papers in front of them. The questions can then be discussed.

- Which of these pairs surprises you the most?
- Are you experiencing any emotions or strong reactions to any of these pairs of statistics?
- Do you have any experiences that connect with any of these pairs of statistics?

We will continue to explore the life circumstances leading people to experience homelessness, seeking to understand our responsibilities as Jesus' followers throughout this session.



Find statistics from your town or city to add to the statistics provided.

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

The opening activity focused on learning a bit about the population of people experiencing homelessness. What do you know about people experiencing homelessness in your area? Is your community involved with this population of people? Let's look at some passages from the Bible that relate to homelessness. Have the youth read the story of the disciples traveling to Emmaus after Jesus' death and resurrection.

### God's Story - Scripture

During the introduction game, we learned that 15 percent of people experiencing homelessness are considered "chronically homeless," which includes many people with severe mental illness. In this passage, we will explore Jesus' interaction with a man who was experiencing chronic homelessness.

- Read **Mark 5:1-9**
- Homelessness Insights
  - Why is this man experiencing homelessness? (afflicted by mental illness; self-mutilation/harming; not able to follow societal rules; physically aggressive)
  - How does this man relate to Jesus? (Son of the Most High God; this man knows Jesus' identity)
  - What question does Jesus ask this man? (Jesus asks the man's name.)
  - What does Jesus' question teach us about relationship with people experiencing homelessness? (How often do we ask a person experiencing homelessness their name and share our name? Relationship and names are important to Jesus.)
  - Why is knowing someone's name important? (When you ask someone their name, it shows you value them as a person; value their humanity; they are important.)

## Our Story - Invisible Homelessness

### LEARN:

View the following video: [youtube.com/watch?v=Bel3vITdnGE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bel3vITdnGE) (3:34 min.)

Ask:

- What affected you the most in this video?
- Did you find yourself relating to anyone in this video and if so, who?
- Do you think you would notice one of your family members sitting along the street as homeless?
- What does this video suggest to us as children of God, brothers and sisters to people experiencing homelessness?

### LISTEN:

There is not one face or one root cause for homelessness. The situations, circumstances and factors are all unique and specific to each individual. Understanding this is essential to understanding those who are experiencing homelessness. Below are links to video case studies of people experiencing homelessness. Please select two or more (depending on your time constraints) and discuss the similarities and differences of each person and their circumstances.

- Story of Abbie, a homeless teenager [video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=yset\\_chr\\_syc\\_oracle&p=rethink+homelessness#id=5&vid=54efacc23ac48ab805756f6939413f44&action=view](https://video.search.yahoo.com/search/video?fr=yset_chr_syc_oracle&p=rethink+homelessness#id=5&vid=54efacc23ac48ab805756f6939413f44&action=view) (1:00 min.)
- Homeless veterans (CNN report) [youtube.com/watch?v=7R\\_o8Bs0sZ8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7R_o8Bs0sZ8) (5:11 min.)
- Domestic violence victims experiencing homelessness [youtube.com/watch?v=RPbMqwIT60w](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RPbMqwIT60w) (1:42 min.)
- "A Day in Our Shoes - Homeless LGBT Youth" [youtube.com/watch?v=ZXv1-fHd6Ug](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZXv1-fHd6Ug) (5:45 min.)

### CONNECT:

Labels: Homeless versus person experiencing homelessness

- What is the difference between labeling a person as "homeless" versus talking about a person as experiencing homelessness?
- How can this language be applied to other life circumstances?

View the following "Eating Twinkies with God" video:

[youtube.com/watch?v=y9N8OXkN0Rk](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y9N8OXkN0Rk) (2:20 min.)

- Imago Dei connection: What does this say about who God is and us being made in the image of God?
- Is it hard for us to see the "image of God" in those experiencing homelessness? Why?

### ENGAGE:

- How does homelessness affect my life?
- Who in your community is experiencing homelessness?
- What efforts are we doing as a community to help end this?





## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

### Sending Prayer

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus encountered and ministered to those who were experiencing homelessness. Those who were sick, lame, blind, mentally ill, discarded women, those experiencing extreme poverty. Those society shunned and cast out into the streets. Jesus himself experienced homelessness and was at the mercy of friends and followers to provide for his needs. The ELCA advocates for and embraces those who are experiencing homelessness. God calls on us to provide homes with and for all humanity. May God bless you with an understanding of radical hospitality and a sense of home. Amen.

### Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)

When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Never take for granted that you have the safety of a physical home, the comfort of a spiritual home and faith community. May we always understand that we have a call to accompany and advocate for those who have less. May you be blessed with a sense of radical hospitality so that all might know the love and acceptance found in our home with Jesus Christ.

**Stand up** – using your feet to end homelessness.

**Stand with** – those experiencing homelessness or are close to that reality.

**Stand for** – justice meant for all people in all places.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Go in peace, walk with those experiencing homelessness!

Thanks be to God.

**STATISTIC:**

**RELATED FACT:**

**549,928**

The number of people experiencing homelessness on a single night in January 2016.

**77,486 OR  
15%**

The "chronically homeless," defined as experiencing homelessness for a year or longer, often due to severe mental illness and substance-use disorders

**39,471 OR  
8%**

Veterans who have served from WWII to recent wars, 45 percent of whom are black or Hispanic and 10 percent of whom are women

**1.4 MILLION**

Veterans "at risk" of homelessness, of which those who served in Vietnam or later are of most risk

**550,000**

Unaccompanied, single youth and young adults under the age of 24 who experience a homelessness episode of longer than one week

**110,000**

LGBTQ youth in the U.S. who are experiencing homelessness, mostly due to family rejection, abuse and neglect

**50%**

Adults over the age of 59 experiencing homelessness

**138,000 OR  
25%**

Children under 18 years old experiencing homelessness

**221,600 OR  
40%**

Women experiencing homelessness, with the overwhelming cause being domestic violence





**NOVEMBER:**

# GATHERING FOR HOME

**PART 2:  
GOING  
DEEPER**

**H**omelessness is a complex issue, with many factors coming into alignment to land someone in a situation where they are experiencing homelessness. We grow in our understanding of the problem by looking at the complexities and how we can respond as Christians.

This session will look at the complexity and our Christian response through a case study and further reflection.



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

Houston will serve as “home” for us for our time at the Gathering. Home is a priority for Houston. Since 2011, homelessness is down 75 percent due to the Houston Housing First Initiative. This is truly remarkable work that comes from a place of generosity and putting humans first. Jesus met the woman at the well and saw her – not her sinfulness, saw her – not her history, saw her – not her lack of understanding. Jesus saw her. Read her story in John 4:7-42. Jesus showed love, compassion and interest to this woman. Jesus’ love changed everything for this woman. How will our learning about homelessness shape us to respond in love, compassion and interest? Check out “The Official Gathering Handbook,” Page 58, to help prepare for service learning and to engage in this way of living.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers
- ELCA social message on homelessness link:  
[elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Homelessness](https://elca.org/en/Faith/Faith-and-Society/Social-Messages/Homelessness)

## GATHER (5 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the phrase “How does homelessness happen?” (or use sticky notes) and use the markers to write down their thoughts.

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why they think these are ways homelessness happens.

### The Intro

This session will look at the complexities of homelessness. We will learn that there is a whole lot behind getting to the point of homelessness. Remember we can’t just hear one story. We need to hear many stories to get a deeper sense of this issue.

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

God heard the cries of those without homes and that working for justice with and for people experiencing homelessness is doing God’s will and work in the world.

Christian love does not provide ready-made, one-size-fits-all solutions to the crisis, but the message calls Christians to walk with those experiencing homelessness in their struggles and provides guidance as together we pursue just, appropriate and sustainable solutions that uphold human dignity. In your name, we pray.

Amen.

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story - Scripture

Read **Matthew 25:34-46**, Food, Shelter and Wellness: Moving to Action

This passage moves us into actions and responsibility as Jesus' followers. Reflect on this passage on where people experiencing homelessness might fit in. This passage links well with the ELCA's social message on homelessness, which calls those who have "dwellings" into advocating and accompanying those who do not. There is a link in the materials section of this session.

Read **Matthew 25:34-40**

*Homelessness Insights*

- What categories in this passage might people experiencing homelessness fit into? (All of the categories are possible: hungry, thirsty, stranger, naked, sick, prison.)
- Where do we see these categories in our local contexts today? (All are seen in the demographic of people experiencing homelessness; some people fit in multiple categories.)

Read **Matthew 25:41-46**

*Homelessness Insights*

- This passage is a warning and teaching from Jesus about the responsibility of God's people in his time.
- What is our responsibility as God's people to those experiencing homelessness? (to give food, drink, welcome/hospitality, shelter, basic needs, health care, visit)
- What does our church say about our responsibility? (ELCA social statements and messages can be referred to here, especially the ELCA social message on homelessness, which encourages us to advocate and work on housing and basic needs for those experiencing homelessness.)

### Our Story - Advocate for Home

#### LEARN:

Use the following links to understand what our voice and actions are as ELCA Christians and more detailed information on homelessness.

ELCA Advocacy blog on homelessness

[blogs.elca.org/advocacy/marginalized-jesus-homelessness/](https://blogs.elca.org/advocacy/marginalized-jesus-homelessness/)

ELCA social message on homelessness:

[download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/HomelessnessSM.pdf?\\_ga=1.239093443.1983485806.1491674869](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/HomelessnessSM.pdf?_ga=1.239093443.1983485806.1491674869)

Good source for homelessness statistics

[endhomelessness.org/library/entry/SOH2016#Homehuduser.gov/portal/publications/povsoc/ahar\\_5.html](https://endhomelessness.org/library/entry/SOH2016#Homehuduser.gov/portal/publications/povsoc/ahar_5.html)

Some other facts about homelessness

[huffingtonpost.com/bill-quigley/ten-facts-about-homelessn\\_b\\_5977946.html](https://huffingtonpost.com/bill-quigley/ten-facts-about-homelessn_b_5977946.html)

**LISTEN:**

Articles from The Seattle Times focusing on other cities' successes in the struggle against homelessness  
(Houston) [seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/houstons-solution-to-the-homeless-crisis-housing-and-lots-of-it/](https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/houstons-solution-to-the-homeless-crisis-housing-and-lots-of-it/)

**CONNECT:**

To show the problem is complex, here is an address from a Lutheran pastor in Houston in response to an ordinance:

*I cannot receive the gospel of "good news to the poor" in the morning and be silent in the afternoon. KINDRED's worship may not be the shiniest or most well-produced because as pastor, my call is to care first and foremost for people. We will prioritize spending time and energy with and for the least of these. Today I addressed City Council as my legs shook to speak against the proposed encampment ordinance. Here's what I said:*

I'm the pastor of KINDRED, a church in Montrose, where many people who are homeless seek refuge. People knock on our door looking for help, and we are able to help folks connect to existing programs and services. I am deeply concerned about how the phases of our city's comprehensive plan seems out of order with this ordinance.

I met Donnie shortly after his release from jail. Our church cheered him on as he worked his way through various programs and took up work as he could find it. He isn't perfect, but he is good and, as a single healthy man, he didn't qualify for the city's housing program.

Where should I tell Donnie to go that he has not already been?

I cannot imagine being in the streets on a day like today with no shelter to keep you dry. Houston swelters summers with no shade for relief or screens to shield you from mosquitoes.

I applaud Mayor Turner's push to provide additional shelters and resources that are desperately needed. That speaks to our ethos of "housing first" as the most successful response to chronic homelessness. But until we have sufficient resources, until we have enough housing or even low-level shelters to respond to the needs of this population, this ordinance is contrary to that effort and would do harm to good people like Donnie in the meantime. Mayor Turner, in regards to immigration, you said that "Houston is, and always has been, a welcoming city, where we value and appreciate diversity. ... We don't profile, and we are not going to start profiling people to determine whether they are here illegally."

I ask that my wonderful hometown not profile the homeless as criminals but prioritize the development of resources for their care.

- The Rev. Ashley Elisabeth Bathe Dellagiacoma of KINDRED

**ENGAGE:**

How might we engage in this work? Read the following article to spark conversation and brainstorm some action items you as a group and congregation might do.

(San Francisco) [seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-may-try-san-franciscos-radical-hospitality-for-homeless/](https://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/politics/seattle-may-try-san-franciscos-radical-hospitality-for-homeless/)

Share these ideas with the congregation and invite everyone to take part in this conversation and action items.

## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

### **Sending Prayer**

Hear our prayer today for all women and men, boys and girls who are experiencing homelessness this day. We pray for those of us with warm houses and comfortable beds that we not be lulled in complacency and forgetfulness. Jesus, help us to see your face in the eyes of every person without a home that we meet so that we may be empowered through word and deed and through the political means we have, to bring justice and peace to those who are experiencing homelessness. Amen.

### **Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)**

When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

Never take for granted that you have the safety of a physical home, the comfort of a spiritual home and faith community. May we always understand that we have a call to accompany and advocate for those who have less. May you be blessed with a sense of radical hospitality so that all might know the love and acceptance found in our home with Jesus Christ.

- Stand up** – using your feet to end homelessness.
- Stand with** – those experiencing homelessness or are close to that reality.
- Stand for** – justice meant for all people in all places.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Go in peace, walk with those experiencing homelessness!

Thanks be to God.

**DECEMBER:**

# **GATHERING FOR COMPASSION**

**PART 1**





**W**hen youth are asked to share some hot topics that they are interested in, mental health seems to appear more times than not on the list. They are concerned about it, maybe living with a disorder themselves or know at least one person who is suffering with a disorder. Therefore, we are going to spend some time digging into mental health.

“Adolescence is a period of rapid physical, cognitive, psychological, social and emotional development.” Karen Ortloff, MS, LP, says in the winter 2017 Connect Journal of Children, Youth and Family Ministry. Ortloff writes, “The importance of psychological well-being in children and adolescents is well recognized. The growing mental concerns of today’s youth are contributing significantly to the social and economic burden of society. Prevention and early intervention contribute to improved resiliency and outcomes for youth and their families” (Page 13).

Mental health disorders continue to carry a stigma in our society. However, medical science has proven that mental illness is a health care issue and should be treated as such. This stigma regarding mental health disorders can stop teens and their families from getting the help that is needed. Quality treatments for mental health disorders, especially if started close to the onset of symptoms, can help lessen the effect on a teen’s life.

As a church, we need to help move beyond the stigma and misinformation to help youth with mental health disorders get the treatments they need. We can do this by teaching our youth about mental health disorders and how to help a friend, a family member or themselves when faced with mental health disorders.

## MENTAL HEALTH BY THE NUMBERS:

The National Alliance on Mental Health webpage ([nami.org](http://nami.org)) gives the following statistics (March 2017):

- **1 in 5 children** ages 13-18 have, or will have, a serious mental illness.
- **Suicide is the third leading cause of death in youth** ages 10-24; 90 percent of those who died by suicide had an underlying mental illness.
- **Half of all lifetime cases of mental illness begin by age 14** and 75 percent by age 24.
- A helpful pdf of these statistics can be found at this link: [nami.org/getattachment/Learn-More/Mental-Health-by-the-Numbers/childrenmhfacts.pdf](http://nami.org/getattachment/Learn-More/Mental-Health-by-the-Numbers/childrenmhfacts.pdf).



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

At the Gathering we will be living in community, not just with those attending the Gathering but also with the residents of and visitors to Houston. Learning about mental health disorders is an important piece of our life together. By understanding, we grow compassion. By growing compassion, we are driven to empathy. Empathy brings us to loving others. The Gathering brings us in close proximity with a whole lot of people, many different from ourselves. Some of those might be experiencing mental health disorders.

There may be someone in your group struggling with mental health disorders. By becoming aware of mental health disorders, we help our youth and adult leaders better engage with people we meet at the Gathering and in our daily lives. This is not something to be feared but rather to be understood so we can respond in the way Christ wants us to.

Jesus came to show God's love for all the world. We are called to do the same. As Jesus changed everything, let that continue to shape how we engage with all people.

One way is to see this is to know yourself and prepare your mindset: Check out "The Official Gathering Handbook," Page 56, – the Gathering often stretches people to their max! It's important to take care of yourself.

Sleep! Eat well! Take a mental break to recharge! Being aware of mental health and mental health disorders are part of our life together at the Gathering and beyond.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in larger print
- markers

## GATHER (15 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, ask them to use the markers to write down signs and symptoms of "healthy mental health" on the large-print paper (or put them on sticky notes.) Ask them to also write down signs and symptoms of mental health disorders on the large print paper (or put them on sticky notes.)

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Explain that you will be focusing on mental health. Look over the sticky notes and have the group make observations about what they see.

### The Intro

After a few minutes of discussing the lists, watch the following YouTube video:

[youtube.com/watch?v=BHSONXBZOWI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHSONXBZOWI) (2:54 min.)

This is one interpretation of how we got to looking at mental health disorders in such a negative light. We're going to look a bit further into mental health.



### SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Let your friends know you are there for them. While your group journeys through this session, share this simple message: #IWillListen #YouAreLoved

### Gathering Prayer

*Let's pray.*

God of presence, you promise you are with us always. Let us feel your presence. When we struggle with your promise, give us someone to be with us in that lost place. Let each of us be someone who bears your love to someone who is feeling darkness. We ask for strength and compassion as we learn about mental health. In your name, we pray. Amen.

## Experiential Learning: Fact vs. Myth

Put the youth into pairs or small groups. Give each group an envelope with the 24 myths and fact cutouts. Instruct the youth to take all 24 cutouts and together decide which are myths and which are facts. Let them know this is not a test. Have the youth review what a myth is and a fact is before they start the exercise.

Tell them to put all the myths in a column on one side of their space and all the facts in a column on the right side of their space.

Give them five minutes to complete the task.

After they are done, use the list in the appendix to review the answers.

Thank you to [walkinourshoes.org/myths-vs-facts](http://walkinourshoes.org/myths-vs-facts) for this resource.

Together discuss:

- Why do you think it is important to know the myths and facts about mental illness?
- How could it be hurtful for people to think that the myths of mental illness are facts?

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story - Scripture

*Credit to Elise Seyfried for segments from her session in the Connect Journal of Children, Youth and Family Ministry, Winter 2017.*

Those experiencing mental health disorders can feel alone, forgotten or abandoned. These people may not share what's happening out of fear or they may believe that nobody cares. In biblical days, people suffering from illness (mental or physical) were often kept out of the community for fear of spreading their disease. As we will read in a moment, sometimes it was believed a person was infected with "demons" brought on by their sin. Jesus flipped that notion upside down!

Read together **Mark 5:1-20**.

- What does "legion" mean?
- How was the man treated for his mental illness?
- How does that compare with how we treat people today?

Now let's look at what Jesus has to say about illness and sin.

Read together **John 9:1-12**.

We see in this passage that Jesus did not blame people for getting sick. Jesus clearly states that their illness was not the result of anything they did wrong or any sin they committed.

- How did the disciples react to the man's blindness?
- How can we help people realize that their illness is not their fault?
- Jesus reached out to, defended and healed people with mental and physical disorders, even though the society he lived in forbade him to do so. How does our society treat those with mental health disorders?

Read together **1 Thessalonians 5:11**.

- Mental health disorders are difficult to live with.
- This passage reminds us how we are to be living examples of God's love in the world.
- Let's watch this video clip as another reminder of this passage.

## Our Story - Having Compassion

### LEARN:

Play this video:

[youtu.be/vitUPDsWAGk?list=PLBXgZMI\\_zqfQO9h2X6x8XNoOU7V2v13He](https://youtu.be/vitUPDsWAGk?list=PLBXgZMI_zqfQO9h2X6x8XNoOU7V2v13He) (1:00 min.)

Discuss what the group learned or discovered in this video.

### LISTEN:

Break into small groups. Have half of the groups brainstorm a list of ideas on how they could seek help if they were suffering with a mental health disorder. Have the other half brainstorm a list of ideas on how they could help someone (a friend, family member, even a stranger) who has a mental health disorder. Come together and share the lists.

### CONNECT:

Fill in any missing gaps from the lists by using the following links as a guide. You may want to print these and post them around your building.

[nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI-Want-to-know-how-to-help-a-friend.pdf](https://nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI-Want-to-know-how-to-help-a-friend.pdf)

[nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI-Getting-the-Right-Start.pdf](https://nami.org/NAMI/media/NAMI-Media/Infographics/NAMI-Getting-the-Right-Start.pdf)

### ENGAGE:

Remind the youth that you and the other adult leaders are available if they need a safe person to talk with about a friend (or themselves) who is struggling with a mental health disorder. Remind them they are not alone in the darkness. Even though God has promised God's presence with us in all things, it can still feel pretty dark. Reach out; don't suffer in silence or alone.



Create signs to hang throughout your building with information on crisis hotlines and intervention numbers.



## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

### **Sending Prayer**

God of comfort, relieve those who are troubled in mind and spirit.  
Bring them hope, peace and the strength of a loving community.  
Grant patience and courage to the families and friends of those who are ill.  
Increase their ability to withstand as they face challenges for their loved one.  
Protect and defend those living with mental health disorders from exploitation, addictions and abuse.  
In your name, we pray. Amen.

### **Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)**

When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Help us identify mental illness as the disease it is, that we might have courage and wisdom in the face of ignorance and stigma. Inspire us as we seek to overcome fear, acquire knowledge, and advocate for compassionate and enlightened treatment and services. As we move out into the world let us:

**Stand up** – against the stigma of mental health disorders.

**Stand with** – those who suffer with a mental health disorder.

**Stand for** – better treatment options and accessible care for all in need.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Amen.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**MYTHS VS. FACTS OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS***From walkinginourshoes.org (March 2017)***MYTH:****FACT:**

Kids can't get depression and anxiety disorders, only adults can.

Kids can develop a mental disorder, like depression and anxiety disorders. This can happen to anyone at any age.

Kids only get mental disorders because they have bad parents.

Mental disorder is not caused by doing something wrong. You can't cause someone to have a mental disorder. Doctors think that it is caused by a mix of what's going on in your body and what's happening around you.

Mental disorder is the same as being mentally disabled (sometimes called by the awful term mental retardation).

Mental disorder has nothing to do with how smart you are. A mental disability is a "cognitive disability," which means it's a different journey with different challenges.

Having a mental disorder means you're a wimp who can't handle life.

Your personality or ability to handle your feelings does not cause mental disorders. It isn't just "in your head" or something that goes away if you try hard. Once treatment is figured out, most people with a mental disorder live healthy, full lives.

People with mental health disorders have to take special tests to get a job or go to college.

People with mental health disorders do not have to take special tests to go to college, buy a house or get a job. They can work and learn and do all the things that people without mental health disorders can do.

People with mental health disorders have trouble handling school work, a job and daily tasks.

It is common for all people to sometimes struggle at work, in school or at home and feel sometimes like they don't know what to do. No matter what, it's good to talk to others and learn what works best for you.

If you have a mental disorder, it will be harder to get an apartment or house once you grow up and you won't be able to live on your own.

All mental disorders are different, but being diagnosed with one will not keep you from being able to grow up, learn how to take care of yourself, and get an apartment or house like everyone else.

When people have mental disorders, they will never get better.

People diagnosed with mental disorders can get better. Every disorder is different. Some people feel better when they talk to someone or take medication. Most people need help from friends and family to figure out how to live with their disorder. Not all people have to take medicine or see a therapist for the rest of their lives.

Talking about your mental health challenge is a waste of time. It's better to just take medicine.

If you have a broken leg, it will not get better with just aspirin. It also takes time and exercise and hard work. In a way, having a mental disorder is the same. You have to be patient, get help, and talk about it and you'll start to feel better soon.

People with mental health disorders are dangerous and violent.

Most people diagnosed with mental disorders are not violent. Most violence in the world is not caused by people with mental disorders.

Mental disorders are more common in some racial groups than others.

Mental disorders can happen to anyone. It doesn't matter what you look like, where you live or where you are from.

I can't help someone with a mental disorder. Only a doctor can.

You can help someone. Don't call people words like "crazy" or "mental." If you know people with mental health disorders, try to get to know them and notice their talents and skills, not just the disorder. Learn about mental wellness and share it with others.



**DECEMBER:**

# GATHERING FOR COMPASSION

**D**ecember can be a difficult month for those suffering with a mental health disorder. The crazy schedules of the holidays, expectations to enjoy a variety of gatherings, changes in weather, shorter days, the list goes on as to why this month can be particularly tough. We want to be aware and compassionate with those who may not fully enjoy the “most wonderful time of the year.”

This session will get your group thinking about how they can add a bit of light in what can be a dark time for some people.



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

Jesus was a living example of compassion.

Read the story of the woman at the well in **John 4:1-42**. The love of God through

Jesus changes everything – how we are with people and how we engage with people. Empathy is a practice, not just feeling sorry for someone (that’s sympathy). Empathy is an awareness of another’s situation, feelings and the impact the situation is having on their life.

It’s a relationship, not just a feeling. This month is difficult for so many suffering with depression and other mental health disorders. By remembering the compassion and love Jesus showed, we

too are to be Christ in the world. The

Gathering challenges us to look beyond ourselves and build empathy for others so we are moved to action.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers or sticky notes

## GATHER (15 MINUTES):

### Warmup

Have the youth post some of their favorite things about the holidays on the large sheet on the wall using the markers or sticky notes.

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote on the paper and why these are some favorite things.

### The Intro

Explain that December is a month that can be very difficult for people who suffer with mental health disorders. This session will look at how we can be with people in their dark places and not necessarily expect them to find the joy we do in the holiday season.

### Gathering Prayer

*Invite someone to lead the gathering prayer.*

Comfort those who live with the darkness of mental health disorders. May we be a light in the darkness for them. Teach us to avoid false cheerfulness, and, instead, give us wisdom to know how to help our friends and family who struggle in this way to come up for air. To see, again, your goodness. Lord, we pray this in your name. Amen.

### Experiential Learning: Slam Cards

Print out enough of the slam cards from the appendix for each small group of three to four people. Explain that there is an insensitive statement on the card. They are to come up with a sensitive way to make the statement. Give them 10 minutes to complete this.

Have groups come back together and share their sensitive statements. Give positive feedback to each of the responses that are sensitive.

Share that it is our calling to share compassion with those who are hurting.



## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story - Scripture

Have youth look at **Isaiah 43:2**.

Discuss:

- How might this verse offer some comfort to someone suffering from a mental health disorder?
- Can it help? How or how not?

We often use trite responses to people as we just learned. These are not necessarily helpful, nor are Bible verses that promise strength and comfort. We can't just "pray away" a mental health disorder. Prayer is our communication mode with God, but telling someone to pray about it and God will make it better isn't the way to approach mental health disorders. It can cause even more harm when the person feels that God has abandoned them in this disorder or that they must not be faithful enough or God would not give them this disorder to deal with. We can stand in the place of Jesus when we offer comfort, our presence or a safe place to be when someone is suffering in their mental health disorder. If someone can't find comfort in God's promises at this time, they are not to be shamed or have their faith questioned. We are to dwell with them in the hard times, being the light of Christ as we are able.

### Our Story - Service Learning

#### LEARN:

We learned earlier in the session about slams that can be hurtful. Let's look again at things that are helpful:

#### WHAT HELPS:

**I know you have a real illness and that's what causes these thoughts and feelings.**

**I may not be able to understand exactly how you feel, but I care about you and want to help.**

**You are important to me.  
Your life is important to me.**

**Tell me what I can do now to help you.  
You might not believe it now, but the way you're feeling will change.**

**You are not alone in this. I'm here for you.**

**Talk to me. I'm listening.**

**I am here for you.  
We will get through this together.**

#### WHAT HURTS:

**It's all in your head.**

**We all go through times like this.**

**You have so much to live for - why do you want to die?**

**What do you want me to do?  
I can't do anything about your situation.**

**Just snap out of it.  
Look on the bright side.**

**You'll be fine. Stop worrying.**

**Here's my advice ...**

**What's wrong with you?  
Shouldn't you be better by now?**

**LISTEN:**

One of the most helpful things you can do for someone suffering with a mental health disorder is to just listen to them. Ask questions that let them see you are concerned and that you are there to support them.

**CONNECT:**

There is a reason security blankets comfort kids, and there is a reason “touch stones” are a common mindfulness technique. Both help create a feeling of centeredness and calm. When we have an object that’s sole purpose is to comfort or ground us, it’s very effective at making that happen. Anything from a stress ball to a seashell to a piece of fabric can work.

When you use a grounding object, the point is to carry it with you into stressful situations (or have it on you all the time). Ideally, it should be able to fit into your pocket so it’s something you can hold or touch discreetly when you need to remind yourself that everything is, or will be, OK. It’s a great way to distract yourself from any present anxiety and stress.



Have each youth create two “grounding objects”; give one to a congregation member and one to a friend.

As a group, brainstorm ideas on creating “grounding objects” to hand out to people over the holidays.

Some ideas:

- It can be as simple as small stones with the word “hope” written on it.
- Do you have a knitters group? Work with them to create a pocket prayer blanket.
- Find seashells and write “breathe” on them.
- The ideas are endless. Find something that your group can do in a simple, easy way to show support and compassion this time of year.

**ENGAGE:**

Make a presentation to your congregation, sharing with them the “grounding objects” you created and encourage them to take some with them out into the world. Teach them about mental health disorders and how to dwell with people who are suffering this season. Remind them to offer comfort not trite statements.

## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

### Sending Prayer

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

Tender God, your gentle and kind-hearted love waits for us in the darkness and shields us from the light when it feels too overwhelming. We remember today all those who live in the depths of mental health disorders. Continue to cherish us all when we find it so difficult to cherish ourselves. Amen.

### Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)

When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Help us identify mental illness as the disease it is, that we might have courage and wisdom in the face of ignorance and stigma. Inspire us as we seek to overcome fear, acquire knowledge, and advocate for compassionate and enlightened treatment and services. As we move out into the world let us:

**Stand up** – against the stigma of mental health disorders.

**Stand with** – those who suffer with a mental health disorder.

**Stand for** – better treatment options and accessible care for all in need.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Amen.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.

**JANUARY:**

# **GATHERING FOR LOVE** PART 1



**A**t least 81 percent of teens, ages 12-17, use social media sites, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, according to recent findings from the Pew Internet & American Life Project. Teens today are more aware of “self” than previous generations of teens due mostly to social media. Most U.S. teens are Instagram users because it’s been deemed “more private” than most social media apps by its developers.

Teens face constant pressure to have to buy the latest, newest, coolest products, and ads are cleverly placed on all social media outlets. Our society equates self-worth with how much we have and who has it, and many teens buy into this falsehood.

In the 2016 TODAY/AOL “Ideal to Real” body image survey, teenagers revealed something unexpected: 65 percent said seeing their selfies on social media boosts their confidence. And 40 percent say social media helps “me present my best face to the world.”

The survey’s findings echo emerging social science on the effect of social media on self-presentation and self-image. Selfies seem inconsequential or goofy, but they can be incredibly important to teenagers because they give teens a way to control the image of themselves that they’re showing to the world, experts say.

## **WE ARE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD AND ARE LIVING TEMPLES, AND THIS ALONE GIVES EACH ONE OF US SELF-WORTH (1 CORINTHIANS 3:16).**

The survey also acknowledges social media’s power to make teens feel bad about themselves, especially when confronted with glamorous, mostly happy, pictures of other people’s lives.

- 55 percent of teen girls and 34 percent of teen boys say “overall, social media makes me feel more self-conscious about my appearance.”
- 58 percent of teen girls say “seeing pictures of other people living glamorous-looking lives on social media makes me feel bad about myself.” Only 19 percent of teen boys have the same reaction.
- 30 percent of all teens say social media means they always need to be “camera-ready.”

This session seeks to get youth thinking about who they are, to reconstruct the idea of self-worth and see themselves in the image of God (Imago Dei).



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

To love others, we need to love ourselves.

This is a foundational component to building community and building on social justice. As we engage in the Gathering, seeing ourselves as created beautifully by God (as God sees us) opens us up to engage in the experiences, seeing others through that same lens of how God sees us and loves us. God's love through Jesus changes everything. Living in that love and sharing that image of a loving God takes the Gathering beyond Houston and into the world we live in. Share this love – the love of God through Jesus that changes everything!

## HANDBOOK TIMELINE:



**January 2017** | Attend the ELCA YM Net Extravaganza! It's a great time to prepare for the Gathering, learn from peers and professionals, and recharge for your daily life and ministry – a great mental health opportunity!

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers or sticky notes

## GATHER (15 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large printout of the phrase "I am" (or use sticky notes) and markers to write down words they would use to describe who they are.

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they see up on the wall and give any insights into what they see.



### SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Share your selfie! #Love #Selfie #ELCAYG2018

### The Intro

We listed many words to describe who we are. These words are our way of seeing self. God has a different way of seeing us. In this session, we are going to see how God sees us.

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

Today, Lord, help us accept ourselves the way we are, without judgment.

Help us accept our minds, our emotions, our hopes and dreams, our personality, our unique way of being. Help us accept our bodies just the way they are, with all its beauty and perfection. Let the love for ourselves be so strong that we never reject our self or sabotage our happiness and personal freedom. From now on, let every action, every reaction, every thought, every emotion, be based on love, the love that you have for each of us, beautifully created in your image. Amen.

## Experiential Learning: Truth & Lies

Have everyone sit in a circle facing each other. Have each person come up with two facts about themselves and one lie. The lie should be realistic instead of extravagant. Go around the circle and have each person state the two facts and a lie in a random order, without revealing which is the lie. After someone shares, the others must guess which is the lie. This experience helps eliminate snap judgments and gives introverts an equal chance to share some facts about themselves.

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story - Scripture

The Bible is full of stories about every kind of person. These stories can help us better understand that while we are unique as individuals, we can perhaps see what it tells us about self-esteem, self-image and what type of people they were.

- Read **Genesis 2:7** – You have value because God created you.
  - What does it mean to you that you were created by God?
  - How might an alternate theory of our origins affect how we view ourselves? For example, how would our Lutheran understanding of evolution being part of God's creation affect how we view our purpose in life and our value?
  - What did God say after God saw all the things created (see **Genesis 1:31**)? How does that affect how you view yourself?

A lot of people have a hard time having a positive self-image. Often, we base our image on things we do, stuff we have, or other people's view of us. But if you get your value from those things, what is going to happen? At some point, you are going to feel like you have no value because those things come and go. The fact that you were created by God means you matter, and that will never change. Have someone read **Romans 8:35-39** to wrap up this point.



Get a cheap mirror and write on it with permanent marker: "Created in God's Image" and hang it in your space.

## Our Story - Through the Eyes of God

### LEARN:

Watch the following video:

[youtube.com/watch?annotation\\_id=annotation\\_1297383017&feature=iv&index=3&list=PLBVNJo7nhINROnXIV5yXTII\\_NjjM4ZRJD&src\\_vid=1czDASTpH9M&v=f0tEcxLDDd4](https://youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_1297383017&feature=iv&index=3&list=PLBVNJo7nhINROnXIV5yXTII_NjjM4ZRJD&src_vid=1czDASTpH9M&v=f0tEcxLDDd4)

(4:13 min.)

- What did you discover?
- What stood out to you about how we see ourselves as we grow up?
- What is the Imago Dei – image of God – based on this video?

### LISTEN:

- Based on the video we just watched, how do you see yourself?
- How does God see you versus how the world sees you?
- What sticks with you?

### CONNECT:

Read **Matthew 22:34-40**

- What do you think it means to “love your neighbor as yourself?”
- If we don’t like the way God created us, how do we then love our neighbor?
- What did we learn from the video clips we just watched?
- How does this change our understanding of the Scripture?

### ENGAGE:

Ask:

- How has this session affected your self-image if you look at it as you are created in God’s image? Have you ever thought of this before?
- Where then does our worth come from?
  - It comes from God and God’s love for us. God gave Jesus’ life for us because God sees us a “worthy” in God’s image.
  - So much of what our world tells us is that our worth is useless and un-founded. As children of God, our worth comes not from how we look, what we do, or how we dress. Our worth comes solely from being created and loved by God.
  - Now what do we do with this?
  - We are now changed people, people who see the image of God in everyone, not just those who look like us or act like us, but in every single human being we see the image of God. If this were true of everyone, how different would our world be? Imagine the massive change – how will you begin the change that in everyone you see, you see the image of God?





## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

### **Sending Prayer**

God, thank you for loving us and creating us in your image. Thank you for giving us purpose. Thank you for giving us value. We ask for your forgiveness for placing value on ourselves from something other than our value simply because you made us. Finally, we ask that you help us see ourselves the way you do and be content in knowing that we belong to you. Amen.

### **Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)**

When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Help us remember our worth comes through the image of God and not what the world tells us makes us worthy. Therefore, let us:

**Stand up** – against a world that tells us "stuff" makes us worthy.

**Stand with** – those who are told or made to feel they have no worth.

**Stand for** – changing the world, that the most important image is the one that we are created by God.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Amen.



**JANUARY:**

# GATHERING FOR LOVE

**PART 2:  
GOING  
DEEPER**

**A**s people of faith who believe that we are each made in God's image, we are invited to see the fullness of who people are – their physical characteristics, their hurts, their joys, their struggles, and anything that affects their quality of life. The recognition that people's identities can overlap and that this can contribute to privilege or discrimination is the basis of the concept called intersectionality. This lens is important as we seek to understand each other and see each other through the lens of Imago Dei – image of God.

**Intersectional theory**, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, was born out of the black feminist movement as an effort for black women concerned with equity to say that their femaleness and their blackness could not be understood separate and apart from each other. A key component of understanding the intersecting realities that make up our identity is to understand how those realities are viewed within society. Identity is not enough. We as people of faith must dive deeper in our own understanding of how the various forces around us give meaning to identities – good, bad or indifferent. We are not somehow separate or apart from the systems and influences that govern our lives. Intersectional theory offers us a way of knowing that can deepen our engagement with our neighbors and within our community (“The Work Out Guide: Calling people of faith into meaningful relationships”).



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

To love others, we need to love ourselves. This is a foundational component to building community and building on social justice. As we engage in the Gathering, seeing ourselves as created beautifully by God (as God sees us) opens us up to engage in the experiences, seeing others through that same lens of how God sees us and loves us. God's love through Jesus changes everything. Living in that love and sharing that image of a loving God takes the Gathering beyond Houston and into the world we live in. Share this love – the love of God through Jesus that changes everything!

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers or sticky notes

## GATHER (5 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the word “Intersectionality” to write what they think this word means.

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they think this word means.

### The Intro

As people of faith who believe that we are each made in God's image, we are invited to see the fullness of who people are – their physical characteristics, their hurts, their joys, their struggles and anything that affects their quality of life. The recognition that people's identities can overlap and that this can contribute to privilege or discrimination is the basis of the concept called intersectionality. This lens is important as we seek to understand each other and see each other through the lens of Imago Dei – image of God.

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

God of love who created us in your image, help us look beyond just one thing to really see each other, to see the deeper parts of who we are created to be and how our unique creation forms and shapes us in the world. Open our eyes to see. In your name, we pray. Amen.

## Experiential Learning: Positive Reinforcement Game

Main aim: Teenagers are encouraged to name positive characteristics about others.

Rationale: The activity challenges the participants in the following ways:

- to identify a positive characteristic in another person;
- to describe how they see themselves; and
- to discover ways to build self-identity.

You'll need one sheet of paper for each participant and a pen for writing.

Instructions:

- If the activity is played in a group, have all participants sitting on chairs in a circle facing each other.
- Hand out a sheet of paper to each person.
- Ask everyone to write their name on the sheet of paper and then hand it to the person on their left.
- Each person then writes down one good characteristic of the person whose name is on the sheet of paper.
- Each person then hands the sheet to another person on their left.
- Again, each person writes down one good characteristic of the person whose name is on the sheet of paper.
- The game continues until all have taken a turn writing each other's positive characteristics.
- Discuss with the participants how they feel about the characteristics that have been written about them. Some questions:
  - Do they feel that the characteristic is true of them?
  - If not, why not?
  - Did they feel good reading about what was written?

### EXAMPLES OF POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS:

adventurous	diligent
brave	easygoing
bright	patient
calm	polite
careful	reliable
communicative	sensible
loving	sincere
loyal	enthusiastic
modest	faithful
neat	friendly
optimistic	funny
sociable	generous
sympathetic	gentle
compassionate	hard-working
conscientious	helpful
considerate	honest
courteous	kind
creative	thoughtful
determined	warm-hearted



## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story – Scripture

Read the following passages and discuss the questions.

- **Isaiah 64:8**
  - How have we been made?
  - What does a potter know about its creation?
- **Psalms 139:14**
  - What does it mean to be fearfully and wonderfully made?
  - Why do you think the Psalmist used those words?
- **John 15:16**
  - What does it mean to be chosen by God?
  - How do we bear fruit? What is that?

### Our Story – Intersectionality

#### LEARN:

Watch the following video clip and discuss what new learnings and insights you discovered: [youtube.com/watch?v=w6dnj2lyYjE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6dnj2lyYjE) (3:03 min.)

#### LISTEN:

Hear kids describing what intersectionality is in the following video. [youtube.com/watch?v=WzbADY-CmTs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WzbADY-CmTs) (2:14 min.)

#### CONNECT:

Have the group look at the photo below. Ask them to describe what they see. How might we be transformed by understanding intersectionality and being created uniquely?



**ENGAGE:**

Go back to the positive comments sheets the youth did at the beginning of the session. Ask them to review these through the lens of intersectionality. How might we respond in different ways based on what we've learned in this session?

Why is it important for us to learn about intersectionality and our engagement in the world?

Tell the group you want to "reflect" what they wrote on their notes by simply reading aloud a few of them. Once you've done this, read 2 Corinthians 3:18.

Reassure each person that they are accepted and loved by Christ just as they are. They are being transformed, which is a good thing. Wherever they go, they should reflect the love of Christ to the world (this is a work in progress). As we engage in our life experiences and in the Gathering, consider ways that you will reflect the love of Christ. People we meet are not just one thing. They are complex and intricate, just as we are. Engaging with the world through this lens will help us see deeper into each person's story and life.

**SENDING (5 MINUTES):****Sending Prayer**

*Ask someone to lead the sending prayer.*

Thank you, God, for helping us increase our awareness of the uniqueness of one another. Thank you for helping us see that we are multi-dimensional people, not just one thing. Thank you for raising our awareness and reminding us to do this at all times because you have made us wonderfully and beautifully. Amen.

**Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)**

When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Help us remember to be aware of the fullness of all people, not just one thing, and that this all comes through the image of God. Therefore, let us

**Stand up** – against a world that sees only one part of each other.

**Stand with** – those who are faced with this reality daily.

**Stand for** – changing the world, that the most important image is the one that we are created by God.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Amen.

Go in peace. Continue reforming!

**FEBRUARY:**

# **GATHERING FOR RELATIONSHIP**

**PART 1**



**A**s Christians, we are called to be in relationship. The Bible is about relationships: God's relationship to us, our relationship to God, our relationships with each other; it's about relationships. Sometimes relationships take on a warped reality as portrayed in media, in books, in all aspects of life. How do we live in relationship with one another as God has desired for us? It is difficult to know what that is, especially since the world has very loud, ever-present opinions on what relationships are.

## YOUTH TODAY ARE IN A DIFFICULT PLACE FOR LIVING OUT RELATIONSHIPS.

So much is driven by self-need and looking out for No. 1. We are called to help them see the counter-cultural message of relationships that are built on mutual respect, responsibility, understanding, effort and care. This month we will consider relationships, how God directs us in relationships and how to model positive, healthy relationships for our own lives.

It's helpful to refer to "The Official Gathering Handbook," page 48, on addressing group conflict because sometimes we're not perfect!



### SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Tweet love lyrics with what kind of love it is!  
#Phileo #Agape #Storge #ELCAYG2018



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

We are a people of community, and community is about relationships. We are not to be alone in our Christian faith but rather to share that faith with others and gain strength from others when we are struggling. At the Gathering, we will be in community (a very large community) and we need to be able to build relationships beyond our normal boundaries.

Trusted relationships allow us to have a deeper experience at the Gathering and give us the space to process the experiences we will have. Community offers us the place to unpack what we see and hear, to help us formulate our response and our ways.

Read the story of the Ethiopian eunuch in **Acts 8:26-39**. Philip helped the man understand the writings of the prophet Isaiah. The man needed someone to guide him. If we try to understand things alone, or from others who don't have any knowledge of the topic, we are not really engaging in relationship. We are just listening to ourselves. The man learned that the grace of God changes everything, and he learned that from being in a relationship with Philip – although short-term, it was, nonetheless, a relationship.

Being in relationship is about being in community. Community comes from building healthy relationships with those we know and those we don't, with those who are different from us: those who think differently, speak differently and look differently. These differences are a building block to healthy community. We can celebrate those differences while seeking to incorporate everyone into community.

**Houston is the most diverse city in the country.** There is no ethnic or racial majority in Houston! Talk about a beautiful mosaic of God's creation, and we get to immerse in that community during the Gathering. It's a thing to celebrate and learn from.



### HANDBOOK TIMELINE:

**February 2017** – Consider having a pre-trip parent check-in meeting along with continuing Getting Ready lessons.

## GATHER (20 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As you enter the space, encourage the group to use the large-print version of the phrase "A healthy relationship is ..." to write down characteristics or words that describe a healthy relationship.

Call the youth together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why. Ask if anything was notable to them.

### The Intro

As Christians, we are called to be in relationship. The Bible is about relationships: God's relationship to us, our relationship to God, our relationships with each other; it's about relationships. Today, relationships take on a warped reality as portrayed in our media, in our books, in all aspects of life. How do we live in relationship with one another as God desires for us? It is difficult to know what that is, especially since the world has very loud, ever-present opinions on what relationships are.

This month we're going to focus on aspects of healthy relationships and how to nurture and sustain healthy relationships.

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

God of love, you ask us to be in relationship with one another. In a world where the messages of relationships are unrealistic or completely warped, please open us to learning how you want us to be in relationship. We ask for guidance as we learn the desires you have for our lives. In your name, we pray. Amen.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers or sticky notes
- copies of lyric pages

## Experiential Learning: Lyrics Game

Print the lyrics out. Cut them apart and display them on a table. It's OK to have a few copies of the lyrics out in case you have more people than the set supplied. Ask the youth to choose a lyric that speaks to their view of or hopes for the kinds of relationships they've had. After all have chosen a lyric, ask each person to share what they chose and why.

Discuss:

- What do we hear in these lyrics?
- What are the messages our world gives us about relationships? Any kind – family, friends, romantic, etc. What does the world tell us relationships should look like?
- Let's look at what the Bible guides us to.

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story - Scripture

The Ancient Greek text of the New Testament has three words that mean love. We're going to look at the differences of each of these.

The first is "phileo" (pronounced: phil-E-o transliteration). Phileo is the kind of love for a friend (try this out: Philadelphia is called the City of Brotherly Love, Philadelphia is the Greek word for brotherly love. Cool, huh!) Let's look at Scripture to help us see this.



Write the Greek phonetic words out so all can see them. Write the definitions as the group learns them.

Read **John 11:1-3** and discuss:

- Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, send word to Jesus that the "one whom you love (phileo) is ill!"
- We see in this passage that Lazarus was a friend of Jesus, along with his sisters, Mary and Martha.
- How does our world define "friend" love?

The next kind of love is "storge" (pronounced: store-gay transliteration). Storge is the love and affection that naturally occurs between parents and children, can exist between siblings, and exists between two people in a healthy marriage. Storge is typically used with phileo in the Bible, helping us understand this is just more than dutiful love. ("Of course, you love him, he's your brother.")

Read **Romans 12:10** and discuss:

- "Storge" (philostorgos) is translated as "mutual affection" in this passage.
- What does "mutual affection" mean in this passage?
- What does the word "affection" mean to us today?
- The word "philostorgos," which is a compound word made up of "philos" (the noun form of "phileo") and "storge," makes Romans 12:10 a very important verse, directing us to be very loving and kind to everyone.

The next kind of love is “agape” (pronounced: a-ga-pAy transliteration). Agape is called out of one’s heart. It is the noblest word for love in the Greek language. Agape is not fueled by the worth. It comes in its own God-given nature. Agape love delights in giving. This love keeps on loving even when the loved one is unresponsive, unkind, unlovable and unworthy. It is unconditional love. Agape desires only the good of the one loved. It is a consuming passion for the well-being of others.

Read **John 3:16**, **Matthew 5:44** and **John 14:21a** and discuss:

- **John 3:16** is a well-known passage that sums up God’s love for us through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God’s own Son.
- God so “loved” (agape) that God gave God’s Son. It did not feel good to God to do that, but it was the loving thing to do. Christ so loved (agape) that he gave his life. He did not want to die, but he loved, so he did what God required. A mother who loves a sick child will stay awake all night taking care of her sick child, which is not something she wants to do, but is a true act of agape love.
- The point is that agape love is not an impulsive thing that comes from feelings. Agape love is an act of will, a deliberate choice. This is why God can command us to love our enemies (Matthew 5:44). God is not commanding us to “have a good feeling” for our enemies but to act in a loving way toward them. Agape love is related to obedience and commitment and not necessarily feeling and emotion. Loving someone is to obey God on another’s behalf, seeking his or her long-term blessing and profit.
- The way to know that we love (agape) God is that we keep God’s commandments. Jesus said, “Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me” (John 14:21a).
- Why do we struggle keeping the commandments?
- How can we help keep each other accountable to these commandments?

## Our Story – God’s Love

### LEARN:

We have now learned about the different kinds of love in the Bible. Let’s look at what God’s love looks like today. [youtube.com/watch?v=PnDgZuG1hHs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PnDgZuG1hHs) (3:19 min.)  
Discuss the video.

- How is this like God’s love?
- How are we at showing God’s love?

### LISTEN:

Based on all we’ve read and discussed, how do you describe God’s love? Use the poster board with the words “God’s love” to write your responses.

- After everyone is done, have them share what they wrote.
- Ask if anyone has thoughts on the things that were shared on the poster board.

### CONNECT:

Using the poster board again, have the youth write ways that they have experienced God’s love.

Next have them write ways we can show God’s love in our relationships.

- After everyone is done, have them share what they wrote.
- Ask if anyone has thoughts on the things that were shared.

**ENGAGE:**

We are created for relationship. It's how God created us. But as sinful beings, we can mess that up. Relationships should have the following characteristics:

- **Respect:** Respect others, honor them, hold them in high esteem, treat them as if they are worthwhile even when they are different from you.
- **Responsibility:** This means others can depend on you, you do what you say you're going to do, and can tell right from wrong.
- **Understanding:** You can put yourself in someone else's shoes, and imagine what life looks like from another point of view, you know what they need and how they feel.
- **Effort:** You work hard to show your respect, to be caring and to be present for the other person.
- **Caring:** You are concerned and interested in the other person's feelings, wants and needs. You want what is best for them. It involves feelings of love for them, and you want to protect, notice and provide for that person.

Positive relationships come from both people putting all these qualities into the relationship. It doesn't mean that it will be perfect, but each person works equally hard at the relationship.

**SENDING (5 MINUTES):**

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

**Sending Prayer**

God of relationships, you created us to be in relationship. Help us have healthy relationships, displaying those things from ourselves that we want to have from others. Give us the strength and wisdom to recognize toxic relationships and end them to keep ourselves safe. We are worthy of love because you first loved us. Let us show that love in the world. In your name, we pray. Amen.

**Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)**

When I Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.  
The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

Help us remember to live in the beauty of healthy relationships. Give us the strength to leave a toxic relationship. Let us:

**Stand up** – against toxic and abusive relationships.

**Stand with** – those who are alone or in a toxic relationship.

**Stand for** – changing the world. All people deserve healthy relationships, and we need to be models of these relationships.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Amen.

# LOVE LYRICS

- I don't mind spending every day out on your corner in the pouring rain.
- Take my heart and please don't break it. Love was made for me and you.
- Look at the stars, Look how they shine for you, And everything you do.
- I've Been A Victim Of A Selfish, Kind Of Love, It's Time That I Realize That There Are Some With No Home, Not A Nickel To Loan, Could It Be Really Me, Pretending That They're Not Alone?
- We are Love. We are One. We are how we treat each other when the day is done.
- Even if your hands are shaking, And your faith is broken. Even as the eyes are closing, Do it with a heart wide open.
- I'll be there for you, 'Cause you're there for me too.
- Should this be the last thing I see, I want you to know it's enough for me, 'Cause all that you are is all that I'll ever need.
- Well I don't have many and I don't have much In fact I don't have any but I've got enough
- Let me fill your heart with joy and laughter, Togetherness is all I'm after, Whenever you need me, I'll be there
- No one knows me like you do, And since you're the only one that matters, Tell me who do I run to?
- I'm jealous of the love, Love that was in here, gone for someone else to share Oh, I'm jealous of the love
- And I see your true colors shining through, I see your true colors and that's why I love you, So don't be afraid to let them show Your true colors, True colors are beautiful
- You can't hurry love, No, you just have to wait, You gotta trust, give it time No matter how long it takes
- Measure, measure your life in love, Seasons of love
- And if I tremble at the sight of you, it's not because I'm cold, It's because I'm staring at the one I want to love me when I'm old
- You're still a part of everything I do, You're on my heart just like a tattoo
- Take my hand, take my whole life too, For I can't help falling in love with you
- Oh, I'll stay with you through the ups and the downs, Oh, I'll stay with you when no one else is around, And when the dark clouds arise I will stay by your side, I know we'll be alright, I will stay with you
- When the winter sings it's raging, And the tide is always changing, Baby all these things are fading But my love will never stray
- Love is the answer, at least for most of the questions in my heart
- Can I lay by your side, next to you, you, And make sure you're alright, I'll take care of you, And I don't want to be here if I can't be with you tonight
- And when you speak, angels sing from above, Everyday words seem to turn into love songs
- You can count on me like one two three I'll be there, And I know when I need it I can count on you like four three two. You'll be there, 'Cause that's what friends are supposed to do, oh yeah
- Forget regret, Or life is yours to miss!
- Even the best fall down sometimes, Even the wrong words seem to rhyme, Out of the doubt that fills my mind, I somehow find You and I collide
- Your hand fits in mine like it's made just for me
- 'Cause if I got you, I don't need money, I don't need cars you are my all
- Said all I want from you is to see you tomorrow, And every tomorrow, maybe you'll let me borrow your heart



**FEBRUARY:**

# GATHERING FOR RELATIONSHIP

**PART 2:  
GOING  
DEEPER**

**A**s Christians, we are called to be in relationship. The Bible is about relationships: God's relationship to us, our relationship to God, our relationships with each other; it's about relationships. Today, relationships take on a warped reality as portrayed in our media, in our books, in all aspects of life. How do we live in relationship with one-another as God desires for us? It is difficult to know what that is, especially since the world has very loud, ever-present opinions on what relationships are.

Relationships are not always healthy. Youth struggle with how to disengage from unhealthy relationships and find the healthy relationships God desires for us. This session will look at signs of unhealthy relationships and ways to get out of them.

It's helpful to refer to "The Official Gathering Handbook," Page 48, on addressing group conflict because sometimes we're not perfect!



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

Being in relationship is about being in community. Community comes from building healthy relationships, with those we know and those we don't, with those who are different from us: those who think differently, speak differently, look differently. These differences are a building block to healthy community. We can celebrate those differences while seeking to incorporate everyone into community.

Relationships are not always easy, and sometimes they can become unhealthy. At the Gathering, there will be opportunity to engage in interactive learning and service learning that will touch on relationships, including unhealthy relationships. Knowing the signs helps us move out of unhealthy relationships and know the kinds of relationships God desires for us. If God's love through Jesus changes everything, then our relationships should mirror that same thing.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers
- object for an obstacle course
- blindfolds

## GATHER (5 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the group enters the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the phrase "It's not OK to ..." to write down characteristics or words in regard to relationships.

Call the youth together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why.

### The Intro

As Christians, we are called to be in relationship. The Bible is about relationships: God's relationship to us, our relationship to God, our relationships with each other; it's about relationships. Today, relationships take on a warped reality as portrayed in our media, in our books, in all aspects of life. How do we live in relationship with one another as God desires for us? It is difficult to know what that is, especially since the world has very loud, ever-present opinions on what relationships are.

This month we're going to focus on aspects of unhealthy relationships and how to disengage from them.

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

God of love, you ask us to be in relationship with one another. In a world where the messages of relationships are unrealistic or completely warped, please open us to learning how you want us to be in relationship. We ask for guidance as we learn the desires you have for our lives. In your name, we pray. Amen.



### SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Tweet the characteristics of healthy relationships.  
#HealthyRelationship #ELCAYG2018

## Experiential Learning: Guide Me

You will need to set up an obstacle course in your space using whatever you have handy: chairs, cones, pieces of construction paper, anything will do. Break the group into pairs. Give each pair a blindfold and have one person wear the blindfold.

The point of the experience is for the sighted person to guide the blindfolded person through the course safely with only voice instructions. The sighted partner must remain at the start of the course and guide their partner through just by giving directions.

You can run multiple courses if necessary, and you can run a few pairs at a time through a course. It adds to the confusion.

Discuss:

- What did we just do?
- What went well? What was difficult?
- What was the most important part of this experience?  
(Trusting your partner to lead you or listen to your instructions)
- This experience helps us keep the idea that trust is essential in any relationship.

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story - Scripture

Read together Hebrews 10:24-25.

- Ask what can we learn from this passage?
- How are we to be in our relationships, with both friends and romantic partners?
- How is this different from what society tells us?

Read together Ephesians 4:29-32.

- Ask what examples of relationships are given here.
- How can we do these in our relationships?
- How is this different from what society tells us?

### Our Story - Relationships

#### LEARN:

This video reminds us of what a healthy relationship is and gives us signs of unhealthy relationships: [youtube.com/watch?v=IAvJh6GnrXU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAvJh6GnrXU) (6:21 min.)



**LISTEN:**

What do you do if you're in a toxic relationship? Let's watch this video to get some guidance. [youtube.com/watch?v=wPwck0EQkgs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wPwck0EQkgs) (4:29 min.)

Discuss:

- What are signs of a toxic relationship?
- What are ways you can get out of a toxic relationship?
- What is important to remember about toxic relationships?
- Remember these things if you find yourself in a toxic relationship. No one should ever feel obligated or trapped. Get help!

**CONNECT:**

How can we help others that are in a toxic relationship?

How can we call attention to unhealthy relationships and raise awareness of this issue?

What can we do right here in our congregation and in our community?

**ENGAGE:**

Remember we are created for relationship. It's how God created us. But as sinful beings we can mess that up. Relationships should have the following characteristics:

- **Respect:** Respect others, honor them, hold them in high esteem, treat them as if they are worthwhile even when they are different from you.
- **Responsibility:** This means others can depend on you, you do what you say you're going to do and can tell right from wrong.
- **Understanding:** You are able to put yourself in someone else's shoes and, imagining what life looks like from another point of view, you know what they need and how they feel.
- **Effort:** You work hard to show your respect, to be caring and to be present for the other person.
- **Caring:** You are concerned and interested in the other person's feelings, wants and needs. You want what is best for them. It involves feelings of love for them and you want to protect, notice and provide for that person.

Positive relationships come from both people putting all these qualities into the relationship. It doesn't mean that it will be perfect, but each person works equally hard at the relationship.



Post signs listing the Relationship Characteristics throughout your building.



## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

### **Sending Prayer**

God of relationships, you created us to be in relationship. Help us to have healthy relationships, displaying those things from ourselves that we want to have from others. Give us the strength and wisdom to recognize toxic relationships and end them to keep ourselves safe. We are worthy of love because you first loved us. Let us show that love in the world. In your name, we pray. Amen.

### **Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)**

When I Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

Help us remember to live in the beauty of healthy relationships. Give us the strength to leave a toxic relationship. Let us:

**Stand up** – against toxic and abusive relationships.

**Stand with** – those who are alone or in a toxic relationship.

**Stand for** – changing the world. All people deserve healthy relationships, and we need to be models of these relationships.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Amen.

**MARCH:**

# **GATHERING FOR JUSTICE**

**PART 1**



In the ELCA, justice work is a priority. It is even in our baptismal covenant: “strive for justice and peace in all the earth.” And the Bible states: “And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8b) and “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God” (Matthew 5:9).

**"ALONG WITH ALL CITIZENS, CHRISTIANS AND OTHERS HAVE THE RESPONSIBILITY TO DEFEND HUMAN RIGHTS AND TO WORK FOR FREEDOM, JUSTICE, PEACE, ENVIRONMENTAL WELL-BEING AND GOOD ORDER."**

(ELCA SOCIAL STATEMENT, "THE CHURCH IN SOCIETY: A LUTHERAN PERSPECTIVE," 1991, PAGE 5)

In terms of justice, here's what we, the ELCA, say: We celebrate the abundant blessings that are a part of this world. But we also walk in the struggle of human existence where we face our own sin, our self-centeredness, and the collective sin of human institutions, for example, the church, governments, the nations. In this struggle, however, we meet the suffering God who bears the sins of the world and sends us out, as ones who are joined in the crucified Christ and in his solidarity with the pain of the world. As believers in Christ we are called to be about the work of justice in our personal and public life. We recognize that God's justice is something deeper and purer than our own best understanding of justice. And yet, we are called to love our neighbor as we would love ourselves.

We speak the truth in love as we participate in God's mission of abundant life for all. With a deep awareness of our sinfulness and the sin of our society, with humility we speak with respect and promote change. And God calls us to speak out. An enemy of justice is silence.

A justice mindset is one key way we practice our faith. A mindset and a heart filled with peace is faith in practice. Practicing our faith is something that we may never master. We always have more to learn. The focus of our practice is our gracious God, not the practices. Our faith practices are always an offering of response to our gracious God. May God work on you as you practice your faith in the midst of life in God's church and God's world.

This session looks at justice and helps shape our understanding of what justice is and is not.



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

Justice is work for all of us to engage in. It begins with our mindset of righting wrongs and helping give voice to those whose voices are ignored or are not heard. The Gathering seeks to lift up issues of justice in many ways through the Mass Gatherings, in Service Learning, in Interactive Learning and Synod Day. Justice is our work. If we don't know about the injustices in our world, how can we help change these to be a more just society?

The Gathering gives us an opportunity to look at justice issues, and we can allow it to shape and form us to change the world through our words and actions.

## HANDBOOK TIMELINE:

**March 2017** - Send the rooming list and housing deposit to your hotel!



## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- construction paper
- tape
- glue sticks
- scissors
- notebook paper
- rulers

## GATHER (15 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the phrase "What is the greatest injustice of the past?" and markers to write their responses.

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why. Remind them to keep these in mind as we move into the session.

### The Intro

In this session, we gather for justice. We will pray, have fun, and engage in conversation around the theme of justice, discussing both how Jesus challenges our perception of it and what threats to justice exist today. When people talk about justice, Exodus 21:24 may come to mind for some, "eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, hand for a hand, foot for a foot." To many, justice looks like law enforcement and the court system. And to others, true justice feels about as realistic as the Justice League. Author and 2012 ELCA Youth Gathering speaker Shane Claiborne shares in his book "Executing Grace" that "When it comes to words like 'justice,' people can say the same thing and mean something completely different. Capital punishment offers us one version of justice ... yet grace offers us another." As we dive into Scripture and see how Jesus flips traditional understandings of justice, we'll catch a glimpse of the kingdom of heaven and learn how we can join in welcoming the kingdom here on earth.

### Gathering Prayer

*Let's pray.*

Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.

God of all, you made us in your image, each of us, equal in your eyes. Open our hearts and our minds to you this day. May we encounter each other with respect and love. Give us confidence as we practice articulating our unique thoughts and beliefs in this safe space. Amen

## Experiential Learning: That's Not Fair

Purpose: to highlight privilege and the advantages and disadvantages privilege creates for individuals and groups. This game will also create paper dolls that will be used for storytelling later in the session.

Supplies needed: Construction paper, various colors, notebook paper, scissors, glue and tape, rulers

Split your group into two teams to engage in an arts-and-crafts competition. Adult participants may judge the competition or participate alongside the youth. Give one team colorful construction paper, scissors, glue and tape, markers, and a ruler and the second team only notebook paper, pencils and older glue sticks.

Give both teams five minutes to create three paper dolls, one 6 inches tall, one a foot tall, and one 18 inches tall. At the end of the five minutes, have each team present the artwork to be judged. If you have more than 12 participants, you may choose to create additional teams. These additional teams can use either combination of the supplies, but manufacture some disadvantages for them to perform their task, such as blindfolds, the inability to speak, use of only one arm.

- Was the activity difficult or easy? What made it so?
- How did you feel doing the activity?
- Did you get frustrated? Why?
- How does this activity mirror or reflect life?



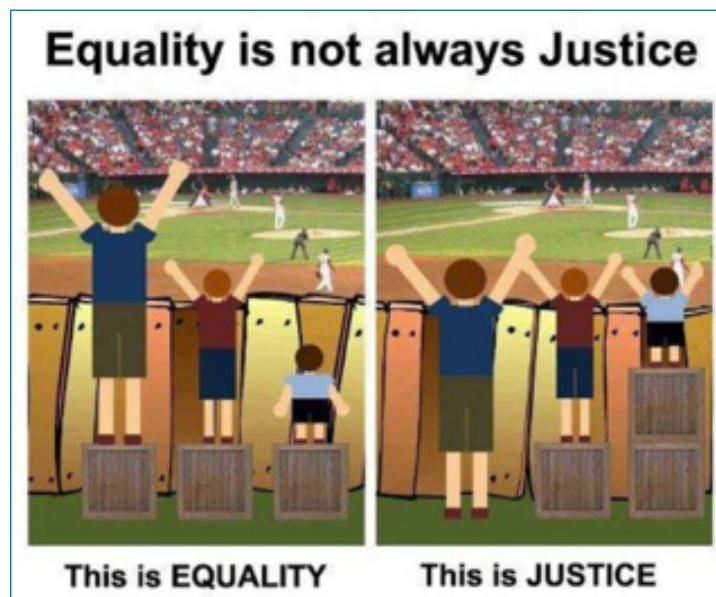
### SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Instagram your arts and crafts!  
#NotFair #ELCAYG2018

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story - Scripture

Creative storytelling: Take the three paper dolls of varying heights from the activity or make your own. For the telling of this story, you will need someone to read, a puppeteer to hang the dolls on the wall, plus something moveable to represent a fence as well as a scene that represents the kingdom of heaven. As the story is being told, you will recreate the following graphic, but instead of using boxes, the fence will be removed, revealing the kingdom of heaven to everyone, regardless of their privilege:





Print copies of the "Puppet" script on this page for all people participating in the show.

- **Puppeteer:** Hang a large picture that will represent the kingdom of heaven or draw the kingdom of heaven on a white board. You may want suggestions from the students for what the kingdom of heaven looks like. Create a fence, again either beforehand or with a dry-erase marker. The fence must be 16 inches from the bottom of the kingdom of heaven scene to match up with the height of the puppets.
- **Reader:** A reading from **Matthew 20:1-6**, *"For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with the laborers for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard.*
- **Puppeteer:** Tape the tall doll in front of the fence, just being able to peek over it, with a piece of tape on the top of its head.
- **Reader:** *When he went out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace; and he said to them, "You also go into the vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right." So they went.*
- **Puppeteer:** Tape the doll of medium height in front of the fence next to the tall doll. It will not be able to see over the fence. Secure it with a piece of tape on the top of its head. Use a longer piece of tape connecting the top of the doll head to the kingdom and not the fence.
- **Reader:** *When he went out again about noon and about three o'clock, he did the same. And about five o'clock he went out and found others standing around; and he said to them, "Why are you standing here idle all day?" They said to him, "Because no one has hired us." He said to them, "You also go into the vineyard."*
- **Puppeteer:** Place the shortest doll on the fence, next to the doll of medium height. Tape this doll like the previous one, using a longer piece of tape to connect the top of the doll head to the kingdom and not the fence.
- **Reader:** *When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his manager, "Call the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and then going to the first." When those hired about five o'clock came, each of them received the usual daily wage.*
- **Puppeteer:** Slide away, or erase, the fence from the shortest doll, giving it full access to the kingdom. Keep pulling and reveal the kingdom to the second.
- **Reader:** *Now when the first came, they thought they would receive more; but each of them also received the usual daily wage.*
- **Puppeteer:** Pull or erase the fence the entire way, completely revealing the kingdom to all the dolls.
- **Reader:** *And when they received it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, "These last worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat." But he replied to one of them, "Friend, I am doing you no wrong; did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what belongs to you and go; I choose to give this last the same as I give to you. Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me? Or are you envious because I am generous? So the last will be first, and the first will be last."*

The point:

- What does this story say about the kingdom of heaven? Who is it for?
- Since this story is a parable, what could showing up at 9 a.m., noon and 5 p.m. be symbolic for? Who could those workers represent?
- What does this story say about God's justice?

## Our Story - Justice/Righteousness

### LEARN:

We're going to watch a clip from the 2014 film "Selma." The scene takes place after a peaceful protest against the discrimination of black voters in Selma, Alabama, goes awry. The conflict results in many of the civil rights demonstrators, including Martin Luther King Jr., being thrown in jail, an act that many would have viewed as justice being served. This scene finds a tired and discouraged King lamenting to cellmate and fellow minister Ralph Abernathy about the layers of discrimination and systemic racism to which they were opposed.

### LISTEN:

Show the clip "Selma - Martin Luther King in Jail" at [youtube.com/watch?v=Tsa61euWa3A](https://youtube.com/watch?v=Tsa61euWa3A) (2:49 min.)

### CONNECT:

At this point in history, segregation had just been outlawed granting equal rights for black Americans. With equality achieved through the Civil Rights Act of 1964, why are they still fighting? What is the prize Abernathy encourages King to keep his eyes on?

Abernathy suggests they "take it piece by piece like we've been doing. Build the path as we can, rock by rock." Where does the path lead? When did, or does, this path end?

### ENGAGE:

Often in the Bible, you will see "justice" used interchangeably with "righteousness," another tricky word that means different things to different people. Our God is in the business of justice and righteousness, restoring humanity into right relationship – last month's topic. When we think about the justice issues of our time, they are mostly due to broken relationships. Messy relationships exist between people, between tribes and between the environment. Through his death on the cross, Jesus has been restoring humanity, bringing us all back into right relationship with him. Remember Ephesians 2:8? "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God." Part of our calling as baptized Lutherans is to respond to that grace by joining Christ in this work to "strive for peace and justice in all the earth." That is how "This. Changes. Everything."

Next session, we will spend our time discussing the global justice problem of human trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery, and what we can do to help bring an end to it.





## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the sending prayer.*

### Sending Prayer

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

God of Justice, you call us to your work of restoration. Give us eyes to see your plan for our world and may your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven, where "justice rolls down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Amen.

### Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)

We will end our session today with a blessing, sending you on your way. When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on your forehead.

Mother Teresa was intolerant of poverty. Bono is intolerant of AIDS. Nelson Mandela was intolerant of apartheid. Martin Luther King Jr. was intolerant of racism. Jesus was intolerant of bigotry. May God bless you with beautiful intolerance that you may:

- **Stand up** – against evil.
- **Stand with** – the marginalized.
- **Stand for** – justice.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Amen.



**MARCH:**

# GATHERING FOR JUSTICE

**PART 2:  
GOING  
DEEPER**

**T**his session, we gather for justice. Youth and adults will engage in conversations about God's heart for justice, what God's justice looks like, and how both affect how we view and engage the problem of human trafficking, a form of modern-day slavery. Participants will also learn what makes Houston such a hub for human trafficking and what the city is doing to raise awareness of and fight against it.

Slavery is not just an ancient or antiquated practice that oppressed Jews in the Old Testament thousands of years ago and uprooted and commoditized tens of millions of Africans until it was abolished in the U.S. during the mid-19th century. Slavery still exists today, and per the End It Movement, an estimated 20 million to 45.8 million people are trapped in it worldwide, even though it's illegal in every country. Domestic and international efforts have helped shed light on human trafficking and bring it to the forefront in recent years with President Barack Obama declaring January National Slavery and Human Trafficking Prevention Month in 2011 and President Donald Trump vowing last year to "bring the full force and weight of our government to the federal and at the federal level, and the other highest levels, whatever we can do, to solve this horrific problem." Considering half the 600,000 to 800,000 people trafficked across international borders every year are children, according to the U.S. State Department, it's more important than ever that young people are aware of trafficking.

According to the Polaris Project, a domestic anti-human trafficking non-profit organization, "human trafficking is a multibillion-dollar criminal industry... no matter where you live,

chances are it's happening nearby. From the girl forced into prostitution at a truck stop, to the man discovered in a restaurant kitchen, stripped of his passport and held against his will!" All trafficking victims experience not only the loss of freedom but the loss of their humanity. In the eyes of their captors, trafficking victims are nothing more than a commodity to be bought and sold. To a God who became fully human so we may become fully human, this reality is heartbreaking.

This "getting ready" session will educate participants on the two most common forms of human trafficking, labor-trafficking and sex-trafficking and ask them to explore two well-known Bible stories through a new lens. For those participants heading to Houston, this session will provide emotional preparation, as human trafficking will surely be addressed in various ways due to its looming presence over the city. FBI Special Agent Suzanne Bradley has stated that Houston is seen as a major hub for human trafficking due to its proximity to the Mexican border as well as the Interstate-10 corridor, which straddles the south, connecting Los Angeles to Jacksonville, FLa. The concentration of human trafficking in Houston has led to the rise of many projects that raise awareness of trafficking, such as the Red Sand Project, as well as a strategic plan to eliminate trafficking led by Houston's mayor, Sylvester Turner.

Our hope for the following sessions is that they both raise awareness of the existence and reality of human trafficking as well as empower participants to join God's work for justice and restoration in the world.



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

Human trafficking is high on Houston's radar. Because of Houston's proximity to the borders, large sporting events and functions, human trafficking is a problem that the city is working hard to eliminate.

This topic may come up at a Mass Gathering and will be a Service Learning emphasis. Houston is serious about eliminating this injustice from the city, the state and the world. By learning about this issue, we engage with Houston in its fight.

By digging deeper into this topic, you will help your group be prepared to hear more about this at the Gathering.

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- copies of the session handout
- printouts of pictures with their fact-filled captions from the Instagram account [@redsandproject](#) around your meeting space

## GATHER (15 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the question "What is a characteristic of someone who is fully human?" and markers (or sticky notes and markers) to write down their responses.

Call the youth together when you are ready to start the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why.

### The Intro

In the last session we explored and grappled with our understanding of justice. We learned that equal does not always mean just, and that we are called to work for justice with God to restore humanity to right relationship with God and one another. Unfortunately, in our world there are many relationships that are broken, sick and just plain wrong. Did you know that today there are between 20 million and 45 million people trapped in a form of modern-day slavery called human trafficking? In fact, there are more slaves today than at any other point in history. We are going to spend this time learning about the two most common forms of human trafficking, how Houston is working to end human trafficking, and how we can join God in the work to end it.

### Gathering Prayer

*(Ritual: You may choose to light your Christ Candle at this time.)*

Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

God of Justice, thank you for gathering us here to learn and talk about a problem that surely breaks your heart. You are the light of the world; shine in dark places. Enable those who work for justice, be with the humans trapped in slavery, and make us advocates for justice and peace.

## Experiential Learning: Through the Cracks

Using the printed pictures from the Red Sand Project on Instagram, tape the pictures around your space. Behind the picture, tape the caption that is with that picture. Ask the group to wander around the space, looking at the pictures and the captions found behind the pictures.

After all have had a chance to do this, call them back and ask what they discovered. Share with them what the Red Sand Project is: Overlooked populations – refugees, immigrants, girls and others – are most at risk of being enslaved, spending their lives being exploited for the profit of others. To recognize the overlooked, Red Sand Project's sidewalk interventions invite you to take the time to find and fill a sidewalk crack with red sand and to then document your sidewalk transformation on social media using #RedSandProject.

Give each person a small bag of red sand to participate. (Perhaps you could do this outside your building, teaching the congregation and neighborhood about this project and human trafficking.)



Have a youth print out the Red Sand Project Instagram pictures and captions for you.

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story – Scripture

We are going to look at a story in the Bible that features one form of human trafficking – labor trafficking. Read the story of Joseph being sold by his brothers – **Genesis 37:12-16**.

Discussion:

- Read the story through twice. The first time, just listen. The second time, I want different people in our group to put themselves in the shoes of the characters in God's stories. The characters are:
  - God
  - Joseph
  - Joseph's parents
  - Joseph's purchaser
  - A bystander or witness
- After the story, ask the following questions of the characters:
  - What jumped out at you this time around?
  - Who were you listening as? What did you feel as that person?
  - How did listening to the story in this way, after learning about human trafficking, change how you heard it? Did it add to or take away from the story?

## LEARN:

### Our Story – Modern Slavery

Watch the "MTV Human Trafficking" YouTube clip (length, 4:09 minutes).  
[youtube.com/watch?v=A-UX\\_EwQcy8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-UX_EwQcy8)

Reflections, questions, prompts:

- Initial reactions? Had you seen this public service announcement before? What surprised you? What saddened you? Other emotions?
- What questions does this raise? Is this public service announcement effective?

**LISTEN:**

Watch the following video on the Red Sand Project:  
[youtube.com/watch?v=jOw1o6VKbFU&t=2s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jOw1o6VKbFU&t=2s) (2:51 min.)

- What did you hear?
- How did this affect you?

**CONNECT:**

Refer to the Red Sand Project pictures and statistics.

Say: Things like the Red Sand Project remind us that we can't merely walk over the most marginalized people in our communities — those who fall through the metaphoric cracks. The simple act of placing sand in a crack or posting a photo on social media may seem inconsequential, but small actions can help raise awareness of the issues facing those who are overlooked.

**ENGAGE:**

The following is from *Relevant Magazine* titled "You Can Make a Difference in the Fight Against Modern Slavery." It lists 10 ways we all help bring about change. You can:

1. Learn about it
2. Connect on social media
3. Give money
4. Consider foster care or support for at-risk kids
5. Buy fair trade every chance you get
6. Volunteer locally
7. Participate in Human Trafficking Awareness Month in January
8. Use your voice
9. Stop trafficking efforts in your community
10. Find your puzzle piece (what supporting the fight looks like for you)

We're passing out a handout with the URL for this list as well as websites that you can learn from, give to and share, including the Hotel Photo Project, which encourages everyone to take and send in photos of their room whenever they stay in a hotel. Traffickcam.com uses these photos to determine where perpetrators of sex trafficking are committing their crimes.

Choose one or two of these ideas and come up with an action plan to get involved in raising awareness in your community.



## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

### Sending Prayer

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

God of all people, stir us with discomfort, shake us from apathy, and call us to action. Be with those trapped in trafficking and sustain those who work to free them. We cry out for justice not without offering ourselves to be your hands and feet in the world. Amen.

### Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)

We will end our session today with a blessing, sending you on your way. When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on your forehead.

Mother Teresa was intolerant of poverty. Bono is intolerant of AIDS. Nelson Mandela was intolerant of apartheid. Martin Luther King Jr. was intolerant of racism. Jesus was intolerant of bigotry. May God bless you with beautiful intolerance that you may:

- **Stand up** – against evil.
- **Stand with** – the marginalized.
- **Stand for** – justice.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Amen.

# GATHERING FOR JUSTICE

GOING  
DEEPER  
HANDOUT

Here are some great national as well as international organizations that are working to end human trafficking. Some raise awareness, some raise money, and some offer practical ways you can respond.

“You Can Make A Difference in the Fight Against Modern Slavery” magazine article:  
[archives.relevantmagazine.com/reject-apathy/you-can-make-difference-fight-against-modern-slavery](http://archives.relevantmagazine.com/reject-apathy/you-can-make-difference-fight-against-modern-slavery)

## How you can help:

- The Hotel Photo Project – [traffickcam.com](http://traffickcam.com)
- Truckers Against Trafficking – [truckersagainstrafficking.org](http://truckersagainstrafficking.org)
- Houston human trafficking tool kits – [humantraffickinghouston.org](http://humantraffickinghouston.org)

## How you can spread awareness:

- End It Movement – [enditmovement.com](http://enditmovement.com)
- Red Sand Project – [instagram.com/redsandproject](https://www.instagram.com/redsandproject)
- Free the Captives – [freethecaptiveshouston.com](http://freethecaptiveshouston.com)
- Modern-day slavery facts – [endslaverynow.org/learn/slavery-today](http://endslaverynow.org/learn/slavery-today)

## How you can support the fight:

- International Justice Mission – [ijm.org](http://ijm.org)
- Polaris Project – [polarisproject.org](http://polarisproject.org)
- Hope for Justice – [hopeforjustice.org](http://hopeforjustice.org)
- Not for Sale Campaign – [notforsalecampaign.org](http://notforsalecampaign.org)

## HELPFUL WEBSITES:

- [cnn.com/2016/08/11/us/the-hunt-john-walsh-diaz-juarez-texas-sex-slave-human-trafficking/](http://cnn.com/2016/08/11/us/the-hunt-john-walsh-diaz-juarez-texas-sex-slave-human-trafficking/)
- [theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/how-sex-trafficking-goes-unnoticed-in-america/470166/](http://theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/02/how-sex-trafficking-goes-unnoticed-in-america/470166/)
- [texasmonthly.com/articles/the-lost-girls/](http://texasmonthly.com/articles/the-lost-girls/)
- [patch.com/texas/houston/houston-mayor-unveils-comprehensive-human-trafficking-plan-super-bowl-looms](http://patch.com/texas/houston/houston-mayor-unveils-comprehensive-human-trafficking-plan-super-bowl-looms)
- [elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Justice-for-Women/Social-Issues/Human-Trafficking](http://elca.org/Our-Work/Publicly-Engaged-Church/Justice-for-Women/Social-Issues/Human-Trafficking)
- [pressandjournal.com/stories/human-trafficking-is-a-domestic-problem,3589?](http://pressandjournal.com/stories/human-trafficking-is-a-domestic-problem,3589?)
- [uccfiles.com/pdf/2017-Interfaith-Toolkit-on-Human-Trafficking.pdf](http://uccfiles.com/pdf/2017-Interfaith-Toolkit-on-Human-Trafficking.pdf)
- [sf-hrc.org/what-human-trafficking#What is\\_](http://sf-hrc.org/what-human-trafficking#What_is_)

**APRIL:**

# **GATHERING FOR ADVOCACY**

**PART 1**





**S**hishmaref is a fishing village in Alaska that is on an island only 3 miles long and a quarter-mile wide in the Chuckchi Sea, just north of the Bering Strait. The village has 560 residents and one church, an ELCA congregation. It's the type of place where nothing seems to change; for generations, the people have been hunting and fishing for food like their ancestors did. But slowly, and without the consent of the Alaskan Native Inupiaqs who live in Shishmaref, the island has been changing.

"Over the past 35 years, we've lost 2,500 to 3,000 feet of land to coastal erosion," said 20-year-old Shishmaref native Esau Sinnok in a letter to the U.S. Department of the Interior. "In the past 15 years, we had to move 13 houses – including my dear grandma Edna's house – from one end of the island to the other because of this loss of land. Within the next two decades, the whole island will erode completely."

On Aug. 16, 2016, by a narrow majority of 11 votes, the residents of Shishmaref decided to move the village inland after homes began falling into the sea due to land erosion from the lack of barrier ice.

According to the United Nations, an estimated one person every second has been displaced by a natural disaster since 2009. From droughts in Somalia to floods in Pakistan and Superstorm Sandy in the United States, there isn't a part of the world that hasn't been affected by the extreme weather events and shifting climate patterns attributed to global warming.

In 2013, the ELCA Churchwide Assembly passed a memorial to evaluate investment in fossil fuels, saying, "The increase in trapped heat changes the climate, causing altered weather patterns. These changes in weather are already measurable. They range from multi-year droughts to extreme storms and flooding and rising sea levels." With all this information, we need to be better informed about these effects on people and what this means for their displacement.

This session will focus on climate migration and how it affects people's lives as well as migration brought on by violence and strife in people's countries.



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

The Gathering will feature migration in Service Learning, Interactive Learning and post-Gathering resources. Texas is a hub of human migration from Central America and Mexico. There is an Immigrant Detention Center close to Houston in Texas. As a church, we respect all human life and strive for justice and peace in all the world. At the Gathering, there will be opportunities to learn about human migration, so you can make a difference in your community and beyond.

## HANDBOOK TIMELINE:

**April 2017** | Collect Gathering liability and medical release forms from participants. Acquire necessary information for tax-exempt status in Texas.



## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers or sticky notes
- match game sheet copies

## GATHER (15 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the question "What does migration mean to you?" and markers (or sticky notes) to write their answers. (Expect answers that relate to birds or animals.)

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why.

### The Intro

There are many types of migration – animals migrate seasonally. In our media today, we hear a lot about human migration, particularly people from the Mediterranean migrating west and people from Central America migrating north. Human migration is the movement by people from one place to another with the intention of settling temporarily or permanently in the new location. Typically, it involves movements over long distances and from one country or region to another. Migration can be voluntary or involuntary.

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

*Prayer for Welcome from Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Services.*

Lord, please remember all who come to America as refugees, especially children separated from their families. Lead them to safe homes, that they might live in peace and be reunited with loved ones. Amen!

Lord, please remember all who have fled their homelands to seek asylum in the United States, especially those in detention. Grant them strength and hope to endure, and grant them protection in our country. Amen!

Lord, please remember all who have found refuge or asylum in the United States. Bless and prosper their families in their new homeland, and inspire their new communities to embrace them and the gifts they bring that enhance our communities. Amen!

Lord, please remember churches, agencies and individuals that serve vulnerable newcomers. Give them wisdom, patience, perseverance and love to minister effectively. Amen!

Lord, thank you for opportunities to welcome newcomers. Guide me that I might continue to be a blessing for their lives as you have been for mine. Amen!

## Experiential Learning: Migration Game

*(attachment – will take about 20 minutes)*

To explore migration a bit more, we are going to participate in a Central American learning experience called a “dinámica.” All the children and families mentioned in this dinámica are real, though their names have been changed for their safety. Their situations were shared directly with the creators of this curriculum.

This experience is a basic matching game. The leader should print out the table below and cut out each of the family situations and outcomes, individually. You will end up with 20 cards. Have participants figure out which person matches with which outcome. (You may want to make multiple sets and break into small groups depending on your group’s size. We recommend groups of four to five people.) Give participants five to seven minutes to talk and choose their matches.

After all matches have been made, go through their matches to see how they did by reading the detailed paragraphs for each match. This dinámica was NOT designed to teach you to choose the right answer. It WAS designed to create an opportunity for conscious learning, self-awareness, and reflection on our theme of human migration. As we move toward exploring Scripture together, let’s hold these children and families in our hearts and minds, keeping their humanity present with us as a living reminder of who we are learning about as “the migrant.”

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God’s Story – Scripture

#### Jesus was a refugee

When exploring this passage, a map can be used to focus on tracing the journey of Joseph, Mary, and Jesus, starting from Bethlehem. Each section of the Scripture can be read, while using the map to show movement and talking about what the reasons are for moving. Start by reminding the group that this part of the story is right after the magi visited Jesus in Bethlehem.

Read **Matthew 2:13-23**.

Have the group pay attention to the topic of migration as they listen.

Discuss the passage:

- What were the reasons for migration: threat of death of Jesus by Herod; return to the land of their ancestors, but to a different place – not their hometown
- Notice the citizen status: They move from being a citizen of Bethlehem to a foreigner in Egypt.
- Children who did not migrate were killed.

## Our Story - Living Advocacy

The opening activity focused on migration from Central America, however, people from all over the world are migrating due such things as war, famine, climate change, violence and terrorism. We hear a lot in the news about Syrian refugees and others from the Mediterranean who are also migrating en-masse. What do you know about immigration? What have you heard in the news or from family members?

### LEARN:

Watch the following video clip. Pay attention to which words pop out at you.  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_B9wtsibMwM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_B9wtsibMwM) (4:08 min.)

### LISTEN:

- What emotions did you feel as you listened to this piece of spoken word by Lamyaa Hanchaoui?
- How does what you heard and saw in the video agree or disagree with what you hear and see in the media? (TV, social media, radio, etc.)
- It may be necessary to acknowledge that not every youth comes from a household or community that agrees with this. These can be divisive issues. We are focusing on how we are being called by God to engage in the world and show love for every human being (and all things for that matter!).

### CONNECT:

Read the case studies taken from two essays written by students at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Gettysburg who traveled to Central America to study human migration.

#### *Visit to Tomolá*

##### **Essay #1:**

"Climate change is a major factor that is contributing to the migration crisis. Drought, shortened growing seasons, blight, and other climate-related factors have made subsistence farming no longer a feasible way of life. We visited a village that has banded together to form a co-op of sorts. They have four large grain silos in a community storehouse. Each member of the co-op would buy into the reserve by contributing a bag of corn. At one point the entire reserve was full. Now it is completely empty. We knew that this most certainly did not bode well for Tomolá's future.

The community was holding a workshop when we visited to try to learn about different types of seeds and agricultural practices to make their way of life sustainable again. They are doing everything right, and yet they still struggle because of climate change.

In spite of the fact that they have so little, they showed us radical hospitality. One of the best meals we ate was prepared and served by women in this community. They would not accept payment or reimbursement for their efforts. They showed love to us as their neighbors who were visiting. The concept of community and caring for one another was ingrained in every fiber of their being. The love these people had for one another, and for us, was apparent. They do not want to leave their home, however, they may not have a choice in the future."

#### *Visit to Tomolá*

##### **Essay #2:**

"After an amazingly generous lunch, we made our way to a meeting that occurred inside the community storehouse. The first to speak to our community was one of the male leaders, who was also president of the grain cooperative that had begun

years back. He told us his story of traveling to the United States to work for three years to send money back home to cover the hospital bills and medicine for his sick father in Honduras. Despite his efforts, his father did not get better and eventually died. He seemed distraught that his dangerous and hard journey had not brought his father back to health. After his father died, he returned home to be with his family ... only to discover an imminent grain crises.

Next, a woman shared the story of her son who traveled to the United States to work and send money back to his mother for a brother who had been sick. They did not have money for medicine, and so her son's sacrifice of the journey north and his hard work were the lifeblood for his brother back in Honduras. Over time, they were able to pay for the medications with the remittance money; the sick son became well, and the son returned to Honduras to be with his family. The stories of migration from Tomolá were similar with extreme poverty, brought on by climate change, as the root cause.

The community had begun a grain storage cooperative process years prior, when there had been enough corn to go around. Each member would contribute a certain amount into the grain stores, which were held in common in silos within the grain house. When times were hard and there was not sufficient corn and sorghum, people would take from the grain stores what was needed. A drought had come upon the community over the prior two years, leading to the depletion of the entire grain supply. As the community described their dire situation, they knocked on the metal silos so that we could hear the emptiness inside resounding into the space around us. Though in crisis, the community was clearly bound together in hope for a different future.

I couldn't help but think about the story of Joseph from Genesis, where famine led to his brothers coming to draw from the king's grain house. The story of Joseph ended with reconciliation and sharing of resources; however, the story of Tomolá is taking a different route. There are no resources to be shared; and the ones who are most responsible for climate change are not in relationship with the ones most affected. The sound of the knocking on the silos was the sound of injustice – the sound of emptiness – but also the sound of expectation and desire for a new “camino” (way) in the days and years to come.”

### Discussion:

1. What was the overall theme or themes that you noticed from the two versions of this visit?
2. Who or what is responsible for the plight of the people of Tomolá?
3. What can these people do differently to better their situation?
4. What can we do differently to better their situation?

### ENGAGE:

The ELCA is committed to many forms of advocacy. Recently our church began an initiative called AMMPARO.

AMMPARO is a holistic, whole church commitment by the ELCA, as a church in the world, to accompany children today and in the future.

The word “amparo” in Spanish means “refuge,” the protection of a living creature from suffering or damage. The ELCA's strategy to Accompanying Migrant Minors with Protection, Advocacy, Representation and Opportunities (AMMPARO, [elca.org/Resources/AMMPARO](http://elca.org/Resources/AMMPARO)) was envisioned after witnessing the plight of children who are

forced to flee their communities because of complex and interrelated reasons, including chronic violence, poverty, environmental displacement and lack of opportunities in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala. Due to our connection to companion churches in the region, including companion synod relationships, and existing ministries in the U.S., the ELCA is well-positioned to help ensure that these vulnerable children are protected.

In a holistic, whole church response that connects international and domestic outcomes, the ELCA has developed this strategy based on the following commitments:

- uphold and guarantee basic human rights and safety of migrant children and their families;
- address the root causes of migration in countries from Central America's Northern Triangle and Mexico and the treatment of migrants in transit;
- work toward just and humane policies affecting migrants in and outside the U.S.; and
- engage as a church body with all of its companions, affiliates and partners to respond to the migration situation and its causes and to advocate for migrant children and their families.

As brothers and sisters in Christ, the ELCA is called to bear witness to the conditions affecting so many communities and find solutions that will acknowledge the humanity in all of God's children. Join us in making a difference in the lives of vulnerable children and families.



Have youth teach your congregation about AMMPARO.

## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

### **Sending Prayer**

A reading from Exodus: "When a foreigner resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress the foreigner. The foreigner who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the foreigner as yourself, for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt: I am the Lord your God."

Blessed are you, Lord Jesus Christ. You crossed every border between divinity and humanity to make your home with us. Help us welcome you in newcomers, migrants and refugees.

Blessed are you, God of all nations. You bless our land richly with goods of creation and with people made in your image. Help us be good stewards and peacemakers, who live as your children.

Blessed are you, Holy Spirit. You work in the hearts of all to bring about harmony and goodwill. Strengthen us to welcome those from other lands, cultures and religions that we may live in human solidarity and in hope.

God of all people, grant us vision to see your presence in our midst, especially in our immigrant sisters and brothers. Give us courage to open the door to our neighbors and grace to build a society of justice.

Source: Pax Christi

## Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

Joseph was an involuntary immigrant. His family voluntarily migrated due to famine and climate change. Naomi and Ruth also migrated due to famine and climate change. Jesus was a refugee who fled rampant violence and certain death. The ELCA advocates for and embraces immigrants and refugees. May God bless you with a fiery passion to advocate for others:

- **Stand up** – educate yourself and know the issues.
- **Stand with** – speak out and share what you know.
- **Stand for** – do something, so that others might see the love of Christ reflected in you.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” This changes everything!

Amen.



# MIGRATION GAME

This game is a basic matching game. The leader should print out the table below and cut out each of the family situations and outcomes, individually. You will end up with 20 cards. Have participants figure out which person matches with which outcome. (You may want to make multiple sets and break into small groups depending on your group size. We recommend groups of four to five people.) Give participants five to seven minutes to talk and choose their matches.

FAMILY & SITUATION	OUTCOME
<p><b>Domingo family</b> – Gang violence in their congregation's neighborhood, including a Sunday school student getting shot in the head close to the church.</p>	<p>Migrated to another neighborhood in the city.</p>
<p><b>Ramirez family</b> – Violence and no job opportunities in their neighborhood in the city.</p>	<p>Moved out of the city into the countryside of Honduras.</p>
<p><b>11-year-old Gustavo and his 9-year-old brother Alejandro</b> – Abusive stepmother and gang violence, causing them to not be able to go to school. They spend their days looking for recyclables to bolster the family's income.</p>	<p>Walked from Honduras to Guatemala; begged to stay at an orphanage there; deported to Honduras; repeated migration attempts.</p>
<p><b>44-year-old Paola</b> – No job opportunities and a single mother who left an abusive husband. She needs money to pay for her children's school and sick mother's medication. She worked in the U.S. and was deported. She's on her way back to the U.S. seeking more work.</p>	<p>Paid a lot of money for a work permit that ended up being illegal; dropped off at border fence; broke an ankle crossing; worked in the U.S. for 10 years; returned to Guatemala to be with family.</p>
<p><b>Tita, a mother, with her 9-year-old-son, Julio</b> – Displaced by increased tourism in their town.</p>	<p>Deported by bus on a 15-hour bus ride with no stops.</p>
<p><b>16-year-old Lupita</b> – Unable to go to school because of the cost and threats of violence.</p>	<p>Made three attempts with a coyote (human smuggler) enduring hunger and "treated like a dog" by Mexican police.</p>
<p><b>25-year-old Sandra</b> – Because her address is in a gang neighborhood, no one will hire her.</p>	<p>Worked in Mexico for six months to make money and returned home to be with her baby.</p>
<p><b>17-year-old Juan</b> – He wants to be reunited with his mother, who is in the U.S.</p>	<p>Was made to watch a gang rape, was robbed, and was threatened to be killed by gangs on the way north. He turned himself in.</p>
<p><b>27-year-old Guillermo</b> – A drought has left his village without a crop to farm and sell. His father is sick, and his family cannot afford the hospital bills.</p>	<p>Worked and sent home money for his father's hospital bills. His father died while he was away.</p>
<p><b>22-year-old Miguel</b> – His brother is sick and can't afford the medication. Climate change has left him without a job and food.</p>	<p>Worked and paid for brother's medication and returned home to be with family.</p>



# MIGRATION GAME

## Discussion:

It's OK if you haven't finished or if you are not sure of an answer. This was not designed to teach you to choose the right answer. It WAS designed to facilitate conscious learning, self-awareness, and now a time of reflection so that we can counter prejudice and stereotypes that our environment and media throw at us.

OK, let's talk about our matches. Most of these statistics are from 2014, the most accurate and recent we have.

**1.** Let's talk first about two Honduran families, the **Domingo and Ramirez families** who lived in a gang neighborhood with increasing violence. They were active in their Lutheran congregation, until a Sunday school student was shot in the head. Both families moved out of that neighborhood into another neighborhood within their country.

- 174,000: That is the number of people in 2014 who were displaced internally within Honduras, mostly due to gang violence. We often think of the large numbers of people who migrate north to the U.S., but there is very significant migration occurring both within countries and now southward.

**2.** 11-year-old **Gustavo** and his 9-year-old brother, **Alejandro**, were fleeing an abusive stepmother and gang violence. They walked from Honduras to Guatemala to an orphanage, where they wanted to stay. They were deported back to Honduras and have since made several more attempts north.

- 518 percent: That is the percentage of increase of children under 12 years old migrating from 2013 to 2014. (1100 to 5700 children).

**3.** 16-year-old **Lupita** was unable to go to school because of the cost and threats of violence. She made three attempts north with a coyote, enduring hunger and said she was "treated like a dog" by Mexican police.

- 306 percent: The largest increase in minors who are migrating is girls (1,800 in 2013 to 5,500 in 2014)

**4.** **Tita**, a mother, and her 9-year-old son, **Julio**, were displaced by an increase in tourism. This is happening to many Guarafina families in Honduras. They reached the U.S.-Mexico border and then were deported by bus on a 15-hour ride with no stops.

- 70,000: That's the number of people in family units who were deported from the U.S.; the number of people in family units deported from Mexico is much higher.

## MIGRATION GAME

**5.** 44-year-old **Paola**, a single mom who needed money to pay for her kids' education and her sick mother's medicine, paid a lot of money for a work permit that she thought was legal. She was dropped off at the U.S.-Mexico border and broke her ankle jumping the fence. She worked in the U.S. for 10 years, sending back money to pay for her kids' school and her mother's medication. She is now back in Guatemala with her family.

- 235,413 people like Paola were deported from the U.S. in the 2015 fiscal year.

**6.** 27-year-old **Guillermo** and 22-year-old **Miguel** are from the same village. A drought left them without work and food. Both of them had sick relatives and migrated to work and send money back home. Guillermo's father died while he was away. These men are the majority demographic of who is migrating, which also happens to be the most educated and able to work demographic.

- 17, 16 and 10 percent: These are the percentages of the gross domestic product that are coming into Honduras, El Salvador and Guatemala as remittance money. This money feeds the political and economic systems of the country but does not strengthen communities to not need to continue to migrate.

**7.** 17-year-old **Juan** tried to migrate to be with his mother in the U.S. On the way through Mexico, he was kidnapped and robbed by a gang that made him watch women be gang raped. He escaped and turned himself in to be deported. His trauma stays with him today.

- 70,000 is the number of children who were deported from the U.S. who were traveling solo, many like Juan who were trying to reach their mothers.

**8.** 25-year-old **Sandra** migrated because she could not get a job to support her baby with her address being in a gang neighborhood. She went to Mexico and worked for six months before returning home to be with her baby.

- 107,814 to 235,000: While the U.S. reported 42 percent less deportations in 2015 than in 2014, the number of people deported from Mexico went from 107,814 to over 235,000. The problems leading to migration are not going away; we are just not seeing as many people reach the U.S. The U.S. is financing the Mexican efforts; however, the violation of human rights has sharply increased in Mexico.

So now I would like you to just take a couple of minutes and talk in your small groups about what you have noticed or learned that you hadn't thought about before. What stood out to you? What surprised you? What were you feeling as you learned about these children and families? You have about five minutes.



**APRIL:**

# GATHERING FOR **ADVOCACY**

**PART 2:  
GOING  
DEEPER**

**A**dvocacy seeks to ensure that all people, particularly those who live at the margins or are vulnerable in our culture, have their voices heard. Advocacy is not done on behalf of another group but calls us into partnership with those whose voices we wish to amplify. Each of us is called to be an advocate, to lend our voices to a cause that sparks passion in our hearts. Advocacy is a particular kind of leadership that each of us can engage in daily.

Did you know that the ELCA has an advocacy office in Washington, D.C., and public policy offices across the country? Each year, the ELCA sets an advocacy agenda, helping members of the church engage in issues affecting the most vulnerable in our society. Read about the ELCA Advocacy 2017 Priorities here: [download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA\\_Advocacy\\_priorities\\_public.pdf](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/ELCA_Advocacy_priorities_public.pdf); or watch a video about their work here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F5bXIUXVixg>.

“Learn to do right; seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow” (Isaiah 1:17).

“Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” – Howard Thurman, theologian and civil rights activist.

This session will help us look at our advocacy work in our daily lives.



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

Advocacy seeks to ensure that all people, particularly those who live at the margins or are vulnerable in our culture have their voices heard. Advocacy is not done on behalf of another group but calls us into partnership with those whose voices we wish to amplify. Each of us is called to be an advocate, to lend our voices to a cause that sparks passion in our hearts. Advocacy is a particular kind of leadership that each of us can engage in daily.

The Gathering helps us come into partnership with the voices we need to amplify. The Mass Gatherings, Service Learning, Interactive Learning and Synod Day will help us shape our calling for partnership when we return home, calling us to action. The Gathering lifts up ways we can do just this!

### MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- markers

## GATHER (15 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the word “advocacy” to write down what they think this word means or ways they have done advocacy.

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why.

### The Intro

Advocacy seeks to ensure that all people, particularly those who live at the margins or are vulnerable in our culture have their voices heard. Advocacy is not done on behalf of another group but calls us into partnership with those whose voices we wish to amplify. Each of us is called to be an advocate, to lend our voices to a cause that sparks passion in our hearts. Advocacy is a particular kind of leadership that each of us can engage in daily.

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

In your eyes, God, all life has dignity. All people are worthy of your love and care.

None are left alone, none left behind: those who have no livelihood; the sick, the elderly and those with mental health challenges; the imprisoned and the migrant. All are your children, equally worthy of your blessings, and, in turn, equally worthy of the advocacy of the people of God.

Christ is our voice in the world. Show us, Lord, how to love our neighbor and care for the ones lost to the flock. Jesus spoke so that we might understand. He taught, so that we might learn. He acted, so that we might effect change in our lives and the lives of others. And he gave his life so that we might live in the grace of God. Jesus’ Spirit remains with us moving us to look with different eyes, hear with the ears of one who loves their brother and sisters and act to ensure that life is protected in every way.

As your church, we stand as one, asking for the protection of those who cannot protect themselves. We pray for justice for those who have no voice. In your name, we pray. Amen.

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story – Scripture

Read **Isaiah 1:17**.

Take a few minutes to reflect on the verse.

Next, read this quote: “Don’t ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” – Howard Thurman, theologian and civil rights activist

What is each calling us to do? After a few minutes of discussion ask each participant to create two lists. You can do this individually or as a group.

Hand out paper and pens. Have the youth write the answers to the following questions on their paper. For one list, write responses to the following questions:

- What is God calling us to do in the Isaiah verse?
- What are some ways you can live that out?

For the other list write responses to the following questions

- What makes YOU come alive?
- What are your passions in life?

Now look at these two lists side by side.

- Are there places where they overlap?
- What ways can you use your passions to live out God’s call to care for the oppressed?
- Discuss ways each member of your group can use their passions to live out God’s call to servant leadership.

As you prepare to engage in servant learning in our community and at the Gathering, you are called to SHIFT your mindset. By focusing on Stories, Healing, Intersections, Faith and Togetherness, you are called into leadership in partnership with others. This partnership is called advocacy.

### Our Story – Advocacy

*Before you serve: Discover Project Row Houses*

Rob Lowe is an artist who wanted to use his passion for art to spark change in Houston’s Third Ward. The ThirdWard is a predominantly African American area where many people live in poverty. Lowe wanted to find a way to use art to change the lives of the people in this neighborhood. By working with a coalition of artists and foundations, he purchased a row of houses built in the historic 3rd Ward, creating Project Row Houses.

The project uses art to celebrate African American culture and history as a way of transforming the community. Project Row Houses now owns 40 houses, each used to support the connections between art and the neighborhood. Some provide low-income houses, seven house a program for young, single mothers, and others are home to visiting artists who spend a year in residence creating art and working with the people of the Third Ward. The artists and staff hold weekly tutoring sessions, support first-generation college students, host free public art shows, and provide opportunities for local entrepreneurs to start small businesses. It is a central part of the community it serves.

Project Row Houses exists because a team of artists identified a way to connect their passion for art and their desire to make change. Like all the partners for the Gathering's Service Learning Day, their success is built on the ability of a team to see the needs of a community and respond from their unique point of view.

**LEARN:**

Visit the Project Row Houses website and learn more about the artists and how they use art to support activism and cultural awareness. [projectrowhouses.org](http://projectrowhouses.org).

- What are some things you discovered about this advocacy work and how might it fit in with your passions?
- Did it spark any ideas for you?

**LISTEN:**

Watch Kid President on leadership: [youtube.com/watch?v=KdL4o7wU0CQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=KdL4o7wU0CQ).

- Do you see yourself as a leader?
- What does this video remind us about leadership?
- How can we use our leadership skills to do the work of advocacy?

**CONNECT:**

When people attend the ELCA Youth Gathering, they become a part of one of the largest servant organizations in the country, a movement calling people to use their passions to service alongside others. For those going to Houston, you will learn about partners like Project Row Houses and work with them to serve. But the movement doesn't end after your day of service! We are called to create lollipop moments and continue this movement in our own neighborhoods by using the skill of advocacy.

**ENGAGE:**

Share the following ways that your group or individuals could engage in advocacy:

- We can be advocates by writing letters supporting the work of partners whose values are like our own.
- Use the ELCA Advocacy toolkit as a jumping point for advocacy work found here: [elca.org/en/Resources/Advocacy#Toolkit](http://elca.org/en/Resources/Advocacy#Toolkit).
- Help each youth to choose a cause, learn about a partner, and write that organization a letter asking how they can be part of that group's work.
- Encourage youth to share why that organization inspires them. Include a reply address or email so that the organization can respond to your requests.
- Using this format of LEARNING, LISTENING, CONNECTING and ENGAGING, take time to learn about at least one local organization your congregation can partner with in an ongoing mission to be part of the SHIFT movement. Stories, Healing, Intersections, Faith and Togetherness – this has the power to change everything.



Engage the congregation in using the ELCA Advocacy Toolkit.

## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

### Sending Prayer

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

(Portions attributed to Martin Luther King Jr.)

God of compassion, "We need leaders not in love with money but in love with justice. Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about the things that matter." Let our voices not be silent but used to speak up for those who cannot be heard. Guide our actions and our voices to bring justice for all into this world. In your name, we pray. Amen.

### Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)

When I say, "Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.

And also with you.

Mary was called to be the mother of God – to love, nurture, raise and protect Jesus until he was grown. Elizabeth was called to proclaim God's amazing presence in our world. Joseph was called to protect Mary and Jesus and to publicly present Jesus to the world. The angels were called to proclaim Jesus' birth and to encourage others to seek him out. The shepherds were called to seek Jesus and to proclaim his coming to others. God also has blessed you with a holy vocation:

**Stand up** – for those with no voice.

**Stand for** – justice for all people.

**Stand with** – all of God's creation using your passions and your voice to bring justice to the world.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Amen.

Go in peace. Continue reforming!

Thanks be to God.

**MAY:**

# **GATHERING FOR PURPOSE**

**PART 1**





**T**he ELCA teaches us about our calling, or what God wants us to do in our lives and in the world through its resource: Faith Practices in the ELCA – Living our baptismal covenant. This resource can be found here:

[download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Living\\_Our\\_Baptismal\\_Covenant.pdf?\\_ga=2.261763661.1591641643.1497585995-1211622384.1493906241](https://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Living_Our_Baptismal_Covenant.pdf?_ga=2.261763661.1591641643.1497585995-1211622384.1493906241).

It's not just the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" It's what does God desire you to do in the world today, tomorrow and for the future? Here is an excerpt from the introduction in the above resource:

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers ... . Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people" (**Acts 2:42, 46-47**).

"... their abundant joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of generosity on their part. For, as I can testify, they voluntarily gave according to their means, and even beyond their means, begging us earnestly for the privilege of sharing in this ministry to the saints — and this, not merely as we expected; they gave themselves first to the Lord and, by the will of God, to us ... "(**2 Corinthians 8:2-5**).

## LIVING IN COMMUNITY AS GOD'S FAITHFUL PEOPLE IS A GIFT OF LOVE AND AN INVITATION TO SERVE IN MISSION.

We are chosen not for position or privilege but to live as faithful witnesses to the good news of Jesus Christ. In our baptism, we were made children of God and members of the body of Christ, the church. God's message of hope and reconciliation strengthens us in our faith walk. Our life in Christian community supports us as we experience the joys and struggles of life. In our walk, we are encouraged to equally embrace all differences and celebrate the diversity of gifts that can strengthen us. So, what are we to do? That's what this session hopes to answer.

## GATHERING CONNECTION:

The Gathering encourages people to think more about vocation in our lives. The Gathering has been a catalyst for many youth and adults to experience God more fully and live life in response to our call from God, helping to discern our vocational calling from God. (What is God asking me to do?) Sometimes it's a small nudge to do something kind for someone. Sometimes it's a whole life focus shift to care for others in ways we never even thought about. For many, the Gathering has been the place that fed the fire burning inside them to live out their baptismal identity. The story of Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch shares this same idea. The eunuch heard the word interpreted from Philip and asked to be baptized, a baptism in the living waters of Jesus Christ, teaching us that grace changes everything. You can read this story in Acts 8:26-39. As Philip was called to offer interpretation and baptism, what are our youth sensing God is calling them to do? That's vocation.



## HANDBOOK TIMELINE:

**May 2017** – Registration closes and final payment due. Have a final parent-participant information meeting.

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- warm-up sheet in large print
- tape
- markers
- notecards with professions written on them

## GATHER (15 minutes):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the phrase "Something to do to change the world" and markers to write things they think they might do today, tomorrow or in the near future.

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why.

### The Intro

In this session, we will be focusing on understanding what God wants us to do in this world, using the talents God has given us.

It's not just the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" It's what does God desire you to do in the world today, tomorrow and for the future?.

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask for a volunteer to lead a gathering prayer asking God to be present in your conversation and to guide your learning. Feel free to add specific prayer requests of your community.*



### SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Tweet or Instagram YOUR vocation!  
#Purpose #ELCAYG2018

## Experiential Learning: What Do I Do?

Headband-style game using vocations on the cards but not using the “vocation” language quite yet.

- Objective: To identify the card you’re holding on your head given the clues that other people give you.
- Sample vocations to write on cards: doctor, lawyer, pastor, mother, president, congressional representative, judge, law enforcement officer, firefighter, paramedic, teacher, principal, custodian, lunchroom worker, baseball player (or any iteration of a professional sports player), gardener, naturalist, father, scientist, surgeon.
- Supplies needed: index cards and something to write the vocations on the cards with (should be done before the session begins). Each participant takes one of the cards and tapes it on their forehead without looking at it.
- At the beginning of a player’s turn, the timer is turned over. During a player’s turn, they ask yes or no questions in order to help them figure out what word is written on the card in their headband. Players can continue asking questions until their time runs out. When a player asks a question, all of the other players may only answer the question with “yes,” “no,” “could be” or “I don’t know.” At any time, a player can guess what word is written on their card. They can make as many guesses as they want with no penalty for guessing incorrectly. If they are right, they remove the card go and help others identify their vocations on their cards, embodying the profession that they identified on their own card. (For example, if they had “doctor” on their card, they might use lots of medical jargon when interacting with others, or act like they’re in the emergency room and interacting with haste.)
- Processing questions
  - What did you discover in this experience? (all “jobs” that people do)
  - What is the definition of a “job” (a paid position of regular employment, a task or piece of work, which one usually gets paid for)

We as Christians do hold “jobs” where we “work,” but as Christians, we have a wider understanding of “work.” In this session, we are going to look at our “work.” But we don’t call it “work or job” we call it “vocation.” In the church, we seem to have fancy names for just about everything, not just to be different but to bring a deeper definition to how we live in the world. We’ll look at this word “vocation” as we move through this session. But to start, vocation is more than a job, so keep an open mind as we learn more.



## WORD (30 minutes):

### God's Story - Scripture

The story of Mary from Luke's Gospel, **Luke 1:26-56; 2:1-24**

Read the story in sections, from one or multiple translations, talking through questions and insights from the group and then addressing the theme of vocation in the characters in that specific section, writing them down on paper or a whiteboard:

#### Read Luke 1:26-38

Vocational themes:

- Mary: openness and willingness to accept God's purpose for her
- Angel: messenger, doing God's work, teaching and interpreting, proclamation of God's promises

#### Read Luke 1: 39-56

Vocational themes:

- Mary: impending motherhood, proclamation, musician
- Elizabeth: impending motherhood, proclamation, musician, hospitality

#### Read Luke 2:1-7

Vocational themes:

- Mary and Joseph: faithfulness, travelers, obedient to authority, relationship and engagement to one another, parenthood

#### Read Luke 2:8-20

Vocational themes:

- Shepherds: working (being shepherds, caring for the sheep), obedient, trusting, curious, proclamation
- Angels: proclamation, reassuring, directors, musicians
- Mary: reflection

#### Read Luke 2:21-24

Vocational themes:

- Mary and Joseph: abiding by God's law, being faithful to their beliefs, parents

### Our Story - Vocation

#### LEARN:

Watch "Vocation 101: What is Vocation?" together, [youtube.com/watch?v=ihnzFH2L818&t](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihnzFH2L818&t) (2:42 min.)

As a group, define what gifts, talents and passions are (from the 1:25 mark). Have words written on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper and write down the ideas from the group.

- Sample definitions for each of these words for the leader to have for a common definition to be able to use:
  - Gifts: a special ability or capacity; natural endowment; talent
  - Talents: a special natural ability or aptitude
  - Passions: a strong or extravagant fondness, enthusiasm or desire for anything
- Together, brainstorm examples in each of the categories: gifts, talents and passions.

**LISTEN:**

**Vocation definition:** Where gifts, talents and passions collide is our vocation.

Share with the group the following definition of Vocation: **“The thing you do that was given to you to do in the way you do for the benefit of those you are doing it for.”** (Jacobson, RA; Jacobson, KN; Wiersma, H. Crazy Talk: A Not So Stuffy Dictionary of Biblical Terms, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009. Print) Got that? Vocation – not to be confused with vacation (taking a break from things) or evacuation (getting stuff out of your system) – is the thing(s) you are called by God to do, with gifts and talents God has given you, to which you commit your passion and excitement and energy for the sake of God’s creation.

The word comes from a Latin term, “vocare,” meaning “calling” – which implies a caller: God. God calls more than just pastors. God calls each of us, gives us many gifts, and gives us a lift by means of the Spirit. We all have more than one vocation. Our Christian vocations include our jobs, our roles as family members, our roles as friends, as neighbors, as citizens, and so on. Vocation is all about loving the neighbor and serving in God’s name.



Post a large sheet with the words *How is God Calling You?* written on it. Encourage your congregation to write their thoughts on the sheet.

**CONNECT:**

What do we see in Mary’s vocational journey that can help us understand our own?

- How have you experienced a change or growth in your own vocation?
  - Do you see the things you are passionate about now being what you will do your whole life? How might they change as you grow?
  - Are there changes that you are you looking forward to?

**ENGAGE:**

Watch “Vocation 201: How Do I Discover My Vocation?”

[youtube.com/watch?v=li1kICU31wA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=li1kICU31wA) (1:47 min.)

- That’s a lot to take in. Remember what was said in the video. This doesn’t happen overnight. It takes time to figure this out.
- Vocation calling is a lifetime thing. Be open to how God is calling you today, tomorrow and in the future.

## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

### **Sending Prayer**

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe. You made the whole earth for your glory; all creation praises you. We lift our voices to join the songs of heaven and earth in thanksgiving for the many blessings you have given us. Renew in us the commitment to use our vocations in the service of others, especially of those in need. Let us be your hands to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, comfort the weary and outcast, welcome the stranger, care for creation, and be loving neighbors to all people. We pray all these things through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **Go and Do Likewise – (Blessing and Sending)**

When I Stand up," we all stand up. When I say, "Stand with," put your arm around your neighbor's shoulder. When I say, "Stand for," mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with you.  
And also with you.

Mary was called to be the mother of God – to love, nurture, raise, and protect Jesus until he was grown. Elizabeth was called to proclaim God's amazing presence in our world. Joseph was called to protect Mary and Jesus and to publicly present Jesus to the world. The angels were called to proclaim Jesus' birth and to encourage others to seek him out. The shepherds were called to seek Jesus and to proclaim his coming to others. God also has blessed you with a holy vocation:

**Stand up** – using your gifts to serve God.

**Stand for** – using your talents to care for all people.

**Stand with** – God's creation using your passions to better God's creation and change the world.

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God." This changes everything!

Amen.

Go in peace. Serve the Lord.  
Thanks be to God.



**MAY:**

# GATHERING FOR PURPOSE

**PART 2:  
GOING  
DEEPER**

**G**ETTING READY IN REVIEW! This session will review the learnings from the past year, reminding your group of how they have been shaped and formed to engage in the Gathering and in the world. You have shared a lot, learned a lot and changed a lot! Take the time to review so you are poised to go deeper at the Gathering next month!

Encourage your group to continue their action items in your community. Continue to look for ways to engage, serve and reform!



## GATHERING CONNECTION:

See previous page. :)

## HANDBOOK TIMELINE:



**May 2017** – Do a final check of your group schedule, meal plans, etc., “The Official Gathering Handbook,” pages 35, 41.

## MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- printout of “This Changes Everything” page from the appendix (or a newsprint sheet you have written those words on)
- markers
- the warm-up sheets from all your sessions (hung around your space)
- sticky notes
- four pieces of poster board with the words: Learn, Listen, Connect and Engage written in bold print (one word per board)

## GATHER (5 MINUTES):

### Warmup

As the youth enter the space, encourage them to use the large-print version of the Gathering theme “This Changes Everything” to write down what they remember from this past year in your time together that reminds them that Jesus’ life, death and resurrection changes everything.

Call the group together when you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why.

### The Intro

We have learned and shared a whole lot this past year. We’ve done so much, we want to take some time to remember all that we did and how it prepares us to engage in the Gathering next month!

### Gathering Prayer

*Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.*

God of community, we have done, learned and experienced so much this past year about you, Jesus, our faith and the world. Let all we have continue to shape and inform our daily lives, our decisions and our work in the world.

In your name, we pray. Amen.



### SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Instagram a group photo surrounded by your “warm-up” word posters from the past year to @ELCAGathering2018 #YourGroupName.



## Experiential Learning: Year in Review

- Have the group go around the room, looking over the warm-up sheets, have them pay attention to what they wrote.
- Ask your group to see if there are things they would add to the sheets now that they have been through the whole year.
- If they have anything to add, have them use a sticky note and stick it to the page.
- After all have had a chance to do this, reflect on what they saw and any insights they had.

## WORD (30 MINUTES):

### God's Story - Scripture

Together read the Gathering theme text from **Ephesians 2:8**.

- Ask the group what they learned about this text over the last year.
- Remind them that it is by God's grace through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus that we are saved. There is nothing we can do for our salvation. God has already done it through Jesus!
- Grace is a foundational and distinctive piece of the Lutheran faith. This gift, undeserved and freely given, changes lives and perspectives as people realize they are enough because of what Christ has done and are called into the world to serve their neighbor and share the good news.
- The Gathering logo is a visual representation of the Gathering theme and the 2018 Gathering experience. It incorporates the coming together of a mosaic to reflect the diverse host city of Houston, as well as the idea that we are a church where all are imperfect and incomplete, yet we each belong in – and have an important place in – God's masterpiece. The cross at the center of the logo is the focus – it is God's grace, through Christ's life, death and resurrection, that changes everything for all people.
- This changes everything!



## Our Story - Looking Back to Move Forward

Throughout these sessions in the "Our Story" portion, we focus on the service learning process of learn, listen, connect and engage. Today we are going to look over the past year and use that to build preparation for the Gathering. (Use the poster boards with the words Learn, Listen, Connect, and Engage for this portion.)

### LEARN:

Using markers, write down things you have learned over the last year that have made an impression on you.

After all are done, share what was written.

### LISTEN:

Using markers, write down things you heard over the last year that stuck with you or sparked your interest.

After all are done, share what was written.

### CONNECT:

Using markers, write down ways that they saw opportunities for connection with our congregation and our community. They can also include ways they felt connected to the topic or something they learned.

After all are done, share what was written.

### ENGAGE:

Using markers, write down ways they have engaged or are planning to engage the learnings and experiences from this past year in the congregation and community. Include ways they are better prepared to engage in the Gathering.

After all are done, share what was written.

Review the poster boards and give any final thoughts. Thank the group for their great work and engagement over the last year.



Post the sheets from the "Our Story" section of this lesson where the congregation can see and refer to them as you depart for Houston!

## SENDING (5 MINUTES):

*Gather around the Christ Candle and ask someone to share the following prayer.*

### **Sending Prayer**

Blessed are you, O Lord our God, ruler of the universe. You made the whole earth for your glory; all creation praises you. We lift our voices to join the songs of heaven and earth in thanksgiving for the many blessings you have given us. Renew in us the commitment to serve others, especially of those in need. Let us be your hands to feed the hungry, shelter the homeless, clothe the naked, comfort the weary and outcast, welcome the stranger, care for creation, and be loving neighbors to all people. We pray all these things through your son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

### **Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)**

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And also with you.

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Amen.


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Thanks be to God.

# #ELCAYG2018

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