

SEPTEMBER:

GATHERING FOR COMMUNITY

PART 1

**GETTING
READY**



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



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

Community 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=StIBPiMQQ28](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=StIBPiMQQ28) (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**

Community 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

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 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.

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Download the complete, year-long curriculum at www.elca.org/gathering

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