

**NOVEMBER:**

# **GATHERING FOR HOME** 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

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

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Download the complete, year-long curriculum at [www.elca.org/gathering](http://www.elca.org/gathering)

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**READY**

**WITH**

**US!**

**QUESTIONS? EMAIL**  
[gathering@elca.org](mailto:gathering@elca.org)  
[www.elca.org/gathering](http://www.elca.org/gathering)