

**JANUARY:**

# GATHERING FOR **LOVE** 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

**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=PLBVNJ07nhINROnXIV5yXTII\\_NjjM4ZRJD&src\\_vid=1czDASTpH9M&v=f0tEcxLDDd4](https://youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_1297383017&feature=iv&index=3&list=PLBVNJ07nhINROnXIV5yXTII_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?
- **Psalm 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!

# #ELCAYG2018

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