

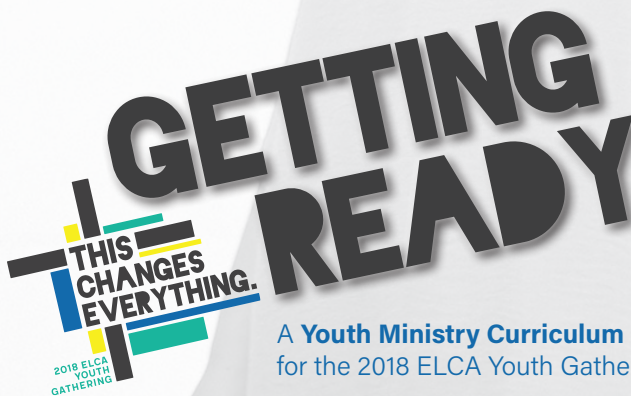
**FEBRUARY:**

# GATHERING FOR RELATIONSHIP

**PART 1**



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



# GETTING READY

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

**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=IAvJh6GnrxY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAvJh6GnrxY) (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.
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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**

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Amen.

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**GET**

**READY**

**WITH**

**US!**

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