

THE OFFICIAL GATHERING HANDBOOK

TIPS & TRICKS FOR ADULT LEADERS

**THIS
CHANGES
EVERYTHING.**

2018 ELCA
YOUTH
GATHERING

INS
HIP
FUN

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#ELCAYG2018



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INTRODUCTION

Dear Youth Ministry Leaders,

The Gathering seeks to be a place, an event where young people can encounter God in new ways and grow in their faith. We know through research, evaluations and conversations that youth who are part of a well-prepared and well-led group have a fuller, deeper and all around better experience at the Gathering, and so a primary goal for Gathering leadership is to help you prepare and lead.

This is the first edition of “The Official Gathering Handbook: Tips and Tricks for Adult Leaders,” and it represents the collective wisdom of adult leaders from across our church. While this certainly isn’t an all-inclusive guide to the Gathering, we hope that every adult leader – newbie or veteran, volunteer or paid, rural, suburban or urban – can find helpful hints and resources.

A huge thank you to our writing team, the Gathering staff and all who contributed tidbits of wisdom. This was an enormous task, and it has been carried out with thoughtfulness and good humor.

Many blessings to you as you prepare yourself and your group for the ELCA Youth Gathering!

In Christ,

Molly Beck Dean

Molly Beck Dean
Director, ELCA Youth Gathering

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This handbook is made possible by contributions from across the Church. A special thanks to the core team who gathered for a weekend of generative brainstorming and writing:

Christian Hicks
Chelle Huth
Aaron Tidwell
Paige Thomas
Amy Wagner
Vanessa Young

Thank you, also, to the many people who sent content suggestions and resources via email and social media. We tried to acknowledge these contributions whenever possible if a source was clearly identifiable.

The collaborative nature of youth ministry means that resources, ideas and knowledge are shared within the community and passed on through informal conversation, personal connections, conferences and websites, etc. Many ideas or suggestions you read about may be the same ones you've had yourself or seen other places – we see this as an affirmation of things that seasoned professionals know work well! We are grateful for the collective wisdom of the community, and again, tried to include acknowledgments whenever possible.

Other known inspirations or contributions came from these individuals and organizations:

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The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod National Youth Gathering
Vibrant Faith



ABOUT THE GATHERING:

Every three years, 30,000 high school youth and their adult leaders from across the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America gather for a week of faith formation known as the Gathering. Through days spent in interactive learning, worship, Bible study, service and fellowship, young people grow in faith and are challenged and inspired to live their faith in their daily lives.

An important part of the Gathering's ministry are the two pre-events, the **Multicultural Youth Leadership Event** (MYLE), a faith formation and leadership development event primarily for youth of color, and **the tAble**, an ELCA gathering of youth with disabilities.



ADDRESSING FEARS & EXPECTATIONS

*Big city. 30,000 people. First time traveling from home.
McDonald's running out of food.*

These are legitimate concerns that many groups will face when planning for the Gathering. Whether you are from an urban, suburban or rural area, the Gathering will present a unique set of challenges and opportunities for you and your young people. Some things to be mindful of during the planning process include:

RESEARCH

Do your research to learn about the host city so you can address any potential fears from both youth and their guardians – and yourself. Sign up for gNews on the [Gathering website](#) to keep informed of any updates. Attend pre-Gathering events and meetings your synod may host. It will be a great opportunity to network with other leaders and search for answers to any concerns you may have. Reach out to your Synod Coordinator for reassurance and information.

PLAN

Develop an emergency plan, create a covenant, discuss the “buddy system” with your group, and identify meeting points in case anyone gets separated from the group. Gather everyone’s cellphone number and make sure that they have yours so everyone can be in constant contact. Carry a copy of everyone’s medical forms and be aware of any allergies and prescription medications.

PREPARE

For some attendees, this will be the first time traveling outside of their hometown. For others, it will be the first time visiting a major city. Others may be shocked that they’ll hear gospel music played during the worship services. Some may be concerned about being around 30,000 people. Be aware that every participant will have different expectations and fears about the Gathering and the host city. Having an honest conversation about those fears before the Gathering is the best way to ensure that everyone is on the same page. If you know anyone who previously attended a Gathering, speak with them about their experience and have them speak to your group about what to expect during the event, which can be an intense (and life-changing) emotional and faith experience.

PRAY

With God at the center of your preparation, you will be equipped to succeed. Remind your youth that this event exists, above everything else, to strengthen their relationship with God and to better understand their purpose in life up to this point. If you don't do it already, make prayer a part of your daily, personal ritual and part of the routine when engaging in any youth activity.

The best thing to keep in mind is that **you are not alone**. You are part of an incredible network with resources to help you prepare. During the Gathering, you will be under the watchful eye of hundreds of planners, volunteers and security personnel whose responsibility is for you and your group to have a positive and safe experience. You are reading this book, so you will be equipped for a majority of the things that you will experience during the Gathering. Most importantly, you serve an amazing and awesome God who can and will provide for you and your group during the entire Gathering experience. With all of that in mind, **“do not be afraid”** (Mark 6:50).

MY NOTES

“THE BEST THING TO KEEP IN MIND IS THAT YOU ARE NOT ALONE. YOU ARE PART OF AN INCREDIBLE NETWORK WITH RESOURCES TO HELP YOU PREPARE.”

PRE-GATHERING

WE WANT TO GO TO THE GATHERING. NOW WHAT?

Preparing for the Gathering is just as important as attending the Gathering.

Whether you are a group of two or 22, preparing for the Gathering is the most important thing that you can do to ensure that you and your group will have an amazing experience together. There is a lot of information to consider. Read through this resource at a comfortable pace, take notes along the way, and feel free to share the load by inviting others in your congregation to be responsible for different sections.

YOU'RE AN ADULT LEADER. NOW WHAT?

First things first – breathe and pray to God giving thanks for this blessing and calling you to this important ministry! The Gathering is transformational for those who attend. One person put it perfectly:

The Gathering belongs on the timeline of your faith journey.

Now that you're onboard, there are tons of details to handle and people to guide. This section will help you prepare yourself and your group for the Gathering. It will also guide you in recruiting other adult leaders to engage in this ministry with you (because you should not do it alone; no one should ever do ministry alone!).

Let's begin with you: The Gathering is a huge undertaking, and you will need patience, grace, energy and enthusiasm to do this work. Please remember to keep a positive attitude during this whole process. It really does make a difference.

Call yourself adult leaders, not chaperones. Leaders are engaged. Chaperones are watching from the sidelines and unengaged. We love the opportunity to engage and grow with youth. They will teach you as well. In fact, adults come away with so much through these experiences, they sometimes wonder if they've gotten more out of it than the youth.

Everyone (including you) is working hard to prepare for the Gathering. People of all ages are investing time and money for themselves, or someone else, to be part of the Gathering experience. Sometimes that can lead to an inward focus of “What’s in it for me?” We get it; it’s a lot of work and sacrifice. What if we thought more about “How will I accompany the youth in this experience?” Accompany, meaning walking alongside, exploring together, putting others before personal needs or wants. It is about being a non-anxious presence, entering the experience completely open and interested in someone else’s thoughts and needs, sharing and listening, being someone who includes those on the fringes, someone who waits their turn, who allows someone else to go first, who engages intentionally in ways that encourage mutual discovery and growth. You can do this; we know you can because God has called you to this. Don’t ever lose sight of that.



RECRUITING ADULT LEADERS TO JOIN IN THE JOURNEY

In the mix of all the things that need to happen as a congregation prepares for a Gathering experience, one of the most critical pieces will be recruiting, preparing and supporting the adult leaders who will lead and be part of the journey and experience with the young people.

There are five key components to putting together a successful Gathering experience:

1. Intentionally choosing adult leaders
2. Careful planning
3. Focused group building
4. Processing the experience as it happens each day
5. Meaningful closure and follow-up



Choosing adult leaders

Great adult leaders for your Gathering experience could mean the difference between success and disaster. Regardless of the size of your group, being intentional about selecting adults is key. Take this responsibility seriously. Ask the question: Why do we send adult leaders? If the only answer you can think of is, "To keep youth in line and out of trouble," we invite you to rethink this. Adults are positive mentors and guides. They empower and encourage youth in opportunities of leadership and relationships. They are connectors for youth and the Gathering experience, and for youth and their relationships with peers and other adults. They are spiritual mentors. Some call adults with these attributes AAA adults, adults who are authentic, affirming and available.

Search carefully

When looking for adult leaders for the Gathering, do just that – look for them. Pay attention to adults and how they interact with youth. See potential. Recognize abilities. Talk to them. Plant a seed. Ask them to "think about it." Avoid advertising if at all possible. If someone volunteers and you have no idea who they are or what they're about, don't say yes or make a commitment to them. Check them out first. Talk to people who might know them. Talk with them to better understand who they are. If you feel they have potential, get them involved with the youth in a group setting to see how they connect and interact. They might pass a background check (a requirement for adult leaders at the Gathering!) but even that does not ensure they are a good fit for this role.



Before any firm commitments are made, be sure to talk to youth and get their recommendation about which adults they might respect and relate to well and would be interested in having along on the trip. Some groups create a team of youth and adults (heavy on the youth) who choose their adults from the list of those who are interested in going.

Depending on the size of your group and the number of adults you need, consider putting together a diverse team of adults who will relate to youth in a variety of ways. Pull together parents, adults who are married without children, young adults (must be 21 or older), parents whose children have graduated, singles, older adults and the like. This brings about a wonderful balance of potential, ages and life experience. There is no one perfect adult leader. You want every young person to connect with at least one adult and hopefully several during the experience.

Part of the search for caring, competent, faithful adults may involve performing background checks, if your congregation hasn't done so within the past year. If the background-check policy for youth leaders or advisers is unclear or nonexistent, have a conversation with staff and leaders of the congregation and urge taking the extra step and cost of checking out your volunteers. It's required for all adult leaders at the Gathering, and the safety, health and well-being of the young people we are entrusted with are worth the extra work and every penny of the cost.

AN EFFECTIVE ADULT LEADER WILL HAVE:

- faith and be able to talk about their faith comfortably
- a healthy, balanced life of their own as an adult
- a relationship with youth or open to developing one
- patience and wisdom
- an interest in youth and youth culture
- a focus on youth and their needs
- commitment and insightfulness
- the ability to see what needs to be done and then do it
- a positive, appropriate sense of humor and playfulness
- the ability to remain calm when unexpected things or emergencies occur
- the ability to share responsibilities and tasks with youth and other adult leaders
- the ability to be observant of group dynamics and other things going on around them at any given time
- good listening skills and attentiveness to youth
- the physical and emotional ability to fully participate as an adult leader in a very active program
- ability to be adaptive and supportive

Adapted from Kathy Hunstad, Trinity Lutheran, Moorhead, Minn.



Adults considering the Gathering experience should ask themselves some questions:

- Do I love teenagers?
- Am I willing to engage young people's faith questions without judgment?
- Can I be vulnerable with young people about my own faith questions?
- Do I have the physical and emotional stamina to handle long, hot, full days?
- Am I a team player?
- Will I be able to focus on the youth and their needs?
- Do I have good listening skills?
- How do I deal with conflict?
- Am I patient?
- Do I listen first or do I jump to conclusions?
- Am I able to see what needs to be done and pitch in?
- Can I develop appropriate, healthy relationships with youth and help them relate to each other?
- Where am I in my faith life?
- Will I be able to share my faith in positive, encouraging ways?

**Adapted from Kathy Hunstad, Trinity Lutheran, Moorhead, Minn.*

Set realistic and honest expectations

Adults need to know that this is not a vacation, no matter how much fun the trip will be. It's a working trip with the powerful, positive possibility of changing the adult's life as much as the youths' with whom they travel. There is less sleep than in a normal night, but there is also much more fulfillment than in a normal day.

Accompanying adults first and foremost need to love being with teenagers. At the very least, your experience will be five days long. You'll need mature, centered adults who are gracious, faith-focused, great team players, willing to go with the flow, and motivated to see what needs to be done and follow through. Sounds impossible? Asking too much? We don't think so. There are many adults who possess these qualities. They will need preparation, support and affirmation though to maintain their energy, positive attitude and enthusiasm.

“YOU’LL NEED MATURE, CENTERED ADULTS WHO ARE GRACIOUS, FAITH-FOCUSED, GREAT TEAM PLAYERS, WILLING TO GO WITH THE FLOW, AND MOTIVATED TO SEE WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE AND FOLLOW THROUGH.”

Training is essential

The time spent training adult leaders before the trip is very important. They need time to address the serious issues, understand the information, consider the possibilities, and anticipate and perhaps role-play different scenarios that relate to the experience. They also need time to get to know each other, better understand each other's skills and strengths, learn to work together, and have fun. The time spent building relationships and training is a great example to set for the youth of your congregation.

Recruiting and preparing adult leaders for your Gathering experience involves lots of careful work but pays off big-time! It also leads to caring, healthy adult-youth relationships far beyond the Gathering.

**Adapted from Kathy Hunstad, Trinity Lutheran, Moorhead, Minn.*

You have a great team of adults. What's next?

Here are some tips to get you thinking about your Gathering experience:

- Read everything the Gathering puts out. It is there to help you.
- Consider pairing up with another congregation or a few congregations to work on logistics and planning together. Many hands make light work, as does many brains providing input (and they may have an adult who has been to the Gathering, or maybe you can offer that gift!) More on this in a following section.
- Use the Getting Ready curriculum created to prepare your group for engaging fully in the Gathering. This curriculum can be used with your whole youth program, not just those attending the Gathering. There are devotions for adult leaders and a wealth of learning resources free for your use, so use them!
- You get out of the Gathering what you put into the Gathering. It's true, really, really true! Groups that use the Getting Ready curriculum and spend time digging into the theme have a deeper experience and get much more out of the Gathering.
- Use your Synod Coordinator. Visit the [Gathering website](#) or call your synod office to find out who it is. They have tons of information and their role is to help you with the Gathering logistics.
- Involve the whole congregation in getting ready for the Gathering:
 - Post thought-provoking questions centered around the Gathering theme to your congregation's Facebook page.
 - Assign each person attending the Gathering a prayer buddy from the congregation, someone who will be praying for them while on the trip.
 - Share insights your group has while engaging in the Getting Ready materials.

SOME **BEST PRACTICES** FOR ADULT LEADERS FROM SEASONED YOUTH MINISTRY WORKERS:

- ability to be excited when youth are not
- accompany students; journey with them
- allow students to lead
- be able and willing to articulate faith and communicate it with others
- be an adult first, not a friend
- be in control without controlling
- **BE AN EXAMPLE! If you show grace, they show grace; if you show anger, they show anger**
- be able to draw boundaries
- commit to being involved with students throughout the year(s)
- conversations, not corrections
- create a safe place for discussion
- debrief and plan daily with other leaders
- engage participants in the Getting Ready materials and preparation for the Gathering
- empower others
- expect the unexpected; brainstorm scenarios and solutions
- be flexible
- focus on true goal of gathering
- be generous
- be genuine
- be a good listener
- **HAVE FUN!**
- have an attitude of gratitude
- humor
- keep students safe
- know your young people
- be level-headed in crisis
- be a listener (with ears and eyes)
- love Jesus
- love youth
- no triangulation
- a non-anxious presence
- open to other views and opinions
- organized
- own your mistakes
- patience
- person of integrity
- physically, emotionally and spiritually prepared
- positive attitude
- **BE PRESENT AND INVESTED!**
- reliable
- respected
- sense of adventure
- servant attitude
- sleep when you can
- take initiative
- team player
- understand the group covenant
- variety of strengths/balance

- Use a bulletin board in your gathering space to post things to ponder in the coming week using the theme as a beginning point (or on the inside of bathroom stalls).
- Splash the Gathering logo everywhere you can!
- As you share, be sure to focus on the faith formation that is happening with the group, not just the fun you're having or going to have.
- Take a photo of the youth not attending the trip, enlarge the photo and carry it with your group. Include them in the pictures you take at the Gathering to let them know they're with you in heart!
- Study the Gathering website for information: [ELCA.org/gathering](https://www.elca.org/gathering).
- Sign-up for gNews, the e-newsletter at the above website.



GOING SOLO OR PARTNERING UP

One of the first big decisions you'll have to make is whether you will prepare for and attend the Gathering as an individual congregational group or with a partner congregation. There are a number of factors to think about when considering either option, and congregations have had great success attending both ways.

Some groups opt to pair with other congregations in order to pool resources. For example, your congregation might have five female youth and one male youth registered to attend. In this scenario, we would strongly encourage bringing both male and female adult leaders. But maybe a neighboring congregation has the exact opposite male to female youth ratio. Instead of having each group finding an adult for just one youth, you could attend together and share responsibility and rooming lists.

Another common situation is one congregation has access to a bus or van with open seats. It might be a huge cost savings to both congregations to partner with them as opposed to arranging travel separately. Plus, you'll be guaranteed to know at least one congregation in the midst of thousands in attendance at the Gathering.

Attending with another congregation is an especially good option for first-time primary leaders or those from smaller congregations who want to share the responsibility of organizing pre-gathering meetings, want someone to divide and conquer the planning and logistics, or for those who just generally prefer a co-pilot for these types of experiences.

Through networking with congregations in your synod, reaching out to your Gathering Synod Coordinator (find them on the Gathering website), or contacting your synod office, you can identify some likely congregations if you are looking to go the route of partnering.

On the flip side, there is nothing wrong with preparing for and attending the Gathering with just your group. In fact, it may even simplify your Gathering experience! It allows your group more flexibility and autonomy when making decisions. Through the fundraising and planning process, you will find that your group will grow closer and build the lifelong bonds of friendship. Planning to attend as a solo group will solidify your group's identity before joining the Gathering's masses.

Ultimately, you need to look at your congregation, the available resources, and who is willing and able to devote the necessary time to making it the most transformative experience possible.



Choosing to travel and prepare for the Gathering together and choosing to attend the Gathering as one congregation are two very different decisions. Congregations must register under one ID in order to be housed and move through programming rotations as a group.





CREATING A PLANNING TIMELINE - BECAUSE IT'S NEVER TOO EARLY!

Provided in the Appendix and under the Resources tab on the Gathering website are two planning timelines. Feel free to use these resources to keep planning for the Gathering experience in manageable chunks and to guard against becoming overwhelmed.

Depending on your preference, there is a 12-month timeline and an 18-month timeline. While it is best to start preparations for this experience as far in advance as possible, some congregations can prepare in fewer than 12 months, but at least 12 months of planning is recommended.

PROMOTING THE GATHERING

There are endless ways to promote the Gathering. While it may be tempting to focus on the logistical aspects of the Gathering (who, what, where, how much), the best way to encourage youth and adults to attend is to share stories (the why!). Have past participants from your congregation or a neighboring congregation come and speak at worship, youth group, confirmation or any other gathering to share why the ministry of the Gathering is an important part of their faith journey. Allow time for testimony, picture or video sharing and question and answer.

Of course, you will also need to do some or all of the following:

- informational meetings for parents and youth
- congregational bulletin, website, social media, newsletter, e-news, blog announcements about the Gathering and how to join your congregation's group
- show the promotional videos whenever you have a captive audience
- create a bulletin board in a high-traffic hallway
- ask for a few minutes to talk about the Gathering at a staff and congregation council meeting
- share at the announcements time during worship
- mail households with eligible youth a letter or a postcard inviting them to sign up or learn more

A media kit is available on the [Gathering's website](#) to help you promote the Gathering. The official promotional poster and videos are also available for download on the website.

You also should do some discernment on whether you will attend MYLE as a congregation or if anyone from your group would benefit from being a part of the tAble. These are important community- and identity-building ministries that can have lasting impacts on individuals and congregations. If your congregation does not have a history of sending people to MYLE or the tAble (formerly DAYLE), the Gathering office can connect you with congregations in your area that have participated.



REGISTRATION

Congregations register and attend the ELCA Youth Gathering as a group. Every ELCA congregation has a unique five-digit ID number that is necessary for registration. If you don't know your number, find it in the ELCA Yearbook in your church office or contact the Gathering staff at gathering@elca.org.

Online registration is the only way to register for the ELCA Youth Gathering, and it opens in the fall of the year preceding the Gathering. All the information necessary for your group's daily schedule and participation will be posted in your account closer to the Gathering: hotel assignment, service learning experience, transportation information, etc.

One adult is the Primary Adult Leader. This person is the organizer for the group, receiving communications from the Gathering about housing, payments, and any other information for the group. The primary leader will need to check their congregational account and the Gathering website regularly for updates, corrections and new information before the Gathering.

Congregational groups can prepare for registration by downloading the registration worksheets and completing them before registration opens. The worksheets will be available on our website about 14 months before the Gathering. These worksheets allow you to collect all the information needed for registration and have it in one place before it's time to do the data entry online.



The Gathering has multiple registration rates, depending on when you submit your information online and pay the necessary deposit. Get your group together early (12 months before the Gathering is ideal), so you don't pay a higher rate - an extra \$40-\$50 per person adds up quickly!

Congregations going to MYLE or individuals attending the tAble can register for these events at the same time Gathering registration opens. The additional fees for them will be added to the congregation's total balance due.

Other necessary forms, such as the release of liability form, the medical release form and sample covenants, will also be available on the Gathering website.

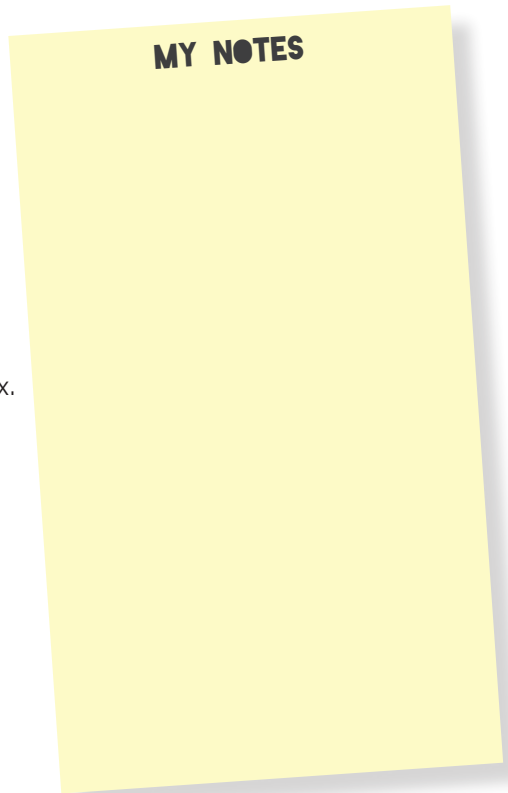


CREATING A BUDGET - AND STICKING TO IT!

Creating a budget and adhering to it are two of the most important things you can do to ensure your Gathering experience is an enjoyable one for yourself and your young people. There are a few basics that every good Gathering budget should contain:

- Gathering registration
- transportation
- activities and extras
- food
- accommodations

To keep things simple, we have created a simple budget sheet and participant tracker to help you keep everything in order. An Excel sheet can be found in the Appendix. (Please visit our resource page at ELCA.org/gathering to download a digital version with functions that will automatically add, subtract, divide, etc!) As with every budget, you will have to make some basic assumptions; with the exception of registration cost, every category will vary from congregation to congregation depending on your mode of transportation, hotel selection, and the amount of money that you intend to commit to food and entertainment. Happy budgeting!



FUNDRAISING

While raising enough money for the Gathering can seem like a daunting task, it isn't impossible and doesn't have to consume all of your group's time and energy. The fundraising process can be one of the best ways to bond as a group before leaving for the Gathering. Here is a collection of ideas from personal youth ministry experience and youth ministry Facebook groups:

1. We do an **ITALIAN DINNER NIGHT** with reservations, candlelit tables, and a choice of preordered of lasagna, chicken fettuccini, etc. Youth waited the tables with the stress on service and quality. We did this every spring and did very well.

2. We do an annual **VALENTINE'S DINNER** and turn the church into an Italian bistro. We are Trinity so we call the bistro "Trinitino's." We assign different jobs to the parents such as the live auction, raffle baskets and auction of the kids to do service projects for the congregation. The kids do the serving and really get into it. We make about \$3,500 each year. We're limited on how many fundraisers we can do so we make this the big one!

3. We do a **QUARTERLY CASSEROLE SALE**. We give the youth families a foil pan and lid, they make a casserole (oven-ready) and bring it back next Sunday. We sell them between services for \$15. I love it because it's not a lot of work on the leader's part, it puts more responsibility on the families, and the congregation loves it! We sell out within 10 minutes. Then during the year before the Gathering, we bump it up to monthly. It's great easy fundraiser in our church.

4. **CHILI COOK-OFF** and chili feed – \$10 per ticket, \$12 at the door. First prize winner = \$100. Judged by blindfolded, experienced chili judges. Additional prize awarded for people's choice.

5. In 2000, we started **MOWING THE CHURCH LAWN**. Figured the church could hire the youth with their families' help instead of an outside service. It really puts some money into the account for each year. After three years, it really adds up and teaches the kids pride and accomplishment.

6. Our best money maker year-round is **HOUSE SITTING, PET SITTING, GETTING MAIL, LAWN WORK, ETC.** We started with our members and they recommended us to their friends. Families serve together. A check is made out to the church. No rates; customers are always more than generous! Kids love getting to know the pets of our congregation.

7. **MOM2MOM SALES** of gently used kids clothes, toys and more! We do two a year, fall and spring. We charge \$15 for table rental or two for \$25, \$1 admission at the door and have items at a concession stand. We really cater to the moms by unloading them at their cars and taking everything into their tables. We also help load them up at the end. This alone is a great hit. I had about 107 tables at our last sale.

8. Our biggest money maker was **FLAMINGO "FLOCKING!"** We bought 25 pink flamingo yard ornaments (\$125). We would leave the flock in members' yards. For \$15 we would come and get them. For \$20 we would come and get them and you could identify the next recipient. For \$25 you could purchase "Flocking Insurance" and we would not come to your house. Super-fun fundraiser.

9. We sell **STOCK IN OUR YOUTH**, and Thrivent matched us, so our stock sale made \$3,500 for our trip. We sell stock in our youth because there is no better investment. We make stock certificates in Word and sell them for whatever investment the individual wants to make. Some invested \$5 and some invested \$100. When we get back from the gathering, we hold a brunch after Sunday service for our stockholders to thank them for their support. The kids tell about their experiences and we put together a video montage of their time at the gathering. The congregation loves it!

10. Annual all-church **YARD SALE**. Everyone in church brings in their "junk" and we organize and sell it on one Saturday in May. It's HUGE!

11. We come from a small church but had a fairly large amount of youth going, so we couldn't rely just on our congregation for support. We held a **COMMUNITY GARAGE SALE** and a **FISH FRY** take-out dinner that made about one-third of our earnings.

12. We sell re-loadable **GROCERY GIFT CARDS**. They give us 5 percent of what people load onto the cards. Members can load them at the grocery store. The grocery gift cards covered around 50 percent of our expenses.

13. We sold spaces for local businesses to put their **LOGO ON THE BACK OF OUR GATHERING SHIRTS**. Made about \$2,000!

14. We did the **144 ENVELOPE FUNDRAISER**. Mark each envelope 1-144 (144 coordinates with a Bible verse). People take an envelope (at random or of their choosing) and the amount on the envelope is what the donor contributes. You can raise over \$10,000!

15. If you have two or more pastors, staff members or adult leaders, one of our favorite out of the box fundraisers was a **PIE-A-PASTOR** fundraisers. We kept jars out for several weeks and the adult leader with the most amount of money in their jar got a pie in the face. We drew names on pie day to see who would do the pieing. All the adults lined up so it was a surprise to see who'd get the pie.

16. On a Friday night in December, parents can **DROP OFF THEIR KIDS** at church from about 5:30-8:30. We'll provide fun and games for them and hopefully the parents can enjoy a night out. We'll set a dollar amount per child but also take donations.

17. We worked with a local Wine & Canvas to host a "**COOKIES & CANVAS**" event. We had about 30 painters and raised almost \$700. The Wine & Canvas gave us their group rate and we added \$10 to the price that it normally costs. Then the Wine & Canvas people gave a donation for 15 percent of the cost of the event. It was great!

18. Charge admission to a **TALENT SHOW** featuring your youth group.

19. Sell **SUB SANDWICHES FOR SUPER BOWL SUNDAY**, get the produce donated, and have the kids make them. We sell 15-inch sandwiches for \$12 each.

20. Invite your mature ministry group to come to a free night of a game show of "**THE NEWLYWEDS GAME**" and serve free desserts. Invite well-known couples to increase attendance. Have a straight freewill offering afterward. Put some \$10 or \$20 bills in the bottom of the baskets to inspire people.

21. Figure out the mileage for the trip and how much each mile should cost. Have **DONORS PAY FOR THE TRIP BY THE MILE**.

22. **COMMUNITY TRIVIA NIGHT!** People may purchase individual admission or whole tables.

23. **GAS 2 GO**. Place a new, empty gas can in the narthex. Encourage folks to drop in their spare change (bills and checks also accepted) after every service. Count and post amount each week. All monies used for transportation. Easy. No up-front costs.

24. A **BUNCO (OR ANY EASY GAME!) NIGHT FUNDRAISER**. Suggested minimum donation of 15 dollars per person to play. Teach the youth how to play so they can all participate, too.

25. I invite all our youth to bring the names and addresses of 10 people (besides) their parents – outside of the congregation – who love them. I give them a **DRAFT OF A LETTER** that they can then handwrite and modify as they see fit. It simply says something like "I know that you love me. I have the opportunity to do this great thing. It costs a lot of money. Here's how you can help me." We include a printed slip of paper the person can complete with name, address, e-mail and amount of gift. It also indicates the church address where they can send their gifts. The youth address their envelopes, and I pay the postage. We always get a great response to this – because these are the people who love our youth the most. They want to help them. And they love getting a handwritten letter from the youth. We follow up with thank-you postcards from the event.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

[youtube.com/watch?v=AhHog-fGB0Q](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhHog-fGB0Q)

youthencounter.org/files/101-Fundraising-IDEAS-Ebook.pdf

A special thanks to the ELCA Youth Ministry Network Facebook group and The Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod Youth Gathering Adult Facebook group for their ideas! Be sure to check out our section on creating a budget to determine your fundraising goal.



FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Each cycle, the Gathering sets aside funds for individuals with financial need to help offset the cost of registration. Primary adult leaders and congregational leadership may apply for financial assistance on behalf of a specific youth. The Gathering does not offer assistance for adult leaders or for the pre-events. The application process generally opens one year before the Gathering and there are almost always more requests for financial assistance than available funding. Like registration, it is best to prepare and apply early! For specific information about financial assistance in the current cycle, visit the Gathering website.

#FUNDRAISER



GAMES TO ENCOURAGE GROUP BONDING:

- “Would you rather..?”
- “Either/Or?”
- “100 Question Game” (Conversation Starters)
- “Two Truths and a Lie”
- “Who’s feeling brave?” (Egg drop un/cooked)
- “Blindfolded Obstacle Course”
- “Human Knots”
- “The Escape Room” (get out of a space working together with clues [timed])

#TRUSTFALL

FACILITATING GROUP BONDING

The Gathering is not an experience for individuals. It’s designed to be something young people experience as a group. To ensure your group has a good experience, it is important to begin the process of building cohesion as a group long before you arrive in the host city.

As you begin to map out your pre-Gathering meetings, it is necessary to not only plan time for the nuts and bolts informational pieces but also time for fun and getting to know one another. Icebreakers are a great first step, but go further. Plan an excursion to the local bowling alley. Do a service project around your congregation’s neighborhood. Schedule a group breakfast on a Saturday morning or before the school day. All of these activities help imitate the types of experiences your group will share at the Gathering, and they help prepare everyone socially. During these activities, it’s OK to talk about the Gathering, but shy away from going too in-depth. This should be a time to learn about one another, get know each other’s passions, likes and dislikes, and to start forming relationships of trust.

Your group will undoubtedly need to do some fundraising. Fundraisers can be great group bonding experiences, too. Consider writing into your covenant that everyone in the group participate in certain fundraisers, even if they don’t need the financial support.

In addition to games, outings and activities, involve your young people in the decision making processes. Let them have a voice in things big (ex. will you drive or fly) and small (ex. designing group t-shirts). Give them responsibilities for leading meetings, fundraisers, bonding experiences, and hold them accountable! This gives them more ownership in their Gathering experience, and further helps build trust and respect amongst group members. As a primary leader, you don't have to do it all!



Pair your young people up to be prayer buddies. Ask them to pray for one another, the Gathering and your congregation on a daily basis, both before and during the Gathering. Spiritual readiness is just as important as physical and emotional readiness!

GROUP COVENANTS - COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS!

A group covenant is an important tool not only for your time at the Gathering but also as a community building exercise before you leave. 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 entire group. Use the templates and examples in the Appendix as a way to start the conversation about covenants or turn your group loose with a blank page of paper and brainstorm how you will covenant to be in community with each other.

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.

The covenant can include the preparation phase of the Gathering, the days you are away from home attending the event, and even the days and months after returning home.



Try to craft your covenant in positive language. For example, "I will be on time." versus "I won't be late."

WHAT AND WHY – The first part of creating a covenant is understanding what you are attending and the purpose of the trip for individuals and the group. The mission of the ELCA Youth Gathering is faith formation in teens. This is a chance to grow in faith, experience new things, have fun and be challenged in an intentional Christian community. This is not a vacation. Talk as a group about what individuals are hoping to experience and what they expect to learn because of their time leading up to and at the Gathering. Share together how you hope to grow as a group.

PRE-GATHERING – If you are including the preparation phase in your covenant, be sure to talk about expectations of attendance. What are the expectations of attendance for the Getting Ready sessions? For fundraisers? For worship and other youth ministry opportunities going on in your congregation and synod? What are the expectations for how participants physically prepare themselves? How they spiritually and emotionally prepare themselves?

#LUTHERANSWAG

DRESS CODE – Decide together what your group’s dress code will be. Dress codes usually serve one or two purposes – safety and modesty. Agreeing to wear appropriate footwear (the No. 1 injury at the Gathering is injuries to toes caused by wearing flip-flops!) is a dress code item that promotes a safe Gathering experience. Things like what language can be on a shirt or the length of shorts or shirts speak more to the modesty purpose of a dress code. If your congregation gets group shirts, wearing those each day could be part of your covenant.

BEHAVIOR – Much of your covenant will focus on expected behavior. Here are some topics to explore as you write the covenant together:

- **Timeliness:** It’s important to be on time for all activities and check-ins. Making the group wait affects the schedule and the group dynamics.
- **Sleep:** Days at the Gathering are very long. Abiding by “lights out” times are important to ensure everyone gets as much sleep as possible to avoid crankiness and sickness.



IDEAS FOR PHYSICAL PREPARATION:

- Two weeks before you leave, start drinking additional glasses of water each day.**
- Decide what closed-toe shoes you’ll bring to the Gathering and walk in them 1-2 miles a day.**
- If you usually skip breakfast, try to work it into your routine. Breakfast will be a very important meal to start your day right at the Gathering.**

- **Groups:** Establish how many people must be together when moving in a group and if an adult has to be a part of that group.
- **Language:** What kinds of jokes and jabs are allowed? How do we speak about others – in our group, those we see? Again, remember to keep things positive!
- **Checking in:** It's important that an adult leader knows where youth are at all times and that the primary leader knows how to find everyone! Establish this communication channel including what, who and how often. Some leaders use a group text for checking in each hour while others physically meet up with their group after an established amount of time.
- **Hotel rooms:** Determine who is allowed in whose hotel room. Can participants go in each other's rooms? Just same gender rooms? Can adults go in all rooms?
- **Service providers:** Talk about how the group will treat the hotel staff, cab drivers, restaurant staff, venue staff and other service workers you encounter. This could include covenanting around tipping. Current best practices are:
 - Wait staff: 15-20 percent
 - Bellhops: \$2 per bag
 - Housekeeping: \$1/day, per person
 - Cab drivers: 15-20 percent
- **Electronics:** Youth and adults will bring cellphones, iPods, tablets and other electronics with them to the Gathering. These things can be great tools to enhance a person's Gathering experience in a number of ways. As part of your covenant building, decide appropriate times and ways



IDEAS FOR SPIRITUAL & EMOTIONAL PREPARATION:

- Participate in the Getting Ready sessions so you are comfortable sharing and praying with others in the group.**
- Pray daily for the ministry of the Gathering, your group members and yourself as you prepare for this monumental event.**
- Read the biblical themes for the Gathering. Familiarize yourself with the Gathering texts.**
- If you're an extrovert, be ready for the ultimate extrovert experience! But also consider how you might support your less-extroverted brothers and sisters. For those introverts, think and talk with others about how you will renew yourself each day.**
- Prepare family, friends and significant others with an understanding that you will likely be too busy and engaged at the Gathering to call home or text often. Assure them you will share all about your trip when you return home!**

to use technology. For example, listening to music on a personal device can disrupt the community and isolate the listener, but on the other hand sometimes people need a break from the constant community and putting on their headphones provides that experience. With electronics it's not so much about the "if" as it is about the "when."

CONSEQUENCES - Every good covenant should also include language about what happens if the covenant is broken. Most of these situations can be dealt with by a kind reminder. Be clear in your covenant what behaviors warrant a more negative ramification, including a participant being sent home at their or their family's expense. It is very important that participants and, if they are a youth, their parents or guardians understand these consequences before you leave for the Gathering.

POST-GATHERING - Finally, are there any post-Gathering expectations for participants? Will there be a time when they share their experiences with the congregation? Is each participant expected to write something for the church newsletter or blog? Is there a reunion a few weeks after the Gathering to further reflect on memories and learnings? How will this group infuse into the normal youth ministry at your congregation? All of these can be important ways to deepen and broaden the Gathering experience. Upon completion of your covenant have each participant sign a copy. For the youth participants, it's a good idea to have their parent or guardian also sign the covenant so they understand what is expected of their child and family.



Be sure to share the final covenant with those in leadership in your congregation including the pastor and congregation council. It is helpful if everyone is on board and clear about what this group and parents have covenanted, especially if problems arise.

In the Appendix you will find a covenant writing template along with several sample covenants. [covenant template, covenant example 1, covenant example 2, covenant example 3]

*Thanks to the Rev. Mark Anderson, Northeastern Iowa Synod,
for his contributions in this section.*



PLANES, TRAINS & AUTOMOBILES - GETTING TO THE GATHERING

Getting to the Gathering can be one of the most exciting parts of your experience. Your group will undoubtedly bond and see parts of the world they may not have been to before. But this is also a time you may encounter challenges. To make this part of your journey a success, start preparing your group long in advance. Walk through how the group expects themselves to behave. How will they entertain themselves? Is somebody leading travel devotions? Is there a group captain in charge of directions? For many young people, traveling to the Gathering can be experiences of many “firsts”: first plane ride, first road trip, first time in another state, etc. Be sure to help these young people prepare.

When making decisions about how your group will travel to and from the host city, there are a few things to consider, including time, money and distance. Each mode presents its own pros and cons so discern with your group and their guardians what might be best.

- **Flying** is often the fastest, but it can be expensive, unpredictable, and thousands of Gathering attendees will be traveling to the same location within about a 48-hour window. How will your group get to your hotel? What happens if the airline loses your luggage or you miss a connection? How do you prepare your group to anticipate and respond well to these challenges?
- The **AmTrak train** can be cheap, scenic and a rare experience for U.S. teens, but it is notoriously slow and doesn't connect well throughout the U.S. Again, how do you prepare your group and how do you get from the train station to your hotel? Do you rent cars upon your arrival? Or will you take cabs to your hotel and then rely on Gathering transportation?
- **Driving**, either in a bus or car, gives your group much more freedom. Maybe you want to stay in another city along the way or plan a service experience in another state – both are entirely possible when you drive. It also gives you much more freedom within the host city. You are not at the mercy of Gathering shuttles or limited to the area within walking distance of your hotel. You can arrange off-site excursions or cultural experiences and easily get there without arranging separate transportation. But again, driving can be slow, many adult leaders do not feel comfortable driving in urban environments, and paying for mileage, parking expenses, and gas can often make driving just as costly as flying or taking the train.



If your congregation takes a coach bus, consider subleasing it to the Gathering during the program rotation days (Thursday, Friday and Saturday). Hundreds of buses are needed for service-learning experiences. Check with your bus company to see if they'll even offer you a discount, since the Gathering would also be paying to use the equipment and driver. It could lower your overall transportation costs!

However you get to the Gathering, the ways mentioned above or those we left out (bike? walk? boat?), remember to think about time, cost and distance. Each group needs to decide what it values most, and then go from there.



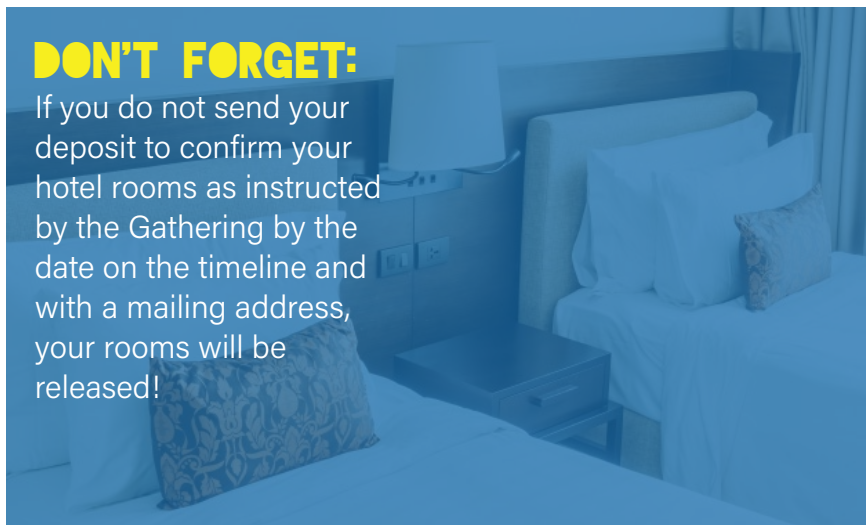
HOUSING: YOUR GATHERING HOME

The Gathering arranges contracts with hotels in the host city and negotiates a rate "range" to ensure that the cost per hotel room is an average amount for all Gathering participants, regardless of which hotel they stay in. To participate in the ELCA Youth Gathering, all registered participants are required to stay in the hotel their congregation is assigned.

Congregation primary leaders are asked in the initial online registration process to indicate: 1) how many hotel rooms they'll need based on the size and gender demographics of the group and 2) what bed configuration they'll need in hotel rooms based on gender and adult-youth demographics

DON'T FORGET:

If you do not send your deposit to confirm your hotel rooms as instructed by the Gathering by the date on the timeline and with a mailing address, your rooms will be released!



of their group. These responses are considered requests or preferences that Gathering staff will attempt to accommodate but may not always be able to meet. Most congregations needing two or more rooms will be asked to accept a combination of king (one bed) and double (two beds) rooms.



If your congregation can afford to spread your group out (such as housing two youth per room, instead of four), consider requesting king rooms (one bed) instead of double rooms (two beds). This will allow other groups with budgetary restrictions to minimize the number of rooms they use!

The Gathering assigns each congregation group to a hotel during the late winter and early spring of the Gathering event year, which is shared via online congregational registration accounts. This hotel assignment will include: 1) a hotel name, address and contact information, 2) a room assignment worksheet with the number of rooms you've been assigned and a bed configuration for those rooms (for you to map out which youth are in which rooms and which adults are in which rooms), and 3) instructions for following through on your room reservation (how to pay your deposit and reserve these hotel rooms, how to release the hotel rooms that you may no longer need, and a timeline for when you can contact the hotel directly to ask additional questions about your stay during the Gathering).

Each hotel has a Gathering Community Life team, consisting of pastors, youth leaders and other volunteers. Their role is one of hospitality and help. They will be a resource for you in passing along Gathering information, assisting with problem solving and communicating concerns and questions to hotel staff. Your Community Life team will also check your congregation in for the Gathering, giving you your wristbands, Gathering Guide Book, and any other material you may need for the event. They will send you off each morning with a prayer and welcome you back in the evening. They know which congregations will be in each hotel – and are another set of eyes and ears to help keep everyone safe.



DO NOT contact the hotel before the date on the timeline! The person who answers the phone at the front desk of your hotel will not have information about Gathering guests staying at their facility until closer to the time of the event, and you'll only confuse them - and yourself! Questions about your hotel will either need to wait until the timeline window as instructed by the Gathering or be asked of Gathering staff.

Best practices as you work through Gathering housing:

- Allocate rooms on your room assignment worksheet with youth males in rooms together, youth females in rooms together, female adult leaders in rooms together, and male adult leaders in rooms together. Consult your congregation's "safe church" policy to confirm what is and is not allowed for youth and adults staying in the same room, but generally plan on putting them in separate rooms for the sake of healthy boundaries between youth and adults. And be sure to factor in any considerations that create safe sleeping spaces for LGBTQ youth and adults!
- Your hotel deposit must be paid by check or credit card (as detailed in the hotel assignment instructions you'll receive in late winter or early spring of the Gathering year), but some hotels may allow you to pay the balance in advance of your stay. Paying your balance before the Gathering saves you the worry of needing to pay for additional things during the Gathering, and of course, frees up some space on your credit card during the month of the Gathering! Don't forget that you'll still have to pay for "incidentals" on-site if you incur any expenses during your hotel stay.
- Be kind to hotel staff. Go online to learn about the hotel you've been assigned; there's a good chance that they've got a list of amenities and facilities on their website, which saves you from making an unnecessary phone call and hotel staff from answering an unnecessary question.



Research your hotel online ahead of the Gathering to find out what businesses are nearby. There may be restaurants, grocery stores, pharmacy-type options within a mile or less that will be helpful to your group while staying in the area.

- Set clear expectations for your young people about how to behave in the hotel. This is a shared living space, and all guests are reminded to respect quiet times and common areas. Clean up after yourselves, and be extra mindful when eating from a complimentary breakfast, sitting in lounge areas, and using pool or gym facilities; other people might want to benefit from these spaces and amenities too, so don't forget to share!



If your group needs a larger space for debriefing and devotions each night (because your group is bigger than 10 people and you won't fit in one hotel room), talk to the Community Life team at your hotel when you check in to find out what space is available in the evenings.



DON'T FORGET:

Be sure to tip hotel service staff (bellhops, housekeeping, room service, etc.); these are additional services provided to help make your hotel stay more comfortable, and you should thank them by offering a tip each time you accept their help. Please see the "Covenant" section for suggestions on tipping amounts.



MEALS - FEEDING OF THE 30,000

Teenagers need to eat, every day, and usually several times a day. Meals are an important part of your Gathering experience, because not eating regularly can cause people to feel unwell or be unable to engage fully in Gathering events and activities. There are several things you can do to plan for your meals, which will help keep people healthy, alleviate group-leader stress, allow your group to experience more of the host city, and maybe even save you some time and money! Meal time can be "family time" if you build it into your Gathering experience that way, so do some advance planning to help make the "event" of eating a meaningful part of each day.

The key to planning a meal strategy is researching ahead of time. Find out what meal options are in the areas surrounding the Gathering venues (near the stadium, convention center and your hotel, etc.), identify your daily schedule for meals, and decide what kind of menu and pricing works best for your group and budget.

#LOAVES&FISHES

- 1. Encourage youth and adults from your congregation to bring their own snacks for your journey to and from the Gathering host city.** Adult leaders might want to carry an extra snack or two in their backpack each day in the event of a youth suddenly feeling unwell or if there's a delay in getting back from an activity, etc.

- 2. Poll your group ahead of the Gathering to find out what they usually eat for breakfast.** Depending on their responses, you may be able to bring some simple, non-perishable food items with you from home (Pop Tarts, granola bars, juice boxes, mini boxes of dry cereal, etc.) that are easy to grab and go each morning, or even grab at the end of the night (at “bed check” time) to eat the next morning. Or stop at a grocery store when you arrive in the host city to pick up a few staples; some hotels will allow you to add a mini refrigerator in your room at check-in (but don’t hoard them – only one per group, please!), which would allow you to keep a jug of milk for your group’s morning cereal, for example.



Eat the complimentary breakfast at your hotel if one is provided!

- 3. If you plan to eat out for meals, stay within your budget.** Pick restaurants that fit within what you’ve planned to spend on food, so you don’t have any surprises when you receive the bill. Find restaurant menus online ahead of time to make sure they’re in your price range and have teenager-friendly options. When you sit down for each meal, make sure that you communicate what that meal’s budget will be to your group members (splurging for a fancier dinner one night, you may decide that the budget is \$20 this time, or if all the lunch options on a restaurant’s menu are \$7 or less, communicate that amount to the group). Efficient meal-budgeting and communication to the group can help you save money each day!

- 4. The restaurants closest to venues will be the busiest.** Choosing to eat at these establishments will likely mean a longer wait (especially if it’s “fast food”), so give yourself plenty of time to stand in line. If you’ve got a little more time, consider choosing a restaurant farther away; the line will be shorter, and you’ll have a much better chance of getting a place to sit and eat your food.

- 5. Try to hit “food courts” with multiple options for the varying tastes of your group;** check ahead of time what kind of payments are accepted (if they don’t accept credit cards).



Give youth a daily stipend for their meals (\$40/day; \$5 breakfast, \$10 lunch, \$15 dinner). Put cash into an envelope for each youth, and hand out the next day’s meal money stipend the night before once you wrap up the “Final 15” devotion, or when you go around to each room to do “bed checks.”

6. Make reservations at sit-down restaurants, probably within three months of the Gathering or less. Let them know you're part of a big conference that week, and ask if there's a discount for being part of the event, or if you'll be tax exempt as a church group. Bring a copy of your tax exempt letter with you!

7. Try to "eat local"! Find out what the popular restaurants are in the city and what the local cuisine is. You'll get to know more about the host city and culture by trying some of their favorite foods!



Consider selecting a few dishes from the menu and giving your group three options to choose from (one chicken option, one beef option and one vegetarian or gluten free option), then place your order in advance so that food is ready faster when you arrive.

8. Sometimes there are "opt in" meal services connected to the Gathering, to order sack lunches for your group on the last day of event. (At the 2015 Gathering in Detroit, Old Lutheran partnered with a local vendor to provide sack lunches on Sunday as groups departed). Watch gNews for information about ordering these "to go" lunches.



If pre-ordering your food, pay a deposit ahead of time; the restaurant can keep your credit card information on file for the remaining balance payment on the day of the meal or possibly accept a church check if mailed ahead of time for the deposit or the balance amount.

DON'T FORGET:

Tip well. It's not cool to "save money" by skimping on the tip. If the restaurant is allowing you to do a tax-exempt meal, be sure to give your server at least a 20 percent tip to show your appreciation for their service during a busy and stressful week catering to a large crowd!

#LOCALEATS

9. Consider packing your own lunches! Bring your lunch ingredients from home or buy them from a grocery store when you arrive; peanut butter and jelly, luncheon meat with cheese, apples and oranges, small bags of chips and pretzels, bottles of water, etc. would all be inexpensive meal options that youth could assemble each day to take with them for lunch. Some lunch ingredients would need to be refrigerated, so ask your hotel for a fridge in the group leader's hotel room.

10. Collaborate with other congregations from your synod to organize a catered meal – on your Synod Day, on the first day of the Gathering, on the last day of the Gathering, etc. This would create “critical mass” for such a food order and bring down the cost for all congregations participating in the meal.



Check out a host city tourism guide or Buzzfeed-type “best restaurants in this city” guide, etc.; attending the ELCA Youth Ministry Network Extravaganza during the Gathering year would be a good opportunity to try out some local restaurants.

CONSIDER THIS:

If you have a larger group or a variety of “taste palettes” within your group, consider giving prepaid gift cards (with a major credit card logo like Visa on them) to your adult leaders for the sake of dividing and conquering meal times. There’s a minimal charge to activate these cards when you purchase them from your local grocery store, they never expire, they are accepted anywhere that credit cards are taken, and they don’t require a pin number to use. As long as your adult leaders are willing to assume the responsibility of keeping track of the card (and keeping their receipts for your congregation’s expense accounting after the Gathering!), this can be a simple and efficient way to streamline paying for meals or other incidentals throughout the Gathering.

MY NOTES

PACKING LIST

GENERAL

- Orange Gathering T-shirt
 - Sturdy backpack
 - Journal and pen or pencil
 - Money for meals, tipping and Sunday offering
 - Comfortable walking shoes (no flip-flops)
 - Pajamas (be considerate of roommates)
 - Bathing suit and towel
 - Warm shirt or light jacket for the air-conditioned environments
 - Any medications prescribed to you
 - Cards or other free-time activity stuff
 - Hat, sunscreen and sunglasses
-

LEAVE @ HOME

- Expensive belongings
 - Drugs, alcohol and medications not prescribed to you
 - Firearms, knives and weapons
 - Glass bottles
 - Laser pointers, air horns, matches or lighters
-

DAILY PACKING LIST

Everyone

- Positive attitude
- Servant heart
- Respectful behavior

Service Learning Day

- Wear orange Gathering T-shirt
- Closed-toe shoes (athletic shoes or boots)
- Sunscreen and insect repellent
- Water bottle
- Sturdy backpack
- Knee-length shorts or long pants
- Work gloves

(continued)

DAILY PACKING LIST

Synod Day

Bible and pen or pencil

Water bottle

Interactive Learning Day

Closed-toe shoes (athletic shoes or boots)

Water bottle

Bible

Smartphone (at least one for every four or five people in your group)

Adult leaders

Sturdy backpack

Gathering guidebook

First-aid

Completed health and liability forms

Water bottle

Granola bars or snack and energy bars

Materials to pass time while waiting



Regardless of your mode of transportation, you should instruct youth in your group to stick to two carry-on size bags for the week; one should be a backpack for carrying daily supplies during the Gathering, and the other one can be a duffle bag with needed clothing and toiletries for the week.

Create a brightly colored luggage tag (see Luggage Tag templates in Appendix) by printing text on cardstock and laminating it to help identify all the bags of your group; one side of the card can have your group or congregation name, church address and phone number, and the name and phone number of the primary adult leader as a back-up. The other side can have the owner's name and phone number, if they choose.

AT THE GATHERING

PLANNING YOUR GATHERING SCHEDULE

While each Gathering experience brings its own set of nuances, one thing is certain: The days will be full and long. It is good to prepare your group to be on the go from at least 7:30 a.m. until 11 p.m. each day. So if that means you need to scope out each of the coffee or ice cream places within walking distance, do so. #beprepared #priorities



Try to arrange it so your group arrives in the Gathering city the day before the event starts to allow for some down time. This will allow for your group to settle into the hotel, rest and even explore the city a little before the Gathering starts.

The 2018 Gathering will have five program areas that are the primary vessels for engaging youth and adults in ministry and fulfilling our mission of faith formation in teenagers:



SYNOD DAY – a day of Bible study, worship and fellowship within the ELCA's geographical groupings.



SERVICE LEARNING – a day of learning the stories of Houstonians, service projects and advocacy.



INTERACTIVE LEARNING – a day of hands-on experiences related to theology, service, justice seeking, prayer, the arts and fellowship.



COMMUNITY LIFE – daily opportunities for worship, fellowship, music and recharging.



MASS GATHERING – daily gatherings of the whole community featuring inspiring speakers, engaging Christian musicians and worship.



EXPERIENCING THE HOST CITY

While growing in faith is the focus of your time at the Gathering, it's also an opportunity to explore and learn about an awesome city. Groups should consider coming a day early (or staying a day late) to settle in and see some of what the city has to offer.

Depending on the size and character of your group, you may choose to see some of the most famous sites, or if you are feeling more adventurous, take the road less-traveled and find the hidden gems!

Here are a few ideas to help in your planning:

- Use search engines such as Google and Yelp to find things to do and places to eat. Those websites are your friends!
- The Convention & Visitors Bureau has great information about the host city and often will do a microsite for Gathering participants three to six months out.
- Try to eat at locally owned restaurants. While you may not be able to avoid the national chain restaurants the whole time, eating at these smaller restaurants often gives you a true taste of the city, supports the local economy and often you'll get to talk to locals who can share more about their home.

- Visit a museum, park, farmers market or a locally owned grocery store. Drive or take Uber to a cool restaurant in a neighborhood of the city.
- Before you go, read an article or short book as a group on the city's history. It will allow you to see the city through a different lens.
- Purchase several copies of the local newspaper, and as part of your nightly check-in or devotion, read and pray through it together. This is a great way to become aware of the host city's "highs and lows."



Be adventurous in your eating and encourage your young people to do the same. They can get chicken strips anywhere - why not eat a Coney dog in Detroit or gumbo in New Orleans or a cheesesteak in Philadelphia?

MY NOTES

THINGS TO REMEMBER AS AN ADULT LEADER @ THE GATHERING

- **Have a positive attitude.** This is infectious and sets a great example for everyone. It also makes relationships easier for you. If you are unhappy or concerned about something, talk to another adult leader away from the youth. Never argue in front of the youth; handle disagreements in a separate space.
- **Treat youth with respect.** Give them the opportunity for leadership. When we empower our youth with respect and responsibilities, there are rarely discipline problems on the trip. When discipline reminders are needed, remember to be strong and firm, communicating that we care and we're serious about changing negative and unhelpful behavior.
- **Spend time with the youth; hang out with them.** It's great to have adult conversations, but remember our No. 1 concern is the youth! Keep an eye out for those on the edges. Invite them in and help others invite them in.
- **Do the First 15 and Final 15 every day of the Gathering.** These help shape the day. Research shows that reflecting on the day and your experiences boosts memory retention exponentially. This will help youth remember key learnings and not just the fun!
- **Plan on three things going wrong** for every person you bring to the Gathering.
- **Be kind to the volunteers!**
- **Be prepared to interpret.** Your young people will have questions, reactions and thoughts about what they are experiencing and observing. Many times, you will not be able to prepare for these moments. Be open to how the Spirit moves. It's OK to say things like, "I don't have an answer, but let's explore that more together." or "I haven't thought about that much, what do you think?"

THINGS TO REMEMBER AS AN ADULT LEADER @ THE GATHERING

- **As adult leaders, take turns giving each other a short “respite” time.** When you’re in Interactive Learning in the convention center, tell the group they can always find an adult in a specific location and then have the adults take turns “staffing” that location.
- **You are not a superhero – you need sleep!** **#NAPTME**
- **Face time is more important than screen time.**
- **Set boundaries on cellphone use,** such as no phones during meals or while walking or after midnight.
- **Respect sacred space.** Room assignments are sacred space; stay out of each other’s rooms.
- **Be responsible and on time.**
- **Your personal life stays personal.** Personal problems should be left at home and not discussed with the youth.
- **Starbucks can wait.** The youth and the group come first before your needs. (Seriously, I once saw a group wait 30 minutes for one adult leader who was in line at Starbucks, making the group late for their next event.)
- **Remember to pause, just take a moment and take a breath.** It helps you stay centered, calm and focused. No really, it does! It also helps to use a simple mantra while breathing: As you breathe in, say to yourself, “Breathe in all that is Christ.” As you exhale, say to yourself, “Release all that takes me from Christ.” Try it and you’ll be hooked!



EXPECTATIONS @ THE GATHERING*:

- Remember your every word and action is to be a model of Christian living.
- Live by the group's covenant and help others abide by it as well.
- Review the daily schedule of events.
- You are responsible for your youth AT ALL TIMES!!
- Do visual headcounts, making sure your youth are accounted for each time the group gathers.
- Monitor the health and behavior of all students. Make sure they're eating somewhat healthy and drinking lots of water!
- If a youth remains at the hotel, it is imperative for their safety and welfare that an adult remain with the youth.
- Be available. Be sure everyone has each adult leader's cell number.
- Encourage appropriate behavior such as:
 - Low conversational volume, especially in public areas and after hours.
 - Be respectful of all hotel staff, guests, residents of the city, those serving us in any way, those you encounter on the street – be respectful of ALL!
 - Close the hotel room doors gently. They make a lot of noise when they slam shut.
 - Remain quiet in rooms after lights out. (Your neighbors may not be with the Gathering and won't appreciate you waking up their 15-month old twins!)
 - Be on time; make a plan for getting up and ready for the next day.
- Be prepared to:
 - Quiet excessive noise, especially in hotels and on the bus.
 - Make sure all your youth are up in the morning.
 - Check into abnormal actions.
 - Do a visual room check at curfew to ensure youth are in their assigned rooms.
- Keep your eyes open for personal property being forgotten in the rush of activities. It is very hard to recover lost items. Do a visual sweep before leaving public places. Assign an adult leader to take on this task.

**Adapted from Kristen Baltrum, Bethlehem Lutheran in Longmont, Colo.*



Connecting with home and congregation at the Gathering:

- Send nightly emails or blog posts recapping the day.
- Create a Facebook group where youth and adults can post about the day that others can read.
- Use Facebook Live, Periscope, etc.
- Choose one media outlet to share on. It's consistent and easy for everyone to follow. Be sure to let your congregation know where they can get updates.
- Have a contact person at the congregation who can display the social media information on Sunday for members who aren't connected electronically.
- Have the congregation host "Live Stream" events each night of the Gathering to watch the evening Mass Gatherings together.

Worst practices by adult leaders seen at the Gathering:

- drinking alcohol at the Gathering
- not watching your words
- being late as an adult leader to meet your group
- being unprepared
- having a bad attitude (leave your grumpy pants at home!)
- verbally abusing volunteers (or anyone for that matter!)



ADDRESSING GROUP CONFLICT - BECAUSE SOMETIMES WE'RE NOT PERFECT

Your group created an awesome covenant before leaving home for the Gathering, but now it's day three and there have been breaches – several minor and one major – in that agreement. Now what? Take a deep breath. And then:

- Review the covenant at your daily check-in or Final 15. Remind people that they agreed to this.
- Encourage mutual accountability. If someone in the group sees or hears someone violating the covenant, encourage them to hold that person accountable in a mature way. If they need help doing that, they should talk to an adult participant or the primary adult leader.
- Take aside those who have broken the covenant, point out the discrepancies and encourage better choices. Be firm but kind. Make it clear that even minor infractions disrupt the group's experience and life together.
- Don't let major incidents wait to be addressed. If someone violates a "deal breaker" item in your covenant, address it immediately with that person and set into motion the laid out consequences.



When dealing with conflict, give people space from each other. If the two in conflict are besties or are assigned buddies, make arrangements for them to be separated for the next day. If you feel uncomfortable addressing the conflict or need some suggestions or tips, contact the Community Life volunteers in your hotel. They can be great resources and offer guidance in difficult situations.



LIFE IN A CROWD

Any gathering of 30,000 people will demand the need for flexibility of adult leaders and the use of patience and kindness by all participants. The Gathering is no different. Everything will simply take longer and lines are common. But really, can you think of another time when you have to wait in line to go to “church”? Pretty exciting, huh? Be prepared for things such as traveling from one location to the next, getting food at a restaurant, or moving from one activity to the next to take more time.



Congregations often trade items for fun. For great team building opportunities you can make decorated clothespins, symbols or items representing your state, a prayer or inspirational message to share. Kids like trying to collect things from as many states as possible.

Locating your group

With so many people, staying as one group all the time isn't always possible. There may be times when members get separated from the group when walking in the masses. It is helpful to have a way for your group members to find you in the crowd. Some groups appreciate wearing the same T-shirts on a certain day as a way to easily identify members at a glance. Plus, it makes packing for the trip a cinch!



Another line? Bored? Why not play games! Get to know your neighbors, ask the group in front or behind you to join in. Share new games with each other! Have one, two or three youth prepare waiting games ahead of time. It will keep you group engaged and happy!

Since cellphones have become commonplace in the world, make sure each participant has the numbers of each adult leader not only in their phone but also on a card they can carry should they misplace their cellphone (or it is out of juice). There are also Safety and Security Gathering volunteers that can help reconnect lost group members. During the planning, discuss what to do should a member of the group get separated.



A tall identifier, like an umbrella, stuffed animal, picture on a stick or something else that can safely be held in the air is a great way for your group members to locate you. Be creative! But don't forget that someone will need to carry this item each day, so it should be easy to carry, possibly collapsible.

For quick and easier group identification in large crowds wear the same colored shirts, hats, bandanas, etc. each day.



MY NOTES

WHAT TO CARRY WITH YOU @ THE GATHERING:

- Deck of cards (to play while waiting)
- Granola bars
- Koosh balls (they're light and easy to play with in crowded venues)
- Tampons/pads
- Band-aids
- Zip-close plastic bags (they work great for dirty items, puke bags, ice packs, etc.)
- Copies of all health forms
- Sunscreen
- Candy (in case someone's sugar drops)
- Phone charger or power bank
- Sharpie (to label items)
- Maps
- Duct tape (it fixes most everything from a broken shoe to a broken backpack!)



GETTING AROUND @ THE GATHERING

Walking

Obviously, the cheapest way to get around the Gathering city is to walk. Walking with your group might require extra patience as well. In a group of any size you can almost be guaranteed that not everyone will walk at the same speed. Before arriving in the Gathering city, be sure to discuss how your group will walk together, and inform them to expect to spend some time in lines and how to make the most out of every situation.



Encourage your group to begin “training” by walking a mile or more each day in the months leading up to the Gathering. Not only will this break in the walking shoes they plan to wear, it will get the body used to walking. Walk outside to get used to the heat. Begin to hydrate before you arrive in the Gathering city, too!

Ride sharing

With the advent of many ride-sharing programs, getting last-minute vehicle transportation in the Gathering city could be as easy as opening an app on your phone. Consider looking into creating accounts with various ride-share apps supported in the Gathering city as a way to move from one location to the next in small groups. Lyft and Uber are two of the most common.



Download the apps and create an account before leaving. Because payment is typically handled within the app, make sure each adult leader has a church credit card or reloadable gift card to make these purchases.

Public transportation is another option for getting around a Gathering city. Each city's transit system has different service and coverage areas, so be sure to explore the feasibility of routes and cost for public transportation before arriving. Remember, many young people don't live in areas where public transit is an option. Consider taking your group somewhere on a train or bus system to further your group's cultural exploration of the Gathering host city.



Many smartphone apps have real-time transit directions for major cities. Google Maps is a great option for searching available routes and wait times.

Providing your own transportation

If you traveled to the Gathering with your own vehicle or bus, your group has access to the transportation as needed. Be sure to know where you can park vehicles in the city and if there are any fees. Some lots may not allow charter buses or large vans. The Gathering Transportation team can usually recommend accessible and affordable options if you are unable to locate space on your own – simply call the Info Line for assistance.

Don't forget, the Gathering is typically interested in sub-contracting your charter bus for the service learning experience! This may limit your access to the bus, but it can save you and the Gathering money.



YOU FUNDRAISED - NOW SOME TIPS ON SPENDING IT @ THE GATHERING

Money will be essential for food, tips, transportation and other incidentals during the Gathering. It is important for your group to have a plan to handle these incidental expenses. Will your participants be responsible for bringing their own food, tip and transportation money? Will the primary adult leader be responsible for paying? How do you talk about these items beforehand so everyone is on the same page?

Cash

Some groups choose to use cash for all items while at the Gathering. Doing so may mean you, as the adult leader, may have large amounts of money on you at some point. Discuss with participants and parents how the group will manage money needed for items in the Gathering city. And as always, be smart and careful when using ATMs!

Do not carry all of your cash with you. Place any cash that is not needed for the day in a safe and secured place in your hotel room or in the hotel safe. Open purses and back pockets are not the best places to carry wallets in large crowds.



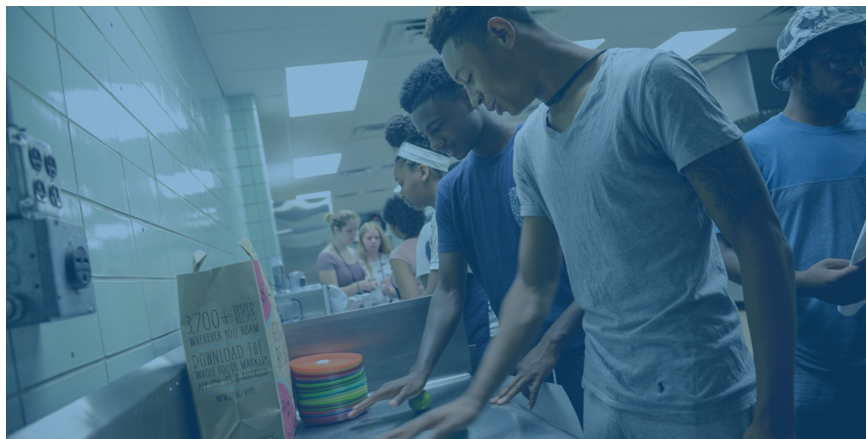
Create a daily cash envelope system for each person with enough money for the day - breakfast, lunch, dinner, housekeeping tips, transportation, etc. Allow participants to donate their unused money at the end of each day and place it in the Sunday offering.

If you are planning to come to the Gathering with large amounts of cash, consider divvying up the cash among other adult leaders.

Participants often choose to bring cash with them for souvenirs, snacks, meals, etc. Be sure to discuss as a group safe ways to handle cash, what amount you think is needed for the experience and how to budget for the week. Talk with participants and parents about how they will spend the money.



Open a Mission Investment Fund (MIF) account for your youth group, if you don't have one already. This is a great way to save money from all your fundraisers, and the perfect way to keep your money handy while at the Gathering. MIF has a staffed service center at the convention center each day of the Gathering, and you can withdraw the cash you need right there, without having to worry about ATMs. For more information, visit mif.ELCA.org/youthministry.

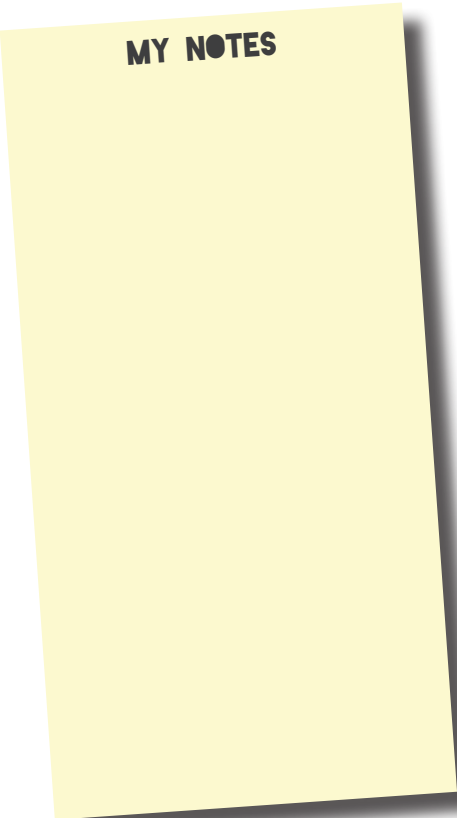


Credit and debit cards

Many restaurants will take credit or debit cards as payments. Pre-paid debit cards for adult leaders can cut down on having to carry large amounts of cash. This is also a great way for groups with multiple adult leaders to have the freedom to break into smaller groups and not have to incur personal expense.

Tipping

It is important to have a conversation about the importance of tipping. Tips help service providers earn living wages. Because tipping can vary person to person, it is best for your group to covenant appropriate tipping amounts or percentages. Cash is preferred for tipping. Tips are appropriate for hotel housekeeping, restaurant wait staff, and private or contracted transportation providers.





BE KIND TO THE VOLUNTEERS:

"The folks in Gathering team shirts? The odds are 99.9 percent that they are a volunteer who is as excited as you are to be there. It's not their fault that the floor of Ford Field has been closed off. It's not their fault that it's hot out and that there aren't water fountains nearby. It's not their fault that your bus was late and that you missed your launch time. They are there out of the goodness of their heart and they want to help.

I've seen adult group leaders treat volunteers horribly. And when you're tired, hot, sweaty and impatient, please remember that it's not their fault. They're following instructions. So treat them (and everybody for that matter) kindly. And your group will be watching you. If you're patient, they'll be patient (perhaps even with you). You'll have a better week, I promise!"

- Todd Buegler, Trinity Lutheran, Owatanna, Minn.



PREPARING YOUR MINDSET

There may be a time during the Gathering when a member of your group (maybe even you) is not excited to get up early the next morning, walk in the heat, participate in the given service learning project, etc. It will be important to discuss that there will be times when everyone has to “put on a happy face” and let go of negativity for the betterment of the group. Provide opportunities for open communication to express frustrations appropriately, which will not affect the overall positivity of the group.

The Gathering often stretches people to their max. They are away from home, eating different foods, are often sleep deprived, and are being challenged spiritually and emotionally. Remind your group daily to be kind to each other and that a positive attitude goes a long way. If conflict does erupt in your group, address it privately with the individuals and seek a solution together.

The Gathering is an event that requires planning, but it is also a time when you get to be fully present with your group and be silly, smile, laugh, share stories and be yourself. The group will get to see how deeply you care for them – as witnessed by the preparations you have put into place – experience you living a faith-filled life, and share in this faith formation event with you. For many participants, this is a once-in-a-lifetime experience, which many will remember as an important piece of their faith journey.

Have fun.



Keep the main thing the main thing. Don't sweat the small stuff. Make backup plans and be prepared for the worst, but don't forget to leave room for God to show up and show off through this experience.



PREPARING FOR MASS GATHERINGS

A Mass Gathering takes place each day of the Gathering for the entire community to come together in worship, learning and fellowship. Some groups may choose to arrive as soon as the venue doors open to reach a certain seating area, and others may choose to arrive right at the start of main stage programming. There will be many sights, sounds and experiences to take in during Mass Gathering each day, so groups should decide on the schedule and seating options that work best for them.

By virtue of this event being the ELCA Youth Gathering, there may be some familiar components to worship, teaching or fellowship, but there will also be many new components as well. Gathering participants will likely learn new songs during worship and may even observe different styles of engagement during worship (people raising their hands or people singing and dancing enthusiastically). Speakers may share Bible stories, testimonies or spiritual challenges for listeners to live out their faith in different ways than the pastors who give sermons in your home congregation usually do.

There will be a lot to see, hear and learn, and Mass Gatherings are best experienced when participants keep an open mind! The ELCA is comprised of a diverse range of people and life experiences, and there is something to be gained from participating in worship, learning from speakers and engaging in fellowship in different ways than you're used to at home.



PREPARING FOR SERVICE LEARNING DAY

During the three program days of the Gathering (Thursday, Friday and Saturday), each congregation will participate in a Service Learning Day in one of the communities that are part of the host city. Gathering participants are able to experience and understand the ELCA tagline “God’s work. Our hands.” by accompanying residents in neighborhoods and partner agencies where God is already busy at work. Listening to the stories and experiences of the diverse range of people who live in the host city allows Gathering participants to have a wider perspective on the lives of others and provides a new lens through which they experience God’s work in the world and in their life.

Specific information about your site and activities will be shared on your service day. KEEP AN OPEN MIND about the service site and project you’ll be assigned; service is about you, but it’s also NOT about you. God has something to teach your group regardless of which site or project you’re assigned, and you’ll be much better able to find out what that teaching is if you keep your eyes, ears and heart open to receiving it, no matter what form it shows up in. Be flexible, patient and cooperative. Follow the lead of your designated Servant Companion – the Gathering-trained volunteer who will be the point person for your service-learning experience.

On average, 10,000 people are all participating in a day of service at a time during the ELCA Youth Gathering, which is a huge feat of organization, communication, prayer and the Holy Spirit. Let the Holy Spirit do its thing!



During the Gathering, talk about connecting with agencies back home that complement the type of work you did as a part of your Gathering experience.

DON'T FORGET:

Be sure to follow the Gathering's instructions about meeting time, meeting location, mode of transportation and other important pre-service day prep. If someone in your group has food allergies or requires a specific menu to remain safe and fed, please consider bringing a meal for that individual with you to service day.

A group of approximately 15 diverse young people, mostly teenagers and young adults, are standing in a line on a grassy area. They are wearing lanyards with ID badges. Behind them is a large wall covered in colorful graffiti. The scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

#SERVICEWITHASMILE



PREPARING FOR INTERACTIVE LEARNING

The interactive learning space provides a wonderful opportunity for young people to engage Gathering themes, encounter ministry partners, and have fun. There is so much to see and experience that going in with a plan is most effective in taking advantage of it all.

There were nearly a million square feet of interactive learning exhibit spaces at the convention centers in Detroit and New Orleans. That's a lot of things to see and do and can quickly become overwhelming if you don't prepare yourself, especially for more introverted individuals. The Interactive Learning planning team always tries to put out a list of partners (exhibitors) and map in the months leading up to the Gathering. Take some time in your group preparation meetings before the Gathering to have youth read through the list and highlight areas they think might be interesting.



Have youth pick a theme, for example, hunger. Ask them to plan a route that makes a stop at every ministry partner related to that theme. It's a great way to get young people to engage partners on a topic they're passionate about.

Remember, about 10,000 other people will be scheduled to be in the Interaction Center at the same time as your group. As with the entire Gathering, be prepared for lines and crowds. The most popular activities may have wait times over an hour. Come prepared with games to play while in line and use it as an opportunity to debrief the Gathering experience – “hallway conversations” can be some of the most impactful memories from the Gathering.



To make sure your youth don't spend the entire day waiting for the high ropes or playing basketball, make a game out of visiting partner spaces. Use a passport system where they have to get signatures from a certain number of partners and write down a few facts about what they learned. Everyone who finishes gets a reward, which can be something like being the DJ in the car for 30 minutes.



PREPARING FOR SYNOD DAY

Synod Day is the time when your group gets to experience a gathering within the Gathering. For many youth, this is the first time they become aware of the synodical expression of our church. Talk to your young people beforehand and explain what a synod is. Who is your bishop? How does your congregation participate in synod ministries? What is the geographical area of your synod?

Synod Day is also generally the most “low key” of the three program days – notice we didn't say low energy! You will gather in a hotel ballroom-type space for worship, Bible study and fellowship. Time will be spent listening to speakers, reflecting as small groups or individuals, meeting new people, etc.



Be sure to encourage your young people to get to know new friends. There's a better chance they could continue *these* new relationships, since new friends from Synod Day are more likely to be from a nearby town rather than spread across the country.

Each synod gets to design their own time together! There is a set curriculum, but synods have the flexibility to get creative. Get involved!

Contact your Synod Day Director if you have suggestions or want to help in the planning process. Encourage your youth to get involved, too. Maybe it's the worship band or giving a short testimony. It's your day, so offer to help shape it!



Synod Day is typically only a few hours long. Many groups choose to plan a city or cultural experience this day since they will have some free time. Check out the section on experiencing the host city for ideas!

MY NOTES



DEBRIEFING THE DAY

As the evening winds down, take advantage of the Final 15. Each evening as you head back to your hotel and think – “WOW! That was an amazing day!” don’t let it go, engage the youth to share their feelings. Process the day and prepare for tomorrow. Yes, these are long days, but this is so important to help everyone deepen their faith connection and articulate their experiences.

POST-GATHERING



THE GATHERING IS OVER - NOW WHAT?

The faith journey doesn't end when the Gathering does.

Picture this – The buses finally pull up to the church carrying weary travelers. Each of them is in a different state of fatigue; for each one who is peacefully sound asleep, there is another who has found an awkward method of dozing off. One is asleep in a constantly growing puddle of drool on their pillow, while another is pressed against the bus window with “Blank Space” blaring on repeat through their headphones. Yet another has managed to curl up in their seat, resembling a snoozing cat, with a “Lutheran Chick” hat.

You step through the strewn maze of sleeping teens to get off the bus, where you are swiftly welcomed by a sea of parents, thankful that you returned home with their child in one piece. As the youth stumble off the bus into their parents' waiting arms, you are struck with two profound thoughts, the first being, “I survived!” followed by the realization that you just experienced something that you will never forget. The pleasant thought quickly dissolves into the sobering reality that you and your group just had a mountaintop experience in youth ministry – and now it's over. So what do you do for the 1,000 or so days until the next Gathering?

This is a common scene that is carried out across the country after every Gathering. Upon returning home, youth leaders are left with the lofty task of transitioning their youth from the euphoria of the Gathering to the normalcy back home. Fortunately, we have a list of tips to ensure that the energy of the Gathering doesn't get lost during the transition:

- 1. DEBRIEF:** Have an intentional conversation with your Gathering group to find out how they want to shape their post-Gathering life. Ask questions about the Gathering high points (and low points) to discover if there is anything that can be easily duplicated in your congregation or synod.

- 2. APPRECIATE:** Have a “thank you” event (i.e. spaghetti dinner or coffee hour) to recognize the congregation and volunteers who helped send the group to the Gathering. During the event, have the kids talk about their experiences and share their pictures and videos from their travels.
- 3. PLAN:** As you develop the upcoming year of youth ministry, consider the Gathering feedback from your kids. For example, if they loved their Gathering Service Learning Day, plan some community service activities throughout the year. It will remind the kids that they don’t have to travel far from home in order to serve.
- 4. CONNECT:** Make an effort to reach out to your synod and local congregations to find out what they are doing to maintain the post-Gathering energy. Speak with other youth leaders who attended the Gathering and see if your groups can participate in some joint activities. Maintaining current and forging new relationships is not just biblical but necessary to keep the group energy moving in a positive direction. Oh yeah, don’t forget to connect with the groups, both individually and collectively, that you met during the Gathering, whether it be by doing an event together or setting up a Google Hangout or FaceTime session for groups who are far away. Those relationships are priceless!
- 5. REGROUP:** You can’t fast forward to the next Gathering, but you can reminisce over the time that you and your group shared during the last Gathering. Have a reunion to tell stories, share pictures, and talk about the Gathering experience. If you have a small group, try inviting another congregation along for some additional bonding opportunities.



6. ENGAGE: Speak with your pastor or worship committee to find ways to integrate Gathering experiences into the worship service. Suggestions might include delivering sermons based on themes discussed at the Gathering and using some Gathering music. See if you can create a committee to plan a youth service that will resemble a scaled down Gathering worship service. It will be a great way to involve your youth and invite others to join in.

7. SHARE: Ask if you can post youth testimonials in the church bulletin in the weeks following the Gathering. Have your kids write an article for the local newspaper, depicting their Gathering experience. Contact a local congregation that didn't attend the Gathering and see if your youth can share their stories and experiences with them.

...through worship

- Have the youth plan a worship service shortly after the Gathering incorporating their Gathering experiences
- Have youth share their experiences with language of faith, rather than "It was fun or I had a good time"
- Explain why this is an important experience of their faith journey timeline

...through gratitude

- Invite the congregation for coffee and doughnuts, breakfast or dinner to say thank you
- Share your stories throughout the meal
- Write a thank-you note to your congregation
- Write to a younger church member about your experience

...through prayer buddies

- Contact, meet, touch base with prayer partners
- Pray for your prayer partner
- Send your prayer partner notes and pictures about your experience

...beyond the walls of your congregation

- Find a near-by congregation that did not attend and share your experiences and stories with their youth and the congregation
- Serve your community
- Identify your community's needs that are similar to the host city's needs and serve at home

- 8. REPEAT:** If your kids loved the Gathering, remind them that they can go again, either as a youth, young adult or adult leader. It's never too early to begin planning for the next Gathering!

Lastly, remember that the Gathering is not the end – it's the beginning! You and your youth now have a different perspective on your faith and have a better understanding of the amazing church community that you belong to. Treasure your Gathering experiences, develop new networks of youth leaders and congregations, and build a youth curriculum reflective of your youth group's positive Gathering experiences. And if you and your group are still suffering from the post-Gathering blues, remember: Three years will fly by in the blink of an eye.



RE-ENTERING LIFE AT HOME

Returning home from a mountaintop experience is often difficult and exhausting. So much has happened in a short amount of time that it is nearly impossible to convey what happened and how it affected you and the group. Here are some helpful ideas to re-enter and de-brief the amazing experience:

- On your last night, prepare a “press briefing” together as a group. Make it just a couple paragraphs about the Gathering that everyone can then use as a starting place to share the story of the Gathering.
- In your covenant, have a meeting scheduled to occur about a week or two after the Gathering to talk about the experiences and create ways your group will continue the Gathering experience and learnings now that you're back home. Remember the Gathering is not a stand-alone ministry. It is a component to your faith formation in your congregation.
- Use the Getting Ready materials that contain a returning home de-briefing session that includes helpful questions to give to the parents and congregation to engage the youth in conversation instead of just asking: “So how was it?” To which most would answer “fun.” Folks not at the Gathering may not know what questions to ask to get a deeper story. Use the resource!
- Be sure to have an adult leader de-briefing session at some point soon after your return. Make notes of what went well, what needed tweaking and what went wrong. Keep the notes for future use!

- Create a video of things the next group should know and things to do differently when the next Gathering comes around.
- In the Getting Ready materials, there is a brief order for welcoming the group back home. It can be done in the parking lot before everyone disperses or on the first Sunday back from the Gathering during worship. Just be sure to do some sort of more formalized closing other than: "Well that was great. See you on Sunday!"
- This would be a great time to create a new "returning home" ritual or tradition. Here are some ideas:
 - Create a bulletin board for the congregation to see highlights of the trip.
 - Make a short video having the youth share their high points.
 - Use sticky notes to jot down quick glimpse points from the trip and post them around the sanctuary. Include changes the group wants to make in their own world and perhaps in the congregation.
 - Host a meal for the congregation to say thank you for their support. Have youth interspersed throughout the room engaging with the adults.
 - The ideas are endless – use your imagination and ask the youth what they would do!





BRIDGING THE GATHERING & CONGREGATIONAL MINISTRY

The Gathering is often a once-in-a-lifetime mountain top experience for many participants, and it can be hard to transition to life after an event like this. When transitioning from the Gathering back to your congregation, be intentional about using the language of faith learned and experienced during the event and drawing connections between the ministry in your congregation and the Gathering experience.

- During the trip home, continue to have participants journal, blog, or reflect on paper about their experience and how they grew spiritually.
- Think about stopping somewhere close to home, but not quite home, to worship and have a closing time of prayer.
- Explain and use the seven faith practices of the ELCA during Sunday school, youth group, adult education, etc. As an introduction to these faith practices, you can use the Practice Discipleship lesson “Dog Eating Chicken” (<http://www.elcayouthministrynetwork.wildapricot.org/Resources/Documents/Practice%20Discipleship/PD2%20Docs/Rachel%20Supplements/Dog%20Eating%20Chicken.pdf>).
- Watch the Mass Gathering speakers from the Gathering as a congregation, small group, youth group, adult education, council, etc., followed by some guided discussion. Possibly even use the Final 15 resource as it relates to the speakers.
- Become informed about your community and listen to its needs.
- Make service a regular part of your youth ministry, serving in soup kitchens, after-school programs, reading programs, housing programs, community programs, etc. How does the Gathering’s accompaniment model play out in your community? For example, what does it mean to walk alongside the same organization month after month, year after year?
- Connect with similar organizations represented in the Interaction Center, either locally or globally.



TANGIBLE TIMELINE TO TRANSITION

2 WEEKS:

Have a photo sharing and thank-you dinner for your congregational supporters to celebrate your return.

6 WEEKS:

Begin to re-watch the speaker videos with a small group or for adult education with guided discussion (possibly the questions from the Final 15) surrounding the Gathering theme.

6 MONTHS:

Work on building the ongoing relationship with a local service agency.

1 YEAR:

Mail a letter or card with encouragement to review their trip book or journal from the Gathering. Perhaps gather the group together and talk about the same reflection questions to see how things may have changed.

BEYOND 1 YEAR:

Have past participants share their experiences as a way to recruit for the next Gathering.

INCLUDING YOUTH WHO WERE UNABLE TO ATTEND

Often a struggle primary leaders have revolves around youth in your ministry that did not attend the Gathering and how to make sure they don't feel left out as others share their experiences or recall fond memories. Here are some ideas to help ensure that your group stays cohesive:

- Take time with the group to **share videos, pictures and stories** from the Gathering. Allow space for those who didn't attend to ask questions. Share the theme and Scripture and ask everyone to reflect on how each speaks to their faith journey.
- If your Gathering group does some kind of report back to the congregation, find ways to **include those who didn't go**. For instance, if the group is leading a worship time, invite those who didn't go to participate in the worship band or read Scripture. Or ask those who didn't go to be an interviewer to help people tell their stories. Those interviews could then be turned into a written piece for a newsletter or blog, or set up the interview as part of a sermon or thank-you dinner program and turn it into a talk show where those who didn't go play the host.
- Many **Lutheran Outdoor Ministry** sites will share the same theme as the Gathering the summer of 2018. Encourage your youth who went to camp (instead of or in addition to the Gathering) to share how they encountered the theme and accompanying Scripture.
- As fall programming resumes, be sure conversation involves the **entire summer of ministry or personal activities**, not just reminiscing about the Gathering. If some youth chose a family vacation or soccer camp over attending the Gathering, ask them to share how they experienced God in those activities.
- Early in your program year be sure to provide a **special bonding opportunity for the entire group**. This could be anything from a service project to a high ropes adventure to a weekend retreat.



MY NOTES



STAYING CONNECTED DURING NON-GATHERING SUMMERS

Hopefully, some results of your ELCA Youth Gathering experience are that you're fired up and ready to grow even further in your Christian faith, that you return and search for service-learning projects in your community and beyond, that you partner with even more Lutherans and non-profit agencies to see where other meaningful networking opportunities might take place, and that you are simply finding out more about what God's up to in the world!

Every synod will have different opportunities for youth and adults to stay connected, but you're strongly encouraged to find out what synod-wide youth events or outdoor ministry activities might already be offered regularly for young people or continuing education events for adults that leaders can grow from. Your synod office can also connect you to partner synods in the U.S. or even across the world, so that you can make some meaningful relationships with other Lutherans and even consider exchange or correspondence opportunities to learn from and accompany one another.

Some congregations build relationships of mutual accompaniment with partner organizations locally or nationally and spend the two non-Gathering summers serving and learning with these agencies in need of ongoing love, support and partnership.

There are many more ways to maintain the energy of the Gathering, so be sure to reach out to other congregations and synods to solicit ideas. For example, joining the Youth Ministry Network (ELCAymnet.org) is a great way to interact with youth leaders from across the country and also receive encouragement and direction at their yearly Extravaganza.

Whatever you decide to do during your non-Gathering summers, you're encouraged to capitalize on the enthusiasm and momentum of the young people from your congregation who attended the Gathering, and you should solicit their feedback about where God might be calling them next.



Some congregations use a summer trip rotation schedule, with varying activities from summer to summer so that youth are engaged in many styles of youth ministry and faith formation. For example: Gathering, wilderness trip, service-learning trip, REPEAT.

GLOSSARY

Adult Leaders: They assist the Primary Adult Leader with all Gathering duties and provide additional leadership and support to youth. Adult leaders are not simply chaperones.

Community Life: Volunteers work as a team within hotels to help create a welcoming and positive atmosphere. Additionally, Community Life teams implement a variety of activities in various Gathering venues to provide fun, fellowship and respite.

ELCA: Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. Learn more at [ELCA.org](https://www.elca.org).

ELCA Youth Ministry Network: The Network provides opportunities for spiritual renewal, continuing education and networking for adults who work with children, youth and families in our congregations. Learn more at [ELCAymnet.org](https://www.elcaymnet.org).

Extravaganza: The Extravaganza is an annual four-day conference that draws 500-1200 adults who work with youth in congregations of the ELCA for the premier renewal, education and networking event of our church. It is for the professional and the volunteer, for the old and the young, for the urban, the suburban and the rural. It is for pastors. It is for laypeople. It is for all who share in the adventure we call youth and family ministry. Learn more at [ELCAymnet.org/whatisE](https://www.elcaymnet.org/whatisE).

First 15 and Final 15: A brief Bible study created for each day of the Gathering to help prepare for and wrap-up the day.

Gathering Leadership: The collective identity of staff, planning teams, and key decision makers.

Gathering Volunteer Corps: GVC is the group of volunteers that serve in almost every area of the Gathering, including ushering at the stadium, checking wristbands at Community Life activities, directing foot traffic in the Interaction Center, staffing information booths, or moving equipment in the convention center.

Getting Ready Materials: Curriculum produced each cycle for congregations to use in preparation for the Gathering. A post-Gathering lesson is also produced.

gNews: The Gathering's electronic newsletter and a primary communication tool. Subscribe on the [Gathering website](#).

Interactive Learning: The space inside the convention center exhibit hall where partners from across the church create unique and engaging opportunities for young people to learn, play and serve.

GLOSSARY

Mission Investment Fund (MIF): A financial ministry of the ELCA that provides onsite banking needs to congregations with MIF youth ministry accounts. Visit mif.ELCA.org to learn more.

MYLE (Multicultural Youth Leadership Event): A pre-event of the Gathering and the largest gathering of people of color within the ELCA. MYLE empowers young people of color and those whose primary language is not English to claim their story as a part of God's story.

Planning Teams: The 15 volunteer groups responsible for all programmatic and operational elements of the Gathering.

Practice Discipleship: The Practice Discipleship initiative is a ministry of the ELCA Youth Ministry Network and ELCA Youth Ministry. The initiative trains adult leaders to accompany young people on their faith journey. Learn more at ELCAymnet.org/page-1465964.

Primary Adult Leader: The person who provides primary leadership and guidance to their congregational group. All communication between the Gathering office and the congregation is handled by this spectacular individual!

Service Learning: On each of the three full Gathering days, one-third of the Gathering is sent out to serve in our host city. Service ranges from hearing stories from local citizens, learning about the history and heritage of our host city, engaging in relationship building around discussion and storytelling, helping with improvements or projects the host city has indicated they would like partners to engage in with them. This day is not about "working hard" to help the city. The day is about engaging with the local community so we can be transformed by their stories and experiences!

Synod Coordinator: An individual selected by the synod bishop, who serves as the primary point of contact for information, questions and advice for all things Gathering. They can be contacted on the Gathering website.

Synod Day: Each synod has an assigned day at the Gathering to come together for worship, learning, building relationships and ongoing faith formation. This is an integral part of the Gathering and should not be considered optional.

the tAble: One of the pre-events to the Gathering. The tAble is for youth who live with varying disabilities. It focuses on the God-given gifts and abilities of all young people but particularly those the world labels as "un-able."

APPENDIX

Gathering leadership encourages congregational leaders to begin preparing as early as possible. For your convenience we have created timelines and budgets to help pace and guide your preparations.

The 12- and 18-month timelines have similar information—use whichever suits your congregation's context best.

12-MONTH GATHERING PLANNING TIMELINE

JUNE 2017

[Note: May 15 – Volunteer applications go live (age 19 and one year following high school graduation through adult)]

- Read and review The Official ELCA Gathering Handbook resource
- Identify a Primary Adult Leader for the group
- Contact the Synod Coordinator to learn more about the Gathering
- Join the Gathering's social media channels:
Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat
- Sign up for the Gathering gNews on the Gathering website
- Review materials from Gathering website, ELCA.org/gathering
- Assess fundraising needs and goals and possible Gathering financial-aid needs
- Begin to identify and target eligible adults and youth for MYLE, the tAble and the Gathering

JULY 2017

- July 15 – Volunteer applications close
- Apply for program fee financial aid from the Gathering if applicable (ELCA.org/gathering)
- Begin to contact transportation companies and get quotes
- Create and approve a baseline, conservative trip budget
 - Program and registration fees
 - Housing and hotel fees
 - Transportation fees
 - Food costs
 - Free time, extras and group shirts
- Participate in any pre-Gathering webinars, trainings
- Develop a Gathering fundraising and participant payment plan
- Set trip dates (travel time + event dates + fun time=trip dates)
- Create adult leader pre-Gathering meeting schedule
- Create youth participant pre-Gathering meeting schedule

AUGUST 2017

- Hold parent informational and youth interest meetings
- Purpose of Gathering
- Hand out all needed forms and paperwork
- Trip overview and vision
- Dates and cost
- Fundraising and payment timeline (are participant payments in manageable amounts? For example, \$200 monthly.)
- Pre-trip meeting and involvement expectations
- Firm up fundraising plans and goals, set dates
- Identify and confirm adult leaders for Gathering
- Register for the 2018 ELCA Network Extravaganza

SEPTEMBER 2017

- Begin to collect registrations and deposits
- Sept. 15 – Early bird registration is open online

Primary Adult Leader needs to have their

ELCA Congregational ID number _____

- Submit non-refundable deposits

OCTOBER 2017

- Begin team-building meetings; focus should shift from informational to group building and growing spiritually
- Create a group covenant
- Start Getting Ready materials and regular pre-trip meetings (suggested monthly)
- Host adult leader meetings
- Expectations
- Trainings

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2017

- Nov. 15 – Regular registration rate begins
- Log onto registration portal to confirm all registrations and deposits have been received

You will need Primary Adult Leader's email address used to register, and ELCA Congregational ID number _____

- Continue fundraising
- Finalize transportation to and from the Gathering

JANUARY 2018

- Jan. 26-29 – Attend 2018 ELCA Youth Ministry Network Extravaganza
- Start researching food options and free-time options
(perfect if you are at the Extravaganza)
- Receive Gathering housing assignment*
(at or following the Extravaganza) *early bird registrations only
- Continue fundraising

FEBRUARY 2018

- Feb. 15 – Late registration rate begins
- Continue fundraising
- Getting Ready materials and pre-trip meeting

MARCH 2018

- March 15 – Send housing deposit and room lists to hotel
- Design and purchase group shirts (if applicable)
- Continue fundraising
- Getting Ready Materials and pre-trip meeting
- Adult leaders meeting

APRIL 2018

- Prepare and gather all liability forms with insurance card copies
(make three copies)
- Contact housing site and verify payment amount and rooming lists
- Prepare tax-exempt information (if applicable)
- Continue fundraising
- Getting Ready materials and pre-trip meeting
- Schedule commissioning service
- Schedule return and celebrate activities

MAY 2018

- May 15 – Registration closes and full registration and program cost due; last day to make cancellations and substitutions
- Have a parent and participant final meeting
 - Give housing contact information
 - Adult contact information
 - Group Itinerary (departure and arrival times)
 - How will the group share its story?
 - Review food and spending-money needs
 - Detailed packing list
 - Covenants (each parent and child signs; adults sign their own as well)
- Double check collection of all paperwork and forms
- Print final confirmation letter from Gathering office
- Collect final trip payments
- Prepare participant calling cards and handout (a business card with all adult leader cellphone numbers)
- Create trip journals (optional); establish storytelling procedures (trip hashtag? Facebook group? Blog?)

JUNE 2018

- Share ways parents and congregation members can “join in the fun” as well (Live stream? Follow the official hashtag? Flickr? Facebook group?)
- Make a plan for devotion time at the Gathering. Is this something some of the senior or junior youth can help lead?
- Commissioning service for all Gathering participants
- Prepare two trip binders (one for primary leader, one for church office)
 - Participant emergency contact information
 - Release of liability forms and insurance information
 - Group itinerary with housing site information
 - Signed covenants
 - Calling tree and plans on how you will update parents
- Have a final meeting with adult leaders to go over expectations, concerns, typical day, etc.
- Have a plan for a group identifier to see through the crowds (something tall and portable)

- Prepare first-aid kits for each adult
- Prepare a group first-aid kit with extra travel sizes of:
 - deodorant
 - bodywash and soap
 - shampoo
 - Band-Aids, ibuprofen, antacids
 - toothbrushes
 - feminine-care products
 - toothpaste
- June 15 – Remind families of departure times
- Hold a blessing and sending service and prayer (prayer partners)
- June 24-27 – MYLE and tAble
- June 27-July 1 – ELCA Youth Gathering

DURING GATHERING

- Have fun! Fully participate. Be positive – even when it is hard to be.
- Upon arrival, call or email the church office to let them know you have arrived safely. Fill them in on any important changed information.
- Check in and meet with your adult leaders regularly to go over daily schedule, expectations, concerns, God sightings; PRAY.
- Have regular devotions with your group. (First 15 or Final 15 are great free and provided resources.)
- Engage your storytelling procedures. (Trip hashtag? Facebook group? Blog?)
- Take time to breathe.
- Bond with your group, engage in conversation, have fun, laugh, live in the moment.

1-4 WEEKS FOLLOWING GATHERING

- Collect and share pictures, post online
- Collect participant reflections
- Celebrate; get together to share stories
- Complete the Getting Ready Lesson-Staying Ready and use Welcome Back Litany to continue to grow
- Share with and thank the congregation and family members (Dinner? Dinner and program?)

18-MONTH GATHERING PLANNING TIMELINE

2-3 YEARS BEFORE EVENT

- Location announcement
- Assess congregation budget line-item needs (if applicable)

JANUARY 2017

- Read and review “The Official Gathering Handbook” resource
- Identify a Primary Adult Leader for group
- Contact the synod office or Synod Coordinator to learn more about the Gathering
- Begin to identify and target eligible youth for the Gathering experience
- Discern if MYLE or tAble is a fit for your congregation
- Join the Gathering’s social media channels: [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#), Snapchat
- Sign up for the Gathering gNews on the [Gathering website](#)

FEBRUARY 2017

- Review materials from Gathering website, [ELCA.org/gathering](#)
- Start the excitement and recruitment of participants and adult volunteers using provided promo materials

MARCH 2017

- Assess fundraising needs and goals and possible Gathering financial assistance needs
- Begin to identify and target eligible adults for the Gathering experience
- Identify and encourage young adults and adults to serve as Gathering volunteers

APRIL 2017

- Create and approve a baseline conservative trip budget
- Program and registration fees (Gathering, MYLE, tAble program fees)
- Housing and hotel fees
- Transportation fees
- Food costs
- Free time, extras and group shirts

- Begin to contact transportation companies and get quotes
- Participate in any pre-Gathering webinars, trainings

MAY 2017

- Develop a Gathering fundraising and participant payment plan
- May 15 – Volunteer applications go live (age 19 and one year following high school graduation through adult)
- Set trip dates (travel time + event dates + fun time=trip dates)

JUNE 2017

- Create adult leader pre-Gathering meeting schedule
- Create youth participant pre-Gathering meeting schedule

JULY-SEPTEMBER 2017

- July 15 – Volunteer applications close
- July 15 – Program fee financial aid from the Gathering open (website)
- Hold parent informational and youth interest meetings
 - Purpose of Gathering
 - Hand out all needed forms and paperwork
 - Trip overview and vision
 - Dates and cost
 - Fundraising and payment timeline (Are participant payments in manageable amounts? For example, \$200 monthly.)
 - Pre-trip meeting and involvement expectations
- Identify and confirm adult leaders for Gathering
- Register for the 2018 ELCA Network Extravaganza
- Firm up fundraising plans and goals, set dates
- Begin to collect registrations and deposits
- Sept. 15 – Early bird registration is open online

**Primary Adult Leader needs to have their
ELCA Congregational ID number _____**

- Submit non-refundable deposits

OCTOBER 2017

- Begin team building meetings. Focus should shift from informational to group building and growing spiritually.
- Create a group covenant

- Start Getting Ready materials and regular pre-trip meetings (suggested monthly)
- Host adult leader meetings
 - Expectations
 - Trainings (maybe use or attend Practice Discipleship sessions)

NOVEMBER & DECEMBER 2017

- Nov. 15 – Regular registration rate begins
 - Log onto registration portal to confirm all registrations and deposits have been received
- You will need the Primary Adult Leader’s email address used to register, and ELCA Congregational ID number _____**
- Continue fundraising
 - Finalize transportation to and from the Gathering

JANUARY 2018

- Jan. 26-29 – Attend 2018 ELCA Network Extravaganza
- Start researching food options and free-time options (perfect if you are at the Extravaganza)
- Receive Gathering housing assignment* (at or following the ELCA Network Extravaganza)
*early bird registrations only
- Continue fundraising

FEBRUARY 2018

- Feb. 15 – Late registration rate begins
- Continue fundraising
- Getting Ready materials and pre-trip meeting

MARCH 2018

- March 15 – Send housing deposit and room lists to hotel
- Design and purchase group shirts (if applicable)
- Continue fundraising
- Getting Ready Materials and pre-trip meeting
- Adult leaders meeting

APRIL 2018

- Prepare and gather all liability forms with insurance card copies (make three copies)
- Contact housing site and verify payment amount and rooming lists
- Prepare tax-exempt information (if applicable)
- Continue fundraising
- Getting Ready materials and pre-trip meeting
- Schedule commissioning service
- Schedule return and celebrate activities

MAY 2018

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JUNE 2018

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 - Participant emergency contact information
 - Release of liability forms and insurance information
 - Group itinerary with housing site information

- Signed covenants
- Calling tree and plans on how you will update parents
- Have a final meeting with adult leaders to go over expectations, concerns, typical day, etc.
- Have a plan for a group identifier to see through the crowds (something tall and portable)
- Prepare first-aid kits for each adult
- Prepare a group first-aid kit with extra travel sizes of:
 - deodorant
 - bodywash and soap
 - shampoo
 - Band-Aids, Ibuprofen, Advil
 - toothbrushes
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- Have fun! Fully participate. Be positive – even when it is hard to be.
- Upon arrival, call or email the church office to let them know you have arrived safely. Fill them in on any important changed information.
- Check in and meet with your adult leaders regularly to go over daily schedule, expectations, concerns, God sightings; PRAY.
- Have regular devotions with your group. (First 15 or Final 15 are great free and provided resources.)
- Engage your storytelling procedures. (Trip hashtag? Facebook group? Blog?)
- Take time to breathe.
- Bond with your group, engage in conversation, have fun, laugh, live in the moment.

1-4 WEEKS FOLLOWING GATHERING

- Collect and share pictures, post online
- Collect participant reflections
- Celebrate; get together to share stories
- Complete the Getting Ready Lesson-Staying Ready and use Welcome Back Litany to continue to grow
- Share with and thank the congregation and family members (Dinner? Dinner and program?)

SAMPLE COVENANT 1*

As we prepare to experience the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering together, we covenant with one another as an intentional Christian community.

Before the 2018 Gathering, we will:

- participate in all meetings and fundraisers
- worship regularly
- ask people to pray for us and the Gathering

We agree to honor each other during this experience by:

- showing concern for others' physical, emotional and spiritual well-being
- using words that build people up
- gathering in public spaces only (not in sleeping rooms)
- having positive attitudes
- understanding that leaders will sometimes make decisions that we don't like but we will be supportive anyway

We agree to care for each other in our group by:

- being on time
- helping each other
- considering others' sleeping needs

We agree that we are called to be responsible to one another and to the families and congregation we represent and that we will behave in the following ways:

- when we are frustrated with someone we will talk to the person(s) involved or seek the help of an adult leader in resolving the problem
- wearing our congregational shirts and bottoms that are at least mid-thigh each day
- not using put-downs or insults (even in jest)
- carry a copy of our emergency form with us
- use common sense and Christian care when an issue isn't covered by this covenant

SAMPLE COVENANT 1 (CONT.)

We expect our adult leaders to:

- show patience and be flexible
- show us a lighthearted, loving and fun side of themselves
- consult youth in decision-making as much as possible

We willingly agree to these expectations:

- always let an adult leader know where you are
- no using drugs, alcohol or tobacco products
- participate fully in the Gathering
- abide by lights-out time
- always travel in groups of three or more
- no sexual activity

After the 2018 Gathering, we will:

- bring back stories, photos and other mementos to share
- participate in sharing these experiences with the congregation including submitting my blog post to the primary adult leader by July 15
- worship regularly
- show care not to leave those who did not attend out of conversations and encourage them to join us for other youth ministry opportunities

When someone fails to follow the covenant, we will handle the problem in the following ways:

- private conversation with primary leader for minor issues
- youth may be asked to spend part or all of the day under direct supervision of an adult leader
- zero tolerance area (alcohol, drugs, violence, theft) will result in consulting the proper authorities and participant may be sent home at their or their family's expense at the discretion of the primary adult leader

Participant signature _____

Parent signature _____
(for youth participants)

**Adapted from the 2016 National LCMS Youth Gathering Pre-Gathering Materials*

SAMPLE COVENANT 2*

Please read and discuss with your group. Add your own items based on input from your group. Have each participant sign.

I will:

- become familiar with the objectives and guidelines of the Gathering and strive to achieve these objectives and communicate them appropriately
- conduct myself in a manner that reflects my Christian faith and positively represent my family, local congregation, my synod and the Gathering
- care for myself physically, emotionally and spiritually, with a goal of positive well-being and over-all health
- support and participate in all activities, honoring my own physical and psychological comfort levels, and work together to learn and grow from this experience
- uphold the authority of those responsible for the program or activity in which I am participating and assist one another in every way to encourage learning and faith formation
- honor the schedule and be punctual for events
- be aware of and keep quiet times
- be mindful of others' right to privacy and respect their personal belongings
- be responsible and accountable for the stewardship of all resources entrusted to me
- use all facilities made available to us with care – if I hurt or accidentally damage property, I will take responsibility for the damage done and inform my group's adult leader or a member of the Gathering planning team immediately
- treat everyone with respect, patience, courtesy, dignity and consideration – I will not tolerate the humiliation or ridicule of anyone in any environment where I am present
- honor the equality of all people, avoiding all forms of discrimination and respect the dignity of each person without regard to status, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation or physical or mental abilities
- use positive reinforcement and effective communication skills – I will not criticize nor engage in unhealthy competition, comparison, or use physical discipline or force as a retaliation or correction for inappropriate behavior by another

I will promote an environment that is physically and psychologically safe for myself and others:

- I will not use profanity.
- I will not smoke.
- I will not use alcohol.

SAMPLE COVENANT 2 (CONT.)

- I will not bring, use or distribute illegal drugs.
 - I will follow the established guidelines for prescription and over-the-counter drugs and medications.
 - As a person under the age of 18, I will follow the instructions of my parent(s) or guardian and the guidelines established by my group and this event for the intake of my personal prescribed drugs or medications.
 - I will not purchase, possess, view, download or distribute pornography.
 - I will not possess weapons or items intended to harm others.
 - I will respect our group's guidelines for use of technology which state
-

I will:

- be respectful of the physical boundaries of individuals and use only appropriate touch and expressions of affection
- avoid inappropriate language and conduct that offends or that takes advantage of another for my own personal benefit
- not engage in any form of unwanted affection, inappropriate sexual activity or sexual harassment
- not visit or gather in private rooms of others, unless it is a sanctioned, scheduled group meeting
- as an adult, avoid situations where I am alone with a youth to whom I am not related

I have read the covenant and understand that a violation of any part of this covenant may result in the loss of my status as a leader or participant in the Gathering ministry and the loss of the privilege to take part in the Gathering. I agree to accept the consequences implemented, which may result in me being sent home at my own expense or that of my parent(s) or guardian.

Signature youth participant

Signature of parent(s) or guardian of youth participant

Signature of adult participant

**Adapted from Linda Staats, Phoenix, Ariz.*

SAMPLE COVENANT 3*

As a participant of the ELCA Youth Gathering, I agree to:

- show respect for myself and all other participants of this event as well as the facility staff and property
- participate in all parts of the Gathering
- not bring or use alcohol or other non-prescribed drugs including tobacco products
- abide by curfew times and quiet hours
- not use offensive language
- not engage in sexual activity
- follow the open-door policy, which states that visitors of either gender who are attending the Gathering may visit friends in their room during free time if the door to the room is left open and if all roommates agree to the visitor being there
- keep my cellphone on silent during all activities of the event
- HAVE FUN!

A warning will be given for breaking the covenant about: respecting others, curfew, participation in the event, language, open door policy.

Stronger corrective action, including a participant being sent home, will be enacted for repeatedly breaking the covenant items or the following: possession or use of illegal drugs, alcohol or tobacco products, sexual activity, acts of violence.

The primary adult leader will make all decisions concerning consequences. If a participant is to be sent home, he or she will be financially responsible for any costs.

I agree to live in this covenant for this event. I understand the consequences if I choose to break this covenant.

Participant's signature _____

Parental/guardian signature _____
(if participant is registered as a youth)

**Adapted from the Southeastern Pennsylvania Synod's Youth Ministry Covenant*

COVENANT TEMPLATE*

Use this template as a guide for creating your covenant together. Feel free to add or take away sections so that you can create a covenant that works best for your group.

As we prepare to experience the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering together, we covenant with one another as an intentional Christian community.

Before the 2018 Gathering we will:

We agree to honor another during this experience by:

We agree to care for each other in our group by:

We expect our adult leaders to:

We willingly agree to these expectations:

After the 2018 Gathering, we will:

We agree that we are called to be responsible to one another and to the families and congregation we represent and that we will behave in the following ways:

When someone fails to follow the covenant, we will handle the problem in the following ways:

Participant signature

Parent or guardian signature (for youth participants)

**Adapted from the 2016 National LCMS Youth Gathering Pre-Gathering Materials*

SAMPLE BUDGET A

First Lutheran Church's Gathering Budget

Arriving Tuesday, June 26; Departing Sunday, July 1

3 female youth, 4 male youth, 2 female adults, 1 male adult
Flying from Philadelphia, PA

INCOME	# of people	cost/person	total
Family/Individuals contribution	10	200	2000
Congregational budget contribution 2017			1500
Congregational budget contribution 2018			1500
Fundraiser - Pancake breakfast May 2017			500
Fundraiser - Pancake breakfast Nov 2017			600
Fundraiser - Pancake breakfast Apr 2018			600
Fundraiser - Clothing drive June 2017			1200
Fundraiser - Rent A Youth (Mar 2017-June 2018)			2000
Fundraiser - Community Yard Sale Apr 2018			1500
Fundraiser - Local business ads on shirts			1000
Fundraiser - Valentine's Day Dinner Feb 17			750
Fundraiser - Valentine's Day Dinner Feb 18			750
Fundraiser - Stock in Youth May 2018			1500
TOTAL INCOME			15400

EXPENSES

Registration	# of people	cost/person	total	
Early-bird registration	10	350	3500	
Registration Total			3500	
Housing	# of rooms	cost/night	# nights	
Hotel rooms	4	159	5	3180
Housekeeping tips	4	10	5	200
Housing Total			3380	

Food	# meals	cost/person	# people	total
Breakfasts + tips	5	12	10	600
Lunches + tips	6	17	10	1020
Dinners + tips	5	20	10	1000
Food total				<u>2620</u>

Transportation	# of people	cost/person		total
Airfare	10	400		4000
Checked baggage	5	50		250
	# of cars	cost/car	# of days	total
Rental cars	2	55	6	660
Rental car gas	2	70		140
parking	2	25	6	300
Transportation Total				<u>5350</u>

Other	# of people	cost/person		total
Site Seeing	10	25		250
Tshirts	10	12		120
Trading pins				100
Sunday offering	10	15		150
Other Total				<u>620</u>

TOTAL FOR GROUP	\$15,470
TOTAL PER PERSON	\$1,547

SAMPLE BUDGET B

First Lutheran Church's Gathering Budget

Arriving Wednesday, June 27; Departing Sunday, July 1
(one day of travel on either end)

3 female youth, 4 male youth, 1 female adult, 1 male adult
Driving from Philadelphia, PA

INCOME	# of people	cost/person	total
Family/Individuals contribution	9	200	1800
Congregational budget contribution 2017			1500
Congregational budget contribution 2018			1500
Fundraiser - Pancake breakfast May 2017			500
Fundraiser - Pancake breakfast Nov 2017			500
Fundraiser - Pancake breakfast Apr 2018			500
Fundraiser - Clothing drive June 2017			1200
Fundraiser - Rent A Youth (Mar 2017-June 2018)			1000
Fundraiser - Valentine's Day Dinner Feb 17			750
Fundraiser - Valentine's Day Dinner Feb 18			750
Fundraiser - Stock in Youth May 2018			1500
TOTAL INCOME			11500

EXPENSES

Registration	# of people	cost/person	total
Early-bird registration	9	350	3150
Registration Total			3,500

Housing	# rooms	cost/night	# nights	total
Hotel rooms	4	159	4	2544
Housekeeping tips	4	9	4	144
Housing Total				<u>2688</u>

Food	# of meals	cost/person	# people	total
Breakfasts (bring along)	7	5	9	315
Lunches + tips	7	15	9	945
Dinners + tips	7	15	9	945
Extra for 1 "nice" meal	1	10	9	90
Food total				<u>2205</u>

Transportation	# of people	cost/person	total
Charter bus with synod	9	300	2700
Uber rides			200
Transportation Total			<u>2900</u>

Other	# of people	cost/person	total
Tshirts	9	12	108
Trading pins			20
Sunday offering	9	15	135
Other Total			<u>263</u>

Total for Group **\$11,556**
Total per Person **\$1,284**

INFORMATION CARD (FRONT) TEMPLATES

(Download customizable Word templates in the media kit at elca.org/gathering)

[CONGREGATION NAME]

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

ENTER THESE #'S INTO
YOUR CELL PHONE,
AND KEEP THIS CARD
IN YOUR POCKET DURING
THE ENTIRE ELCA YOUTH
GATHERING, JUST IN CASE!



[CONGREGATION NAME]

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

ENTER THESE #'S INTO
YOUR CELL PHONE,
AND KEEP THIS CARD
IN YOUR POCKET DURING
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[CONGREGATION NAME]

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[CONGREGATION NAME]

IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

ENTER THESE #'S INTO
YOUR CELL PHONE,
AND KEEP THIS CARD
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GATHERING, JUST IN CASE!



INFORMATION CARD (BACK) TEMPLATES

(Download customizable Word templates in the media kit at elca.org/gathering)

ADULT LEADER PHONE #'S:

Adult 1 (XXX)XXX - XXXX
Adult 2 (XXX) XXX - XXXX
Adult 3 (XXX) XXX - XXXX

ELCA YOUTH GATHERING INFO LINE:

(888) 411-ELCA (3522)

HOTEL:

[HOTEL NAME]
[HOTEL STREET ADDRESS] [HOTEL CITY, ST, ZIP],
[(XXX) XXX-XXXX]

ADULT LEADER PHONE #'S:

Adult 1 (XXX)XXX - XXXX
Adult 2 (XXX) XXX - XXXX
Adult 3 (XXX) XXX - XXXX

ELCA YOUTH GATHERING INFO LINE:

(888) 411-ELCA (3522)

HOTEL:

[HOTEL NAME]
[HOTEL STREET ADDRESS] [HOTEL CITY, ST, ZIP],
[(XXX) XXX-XXXX]

ADULT LEADER PHONE #'S:

Adult 1 (XXX)XXX - XXXX
Adult 2 (XXX) XXX - XXXX
Adult 3 (XXX) XXX - XXXX

ELCA YOUTH GATHERING INFO LINE:

(888) 411-ELCA (3522)

HOTEL:

[HOTEL NAME]
[HOTEL STREET ADDRESS] [HOTEL CITY, ST, ZIP],
[(XXX) XXX-XXXX]

ADULT LEADER PHONE #'S:

Adult 1 (XXX)XXX - XXXX
Adult 2 (XXX) XXX - XXXX
Adult 3 (XXX) XXX - XXXX

ELCA YOUTH GATHERING INFO LINE:

(888) 411-ELCA (3522)

HOTEL:

[HOTEL NAME]
[HOTEL STREET ADDRESS] [HOTEL CITY, ST, ZIP],
[(XXX) XXX-XXXX]

LUGGAGE TAG TEMPLATES

(Download customizable Word templates in the media kit at elca.org/gathering)

GROUP NAME:
[Congregation Name]


[Congregation Street Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

[Phone #]

[Secondary Phone #]

**IF FOUND, PLEASE CALL ONE
OF THE ABOVE PHONE NUMBERS
TO RETURN THIS BAG TO ITS
OWNER. THANK YOU!**



GROUP NAME:
[Congregation Name]


[Congregation Street Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

[Phone #]

[Secondary Phone #]

**IF FOUND, PLEASE CALL ONE
OF THE ABOVE PHONE NUMBERS
TO RETURN THIS BAG TO ITS
OWNER. THANK YOU!**



GROUP NAME:
[Congregation Name]


[Congregation Street Address]

[City, State, Zip Code]

[Phone #]

[Secondary Phone #]

**IF FOUND, PLEASE CALL ONE
OF THE ABOVE PHONE NUMBERS
TO RETURN THIS BAG TO ITS
OWNER. THANK YOU!**



RESOURCES

[ELCA.org/gathering](https://elca.org/gathering)

Sign up to receive gNews on our website!

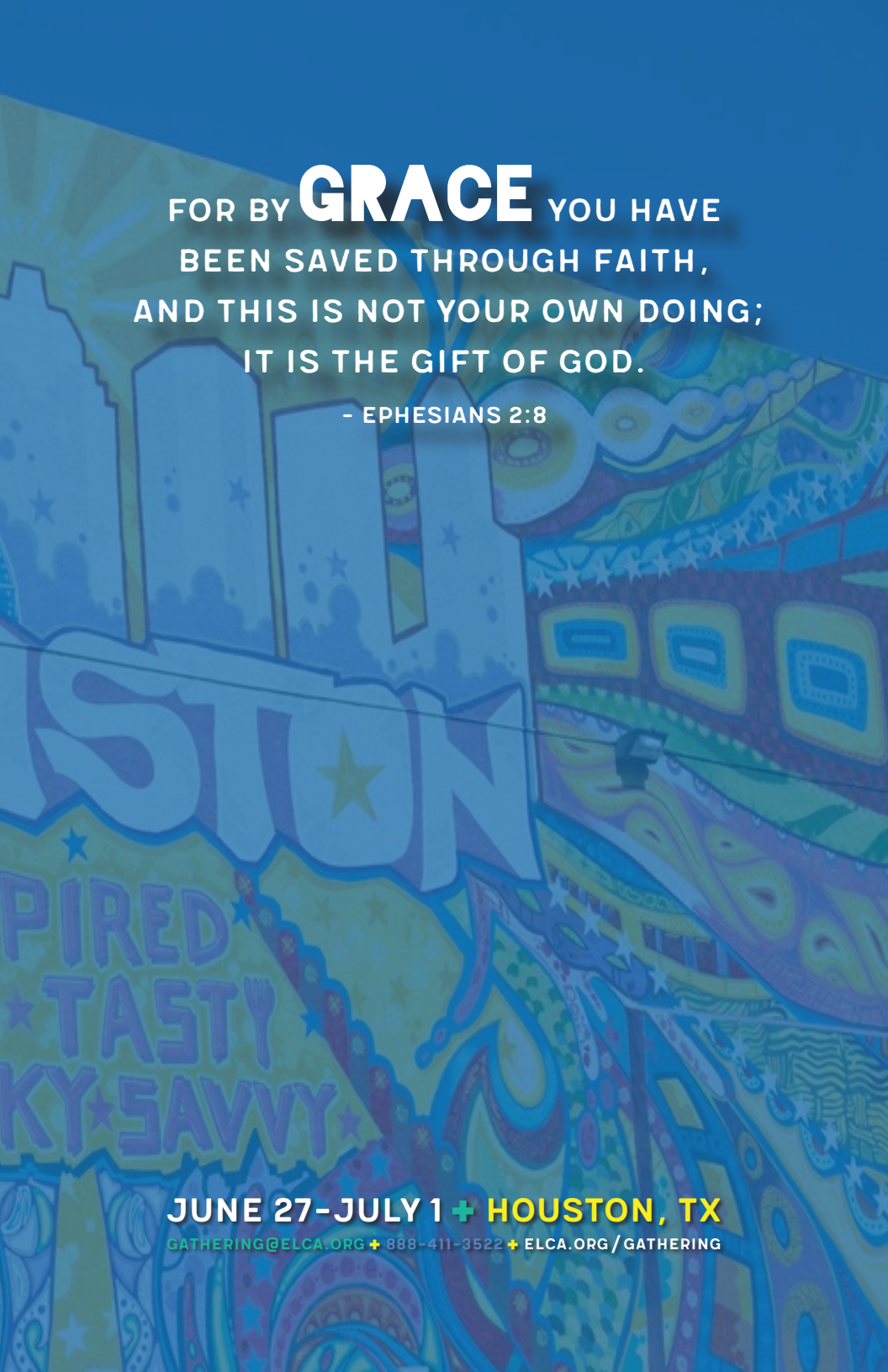
facebook.com/youthgathering

Attend trainings! Typically, your Gathering Synod Coordinator will host training opportunities in the fall and spring before the Gathering. This is a great time to learn about the Gathering but also to ask questions and get ideas from others who have attended.



#ELCAYG2018





FOR BY **GRACE** YOU HAVE
BEEN SAVED THROUGH FAITH,
AND THIS IS NOT YOUR OWN DOING;
IT IS THE GIFT OF GOD.

- EPHESIANS 2:8

JUNE 27-JULY 1 + HOUSTON, TX

GATHERING@ELCA.ORG + 888-411-3522 + ELCA.ORG/GATHERING