BRINGING THE GATHERING HOME

A 3-part Youth Ministry Curriculum reflecting upon the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering
Well, how about that? Years of planning, so many fund-raisers, thousands of miles traveled, five amazing days at the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering and now it’s over. Or is it?

The Gathering shouldn’t just stay in Houston, it needs to be brought home and shared and lived. It’s too much a part of each of our stories to let it stop on July 1st! These resources are designed to help your group think about how they will continue to live the amazing experiences, preached Gospel, life changing stories and radical hospitality and embody them in their lives.

These sessions hold to the 2018 ELCA Youth Gathering theme that was formed from concepts by Morgan Schmidt and our primary scripture of Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

Grace is a foundational and distinctive piece of the Lutheran faith. This gift, undeserved and freely given, changes lives and perspectives as people realize they are enough because of what Christ has done and are called into the world to serve their neighbor and share the good news.

The logo is a visual representation of our theme and the 2018 Gathering experience. It incorporates the coming together of a mosaic to reflect the diverse host city of Houston, as well as the idea that we are a church where all are imperfect and incomplete, yet we each belong in – and have an important place in – God’s masterpiece. The cross at the center of the logo is the focus – it is God’s grace, through Christ's life, death and resurrection, that changes everything for all people.

In her book “Woo: Awakening Teenagers’ Desire to Follow in the Way of Jesus,” Morgan Schmidt identifies the three central desires of teens.

All youth desire:
  • Someone to become
  • Somewhere to belong
  • Something to do [that changes the world]

With these things in mind and pages of notes taken during the Gathering from one-on-one conversations, group conversations, presentations, speakers, musicians, scripture, programming – these sessions have been created to further the Gathering as we engage back in our own communities, forever transformed because Jesus Changes Everything!

Blessings,

Chelle Huth,
Manager, Curriculum Writing Team
Helpful Leader Info:

Here is a list of helpful pieces of information for you as you engage in this resource.

- This resource has a strong relational emphasis. We are called to relationships by Christ through our words and deeds. Spend time before each session studying the materials and getting yourself ready to engage in the discussions and the work of the sessions.

- The resources are built around the faith formation process of devotion, caring conversation, rituals and service. Each session incorporates these practices.

- A ritual we encourage is lighting a “Christ Candle” at the beginning of the session during the opening prayer. It does not need to be THE “Christ Candle” from your sanctuary (and probably should not be…) just get a candle that will last through the sessions and keep it as a visual reminder of the light of Christ present for us and the world.

- If your young people have their “Jesus” rocks from Synod Day or if you have a few that can represent the rocks your group took home with them, place them around the Christ Candle and add those names to your prayers each session.

- A Warm-up activity is included with each session that has you posting a large print copy of a word or phrase. You can have these printed on 24”x36” size paper at a local copy store or office supply place or you can write them on a newsprint sheet (perhaps have a youth with a flair for art create it for you!) You will post this on a wall and encourage youth to write their responses on the sheet. You can save these to add to your sheets from the year as a reminder of your learning and growth through The Gathering. Share these via social media after each session!

- There are video links in the curriculum. If you have internet/wi-fi available to you during your sessions, you can just click the link to have the video cued up to play. If you do not have internet/wi-fi available during your sessions, you will need to download the videos to your computer to have available off-line. If you’re not sure how to do this, ask a youth to take charge of getting the videos ready to view during the sessions.

- Each session has the same style sending for ritual. This is the sending that was used in the Getting Ready Materials and the closing worship at The Gathering. The sending has youth “standing” up during the sending as a visual action. If you have youth in your group that are not able to engage in this way, please be cognizant of this and create an inclusive way to use the sending. This also goes for any of the activities given in the session.

- If you need help thinking through any of this, please don’t hesitate to contact the Gathering office or Chelle Huth (chuth@uls.edu) for ideas.
GATHERING CONNECTION:

Presiding Bishop Eaton shared in her sermon that we spend a lot of time in this world separating the clean from unclean (worthy from unworthy.) The truth is, we are all unclean, have that ick as part of us. It is not possible to be healed except through the love of Jesus. Because we are given this love, this grace, we are forever changed to share radical hospitality. Presiding Bishop Eaton also reminded us that Jesus doesn’t change everything...Jesus has changed everything!

The tAble was a Pre-Gathering event for young people with disabilities. The theme for The tAble was “You Belong” centering on Psalm 139:14 “I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” Their focus was on the understanding that we are all created beautifully by God and we belong at God’s table and every table. This is radical hospitality! All are welcome!

At the same time the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE) was meeting under the theme "One: One Body, One Mission, One Household in Christ" based in Ephesians 2:14-19. In God’s eternal plan and wisdom there is a way to remove barriers. This new humanity would no longer be many, but ONE believer in Christ. In other words, this was God’s plan for the unity of many into ONE new people in Christ. Again, Radical Hospitality! We are ONE in Christ!

LEADER INFO:

"Hospitality is love in action. Hospitality is the flesh and muscle on bones of love." Alexander Strauch, Theologian & Author. The Bible reminds us time and again that hospitality is central to our identity as children of God. The Greek word for hospitality is made up of 2 words that mean “entertain stranger” (philoxenos.) Jesus is our example of radical hospitality. Jesus welcomed the stranger, the outcast, the unclean. We are to be living examples of Jesus’ radical hospitality. This session will help your group recall what Jesus does as examples of hospitality and how to be radically hospitable in our own lives.

Two pre-Gathering events, The tAble and the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE), lifted up the understanding of Radical Hospitality in their gathering spaces. Please read more about these in the Youth Gathering Connection section below.

You will have a large sheet of paper with the word “Unclean” on it. As the session progresses you will be covering up the word “Unclean” with your works of radical hospitality, so the “unclean” is no longer visible.

SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Instagram your group Hospitality sheet to @ELCAgathering #ELCAYG2018 #YourGroupName
GATHER (15 minutes):

Warmup

As youth enter the space encourage them to use the large print of the phrase “Unclean” to write down ways our world tells us we (or someone else) are “unclean” or to be avoided. Provide markers or sticky notes for them to do this.

Call the youth together as you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why they included that.

The Intro

Say: Presiding Bishop Eaton shared in her sermon on Sunday at the Gathering that our world spends a lot of time separating the clean and unclean. Rev. Tuhina Rasche shared on Wednesday night that God is not into the should and should nots of the world. They are both speaking of radical hospitality. A welcoming by God for all. Jesus was sent to earth to show that radical hospitality. In this session we are going to dig deeper into radical hospitality and how we can be radicals too.

Gathering Prayer

Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.

Gracious and loving God, you give us radical hospitality by claiming and loving us even in our “un-clean” state. Help us to grow today in our understanding of that radical hospitality so we may too be welcoming in all places to all people. We pray this in your name and the name of Jesus, your Son, our lead in radical hospitality. Amen.
Experiential Learning: Packing Up

This experience will help you and your youth understand some of the ways you have encountered “inhospitality” in your own lives.

Hand out paper & pens (please make sure the paper and pens are the same color so anonymity can be kept.)

Say: On your paper please take a few minutes to write down a time you were not welcomed or have not been welcomed in an ongoing way. Don’t put your name on the page. We will be shuffling these stories and reading each other’s out loud. We will not be trying to decide who wrote the story, we are just going to learn the many ways we have been unwelcomed. Take a few minutes to write your story, you can move about the space to give yourself some room. You don’t have to include lots of details, just be sure we can understand how you were unwelcomed. I’ll give you about 5 minutes. When you're done, place your paper face down on the table.

When all have finished, shuffle the papers and pass them out. Explain that it’s ok if you get your own, but you can pick another if you'd like.

Read the stories. Process what you have heard by asking how many could relate to more than their own story in the stories we heard. Thank everyone for being willing to share their story and acknowledge the pain and hurt that comes with them. Ask everyone to tape the story they are holding to the large print “Unclean”, covering up the word “Unclean.”

WORD (30 minutes):

God’s Story – Scripture

- Ask: When you hear the term “radical hospitality” what do you think. After you share your idea, write it on a sticky note and put it over the stories we just taped to our “unclean” sign.

- During the Mass Gatherings we heard many stories of people experiencing deep “inhospitality” and then how they experienced radical hospitality. Let’s see if we can remember the ways we heard this:
  - Tuhina Rasche – grew up Hindu, attended church with a friend, became Lutheran pastor
  - Ginny Owens – Being different because she was blind, love was shown to her
  - Bryan Stevenson – Equal Justice Initiative, helping youth sentenced as adults
  - Caroline Meeker – Young adult living with eating disorder
  - Michaela Shelley – Young adult living with chronic life threatening illness
  - Will Starkweather – suffered with self-harm cutting, now a pastor
  - Stephen Bouman – ELCA Executive Director of Domestic Mission
  - Carson McCullar – former addict and student of Generation Found
  - Jamie & Rebekah Bruesehoff – transgender, community support

Most of these speakers can be found on YouTube (including their Gathering speech!)

- Say: An ancient Jewish proverb says: “Hospitality is one form of worship.” Let’s read some bible stories to remind us of radical hospitality.
What did you hear in this reading?
What is Jesus teaching us about Radical Hospitality?
How can we learn from this?
How well do we follow this example today?

- Read Romans 12:9-19 "Marks of a true Christian"
  - Let’s write these on sticky notes and post them to our “unclean” board
  - What stuck out to you in this passage?
  - How well do we follow this example today?
  - What can we learn from this?

- Read Hebrews 13:2 "Hospitality to strangers"
  - What are some ways you have experienced hospitality as a “stranger?”
  - What are we to then do with our lives in terms of hospitality?

Our Story – Radical Hospitality

Read: “Hospitality is love in action. Hospitality is the flesh and muscle on bones of love.” Alexander Strauch, Theologian & Author.

Say: The Bible reminds us time and again that hospitality is central to our identity as children of God. We read three passages about this! The ancient Greek word for hospitality is made up of two words that mean “entertain stranger” (philoxenos.) Jesus is our example of radical hospitality. Jesus welcomed the stranger, the outcast, the unclean. We are to be living examples of Jesus’ radical hospitality.

Say: Synod Day placed an emphasis on the idea that We Belong Together. Through participating in worship that day we experienced this baptismal promise that we are Gathered, Claimed and Sent as God’s children. God has claimed each one of us, each of us matter and have a place to belong.

The tAble, a pre-Gathering event for youth living with disabilities, focused on the theme “You Belong” because God created each of us and we are “fearfully and wonderfully made.” God made you, you are beautiful. You belong! Joey, a tAble participant, said “It’s easy, God loves me. I love others.” Sounds simple, doesn’t it? Joey gets it.

Watch the following YouTube video about churches of radical hospitality: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fJ-ztamQa5Q
After the video ask:
• What did you hear?
• Where are we as a congregation in this?
• What are we doing well?
• What can we improve upon?
Say: At the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event (MYLE), a pre-Gathering event for youth of color and those whose primary language is other than English, participants claim their story as a part of God’s story. MYLE focused on the theme “ONE” learning that through God’s eternal plan and wisdom there is a way to remove the barriers that separate us. The new humanity would no longer be many, but ONE. One believer in Christ. God’s plan is for the unity of many into ONE new people in Christ. During MYLE, the youth engaged in ways to build radical hospitality. Anakaren, a MYLE participant says: “Show up! Don’t just say it, do it!” Meaning as youth you can be leaders in change that affects our world. Fiona, another MYLE participant says: “Together we can move forward, even if we mess up. You’re not the magician, you’re the magic! Don’t feel the pressure to create – God made you and you are good!” Fiona and Anakaren are ready to take on the change towards radical hospitality. Are we?

**CONNECT:**

Ask: What are concrete ways we can be radical hospitality people, using the thoughts in the video we just watched and the words from our siblings at The Table and MYLE? Let’s brainstorm a bunch of ideas, write them on sticky notes and post them to our “unclean” sheet.

When your group is done, look over your work. Ask if there is anything the group missed or wants to add. Praise the groups work!

**ENGAGE:**

Ask each group member to add their signature to the “unclean” sheet, indicating that they are committing to showing radical hospitality in their everyday life.

Ask for volunteers to present your “living” examples with the “unclean” sheet to the congregation the following Sunday morning during worship, so the congregation can also begin to think about how they are offering radical hospitality!

Thank everyone for their participation and great work!
SENDING (5 MINUTES):

Gather around the Christ candle and ask someone to share the following prayer, adding petitions that they deem necessary.

Sending Prayer

Great and loving God, we give you thanks for your radical hospitality through your love and claiming of us, and everyone. Help us to share this radical hospitality wherever we are, being living examples of your love. We will fail at this, but we know we can keep working at it, and the more we practice, the easier it becomes to live in radical hospitality. We pray for this in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Go and Do Likewise – (Blessing and Sending)

We will end each session with a blessing, sending you on your way. When I say “stand up,” we all stand up. When I say “stand with,” put your arm around your neighbor’s shoulder. When I say “stand for,” mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord be with You. And also with you.

The book of Hebrews tells us to not fail at showing hospitality to strangers.....

Stand Up – to show your commitment to radical hospitality
Stand With – those who are on the margins, who are outcasts, who are “unclean”
Stand For – changing the world to be a place where all are welcome!

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” This Changes Everything!

Amen

Go in peace, Serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.

You’re not the magician, you’re the magic!
Don’t feel the pressure to create – God made you and you are good!

FIONA, MYLE PARTICIPANT
LEADER INFO:

We are losing the ability to engage in meaningful conversation and even in basic conversation skills. The Gathering gave us a lot, a whole lot to think about, talk about, and do something about! Our last session was practicing radical hospitality, to be welcoming and open to all people. This session is geared to build conversation skills, so your group can be prepared to engage in places they are being called to and to have skills to discuss topics they may not be in agreement with others in the conversation. It’s okay to not agree, it’s not okay to shut down discussion because you won’t hear what others have to say and teach. We will work together to build our conversation skills so we can engage in meaningful conversation when we practice radical hospitality!

Thanks to the “Do Things Together” organization in Minneapolis, MN for insight into this subject matter. www.dothingstogther.org

GATHERING CONNECTION:

On Saturday night of Mass Gathering, Joe Davis said, “It’s our differences that gives us our greatest strength as a church. It makes God’s house a home!” We don’t have to be the same, agree on the same things, but we’re called to be in community together, letting our differences build us up.

In the last session we heard Fiona, MYLE participant, saying: “Together we can move forward, even if we mess up.” That’s key to engaging in conversation, remembering that we won’t always be perfect at it, but we need to work at it together.

You have a voice to move nations.

DEBORAH D.E.E.P. MOUTON

SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Instagram your group engaging in conversation to @ELCAGathering #ELCAYG2018 #YourGroupName
GATHER (15 minutes):

Warmup

As youth enter the space encourage them to use the large print of the phrase “Listen” to write down ways we can be better at listening. Provide markers or sticky notes for them to do this.

Call the youth together as you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why they included that.

The Intro

On Saturday night of Mass Gathering, Joe Davis said, “It’s our differences that gives us our greatest strength as a church. It makes God’s house a home!” We don’t have to be the same, agree on the same things, but we’re called to be in community together, letting our differences build us up.

We heard about a lot of topics during Mass Gatherings last night and explored even more during our Interactive Learning Day and Service Learning Day. Not all these topics are easy to talk about, nor do we all have the same perspective on these topics. How do we engage in good conversation so we can learn, grow and live in radical hospitality, and hope? That’s what this session will help us with. We’re going to work together to become better at radical hospitality conversation.

Gathering Prayer

Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.

Gracious and loving God, you created each of us, perfectly. We fail at times to see each other that way – perfectly created by you. We ask that you guide our session, or words and actions so we can become radically hospitable in conversation, celebrating the beautiful creations we all are. We pray this in your name and the name of Jesus, your Son, our lead in radical hospitality. Amen.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- Bible
- Christ Candle
- Large sheet of newsprint or poster board with the word “Listen” written in bold marker
- Markers
- Computer with Wi-Fi connection (or the video clip downloaded before the session)
- Projector if available
- Paper, pens, sticky notes
Experiential Learning: Guess My Word or Phrase

Using slips of paper, write one word/phrase on each slip and fold in half. The words can be anything from: word, paperclip, happy, taco, Houston, etc. Phrases could be: ELCA Youth Gathering, Iced Tea, swimming pool.

To play the game have someone pick a slip of paper. They can’t tell the group what is on the paper, they must use hand gestures, movements, and words to get the group to say their word/phrase. They are NOT allowed to use the word or any derivation of the word, ie: if the word is Christmas they can’t say Christ or if the phrase is Christmas Tree they can’t say Christ or Tree, etc. If they say any part of the word, they are disqualified and the next person takes over.

Go until all have had a chance to play.

When all have finished, ask what they thought of the game. What was easy, what was difficult? Say: thank you for playing, that was fun. Let’s look at what the Bible has to tell us about conversation and listening.

WORD (30 minutes):

God’s Story – Scripture

Have the group read James 1:19 and Philippians 2:3-4

Ask:
- What do we hear in these words?
- What can we learn from these texts?
- How are we called to listen?

Our Story – Building Conversation

Watch the following YouTube Video on Bad Conversation Skills: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tOQujhUAOb4

After the video ask: What did you hear? How many of us have done some of these?

Say: There was a wise German pastor and theologian named Dietrich Bonhoeffer who was a strong vocal opponent to Nazi Germany. It was because of this and his involvement in attempts to kill Hitler that he was hanged to death by the Nazi regime. Bonhoeffer’s writings are still widely used today as guides and hopefulness in our Christian faith.

Bonhoeffer writes about listening:

*Half-eared listening "despises the person and is only waiting for a chance to speak and thus get rid of the other person."*
“Just as love to God begins with listening to God’s word, so the beginning of love for the person is learning to listen to them.”

“Often a person can be helped merely by having someone who will listen to them seriously.”

Ask: What can we learn from Bonhoeffer about building our conversation skills?

Watch the following video of Celeste Headlee, public radio host and author giving tips on how to have a good conversation. You can start at 2:28 and still get the full effect of her talk. Ask a few of your youth to make notes as Celeste speaks. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R1vskiVDwl4

After the video ask:
• What were the tips Celeste gave us?

Answers could include:
• Don’t multi-task, be fully present
• Don’t lecture or preach (she uses pontificate) – assume you have something to learn
• Use open-ended questions: who, what, where, when, how, why
• Go with the flow, go the direction of the conversation
• If you don’t know something, say you don’t know it
• Don’t equate your experience with theirs
• Try not to repeat yourself
• Stay out of the weeds (don’t worry about the minute details like dates, etc.)
• Listen, really listen (don’t be thinking of your response, listen)
• Be brief

• Do you struggle with any of these? How?

The organization “Do Things Together” offers the next level of conversation tips from Celeste’s list (some cross over...what does that tell us?) Let’s look at that list (maybe write them on a large sheet of paper or have copies available):

1. Listen deeply. Focus only on what the other person is saying.
2. Listen respectfully. Doesn’t mean you agree. It means you allow time and space for them to fully explain their view or make their point and you accept it as a worthwhile perspective.
3. Inquire. Ask open-ended questions and/or questions that ask for specifics in a way that encourages others to explore their assumptions and evidence.
4. Voice openly. Share your real thoughts on the matter, calmly and in a way that shows respect by connecting your thoughts with those that have been expressed up to that point.
5. Give reasons for your thoughts and ideas that do not imply judgment or rejection of others ideas.
6. Balance advocacy and inquiry. You are not neutral, since you have your own ideas and reasons for holding them. But ask questions about the reasons that others give for holding their ideas in such a way as to enhance the common understanding of the issues.
7. Make time for collective reflection. Don’t jump to action unless absolutely necessary. Encourage time to reflect on the shared conversation before committing to anything.

Say: Okay, now that we have tools to help us have good conversations, we’re going to practice. You will break off into groups of even numbers and gather around each other (try to have groups about the same size as much as possible and no more than 10.) Each pair in the group will be conversation partners. You will be given a topic to discuss. One of you will agree with the topic, the other will not. Practice discussing the topic using the skills we learned today. The other members of your group will listen to the conversation and give helpful tips (when time is up.) When time is up, ask the groups to discuss how that conversation went and ways to improve. After the group discussion move to the next set of partners and repeat the process with a new topic. Suggested topics are listed below, feel free to add your own.

- Peanut butter and jelly is the best sandwich.
- Baseball is an absolutely boring sport to watch.
- Artificial Christmas trees are far superior to live Christmas trees.
- Sponge Bob Square Pants is intelligent television.
- Cats are a better pet than dogs.

Say: The purpose of this exercise was to get us thinking about how we can engage in conversation around topics we may not agree on with the other person/people we are talking with. That doesn’t mean we get into a debate, that’s a whole other thing. It means we can be respectful, learning something from each other and be changed because of our conversation. Jesus taught us this very thing through everything he did. He took the time to really BE with people, not just do a brain dump, drop the mike and leave. The next time you have the opportunity, engage in good conversation, radical hospitality, using the skills we’ve learned today.

Thank everyone for their participation and great work.

Say: There was a youth participating in the pre-Gathering event called MYLE, the Multicultural Youth Leadership Event, her name is Fiona. Fiona shared that “Together we can move forward, even if we mess up.” Fiona is right, we need to be in conversation together, we’ll mess up, but we have to keep trying, keep sharing with each other.
SENDING (5 MINUTES):

Gather around the Christ candle and ask someone to share the following prayer, adding petitions that they deem necessary.

Sending Prayer

Great and loving God, we give you thanks for your radical hospitality through your love and claiming of us, and everyone. Help us to share this radical hospitality wherever we are, being living examples of your love. We will fail at this, but we know we can keep working at it, and the more we practice, the easier it becomes to live in radical hospitality. Open our hearts and our minds as we engage in good conversation, hearing and being truly present. We pray for these and all other things we need in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Go and Do Likewise – (Blessing and Sending)

We will end each session with a blessing, sending you on your way. When I say “stand up,” we all stand up. When I say “stand with,” put your arm around your neighbor’s shoulder. When I say “stand for,” mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord Be with You. And also with you.

The book of Hebrews tells us to not fail at showing hospitality to strangers…..

- Stand Up – to show your commitment to radical hospitality through conversation
- Stand With – those who feel unheard or whose voices are silenced
- Stand For – changing the world to be a place where we can listen to one another without fighting or arguing, but with deep listening and care!

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” This Changes Everything!!
Amen

Go in peace, Serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.

God showed up. God is not into the should & should nots of the world.

THE REV. TUHINA RASCHE
GATHERING CONNECTION:

We heard from so many inspiring speakers at The Gathering, engaged with so many partners in the Interaction Center and met so many organizations working to make the world a better place right there in Houston through our Service Learning day. Presiding Bishop Eaton started us off by telling us God’s resistance to this dark world is love. We are God’s resistance. Love is stronger than hate! She reminded us that where the world tries to divide the cross unites! Savanna Sullivan finished the Gathering off by asking “What are you living for? Are you ready to live for this?”

This session will take that final question and explore what we might do both individually and as a group to answer that question. Some of our passions will align, some will differ, we will be stronger because we are naming what we are ready to live for!

LEADER INFO:

These sessions began with an explanation from Morgan Schmitt’s book “Woo” where she shares that teens are looking for the following:

- Someone to become
- Somewhere to belong
- Something to do (to change the world)

We’ve worked through this in the previous sessions as they grew to understand who they want to become (radical hospitality people) and somewhere to belong (inviting into conversation and relationship building, not dividing) now we’re going to work on something to do! We will look at the many topics brought forth at the Gathering through Mass Gathering speakers, Interactive Learning and Service Learning and see where youth’s passions align with the world’s needs.

Be attentive to some possible triggers for youth who have experience with some of these topics personally and be available to help them work through the triggered emotions and encourage them to continue to seek counseling to help them grow stronger in their ongoing work they are doing around these triggers. Remind them of the words from Maria Belding of meansdatabase.org who spoke on Saturday night. She said: “We are not what has been done to us but what our Savior has done for us!”

SOCIAL MEDIA SHARING:

Instagram your groups signs saying what they are living for to @ELCAGathering #ELCAYG2018 #YourGroupName
GATHER (15 minutes):

Warmup

As youth enter the space encourage them to use the large print of the phrase “I'm Passionate About...” to write down their responses. Provide markers or sticky notes for them to do this.

Call the youth together as you are ready to begin the session. Ask them to share what they wrote and why they included that.

The Intro

Say: We heard from so many inspiring speakers at The Gathering, engaged with so many partners in the Interaction Center and met so many organizations working to make the world a better place in Houston through our Service Learning day. Presiding Bishop Eaton started us off by telling us God's resistance to this dark world is love. We are God's resistance. Love is stronger than hate! She reminded us that where the world tries to divide the cross unites! Savanna Sullivan finished the Gathering off by asking “What are you living for? Are you ready to live for this?” This session will take that final question and explore what we might do both individually and as a group to answer that question. Some of our passions will align, some will differ, we will be stronger because we are naming what we are ready to live for!

Gathering Prayer

Ask for a volunteer to lead the gathering prayer.

Gracious and loving God, you created each of us, perfectly. We fail at times to see each other that way – perfectly created by you. We ask that you guide our session, or words and actions so we can become radically hospitable in conversation and in our actions, celebrating the beautiful creations we all are. We pray this in your name and the name of Jesus, your Son, our lead in radical hospitality. Amen.

You were made to make an indelible mark on the world that only you can make. And if you don’t make it...it won’t be made.

MARLON HALL
Experiential Learning: Do You Love Your Neighbor?

Get the group in a circle and have a volunteer in the middle.

Explain that the person in the middle will approach someone in the circle and ask: Do you know your neighbor? The person who was asked needs to give the names of the people on their right and left quickly. If they can’t give the names, they take the place of the person in the middle.

After they give the names of their neighbors the person in the middle asks them: Do you love your neighbors? The person who was asked needs to say “Yes I love my neighbors because…. (and they are now to give a descriptor about their neighbor like: they have a red shirt on or they’re wearing flipflops or they have brown hair.)

Anyone in the group who matches that descriptor must leave their space and find another one before the person in the middle gets to an empty spot. (I’ve found that if you have each person place a shoe at their spot, it “marks” the spot so all can see what is open in the bedlam.) You can also play this game in chairs, but be careful! Whoever is left without a space is now in the middle. Play several rounds of this game.

When all have finished, ask what they thought of the game. What was easy, what was difficult? Say: thank you for playing, that was a fun way to begin to think about who are neighbors are.

WORD (30 minutes):

God’s Story – Scripture

Say: The Gathering theme was “This Changes Everything” and the focus verse was Ephesians 2:8. Ask someone to read the verse.

Ask the group to share what they learned about this verse during the months getting ready for the Gathering and then at the Gathering. Remind them of the explanation offered by the Gathering way back in November 2016 when the theme was announced: “Grace is a foundational and distinctive piece of the Lutheran faith. This gift, undeserved and freely given, changes lives and perspectives as people realize they are enough because of what Christ has done and are called into the world to serve their neighbor and share the good news.”

Ask:

• How are we called to live grace, serve neighbor and share the good news?
Our Story – What Will You Live For?

Watch the following YouTube Video from a father and son team:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nBi0o9YVERU

After the video ask: What did you hear? What are ways we can figure out our passions to make a difference?

Say: We're going to take some time think about what some of our passions are. Let's reflect on our Service Learning partners for inspiration, or the many partners we encountered in Interactive Learning. Who remembers the organization we worked with on our Service Learning day and what they were passionate about in their community?

How about in Interactive Learning? Who can remember some of the partners we met during our day there? What did you encounter or experience or learn there? (Make a list of those you can remember. Use the attached Interactive Learning list of partners to help spark memories.) These partners encouraged us to get involved in many ways.

Katie, a youth participant from Maryland, visited the Women of the ELCA exhibit on human trafficking. She was surprised to learn how many people become victims of human trafficking but was glad to discover her church is working to end it. "The more people that know about (human trafficking) and are aware of it, the more we can do about it," Katie said. Becoming aware of human trafficking sparked a passion in Katie around this issue.

Grab a piece paper and a pen and write a little about what you are passionate about. Our partners in Interactive Learning and Service Learning suggest you focus on these things (and shared very well by the video we watched):

- What do you love?
- What are you good at?
- What do you know?
- What makes your heart race?
- What experiences in your life have shaped you?
- Who are you or who do you want to become?

Take some time to work on your list and when you're done, come back to the circle. I'll give you about 7 minutes. Go!
After time has elapsed and everyone has had a chance to create a list, bring everyone back together. Ask someone to make a group list of things they discovered using a sheet of newsprint and a marker.

After all have shared look to see where there are similarities and like passions. Encourage those youth to do some ongoing brainstorming around their passions.

If there was a collective passion that rose up talk about what that might mean for you as a group to make a difference in that area. How might your group engage in making a change for the better around that need.

Say: Okay, now that we have an idea of what some of our passions are, let’s see if we can find ways to make a change in our community using these passions and the resources we have around us. Let’s just start by throwing ideas out so we can all gain empowerment from the collective ideas. There are not wrong thoughts...just good starting points! Go!

Give the group some time to brainstorm ways to match needs with passions. Write those on newsprint with the words “Living For” written on top and hang them in the room. Encourage youth to begin working on those areas and making the change. Perhaps there are things your youth ministry or congregation can focus on together?
SENDING (5 MINUTES):

Gather around the Christ candle and ask someone to share the following prayer, adding petitions that they deem necessary.

Sending Prayer
Great and loving God, we give you thanks for your radical hospitality through your love and claiming of us, and everyone. Help us to share this radical hospitality wherever we are, being living examples of your love. We will fail at this, but we know we can keep working at it, and the more we practice, the easier it becomes to live in radical hospitality, sharing your love with the world. Open our hearts and our minds as we engage in good conversation, hearing and being truly present, as we engage in changing the world in small and large ways. Help us to keep The Gathering going because we are forever changed! We pray for these and all other things we need in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Go and Do Likewise - (Blessing and Sending)
We will end each session with a blessing, sending you on your way. When I say “stand up,” we all stand up. When I say “stand with,” put your arm around your neighbor’s shoulder. When I say “stand for,” mark the sign of the cross on the forehead of someone beside you.

The Lord Be with You. And also with you.

The book of Hebrews tells us to not fail at showing hospitality to strangers.....
  Stand Up – to show your commitment to use your passion to make a change
  Stand With – those who need our work to make their place in the world better
  Stand For – changing the world to be a place where all are welcome and feel your love!

St. Paul reminded the community of the Ephesians: “For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” This Changes Everything!!
Amen

Go in peace, Serve the Lord. Thanks be to God.

I hope for a church and a world where people aren’t just welcomed but celebrated for who they are. A place where we can discover who God created us to be.”

REBEKAH BRUESEHOFF
REFLECT WITH US!

QUESTIONS? EMAIL gathering@elca.org
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