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



## Volunteer at the Gathering



In 2006, the Gathering was in San Antonio, Texas. It was Chris' second national Gathering and my first. This was the first year they combined the IT team and the communications team. On July 1, we had our formal, all-team welcome where we introduced ourselves to the rest of the group. This is how we first met.

I was working on some editing and ran into a problem with my Mac. I went over to Chris and asked if he had a minute to help. He responded, "For you Kari, I have an hour." This was the first time we had a real interaction but not the last. On our break day between the two weeks (at this time the Gathering was split into two weeks), I finally got the courage to talk to him, and we hit it off. Over the next few days, we both were trying to be nice, let the other down gently and explain that it was not a good time to start something. Instead, it kept coming off to the other that we were interested. Finally,



we got it figured out and decided we wanted to be friends. I had to leave early that week to get home for my brother's wedding. However, when I went to the airport early Friday morning, I was so sad to be leaving.

The experience and the power with that many people, all there to worship and serve is powerful. I didn't want to leave that wonderful space and the wonderful people I had met. I ended up calling Chris, waking him up at 6 a.m., and he was happy to talk to me until I had to board my flight. Ever since that day, almost 11 years later, Chris and I have talked to or seen each other every day. Which also lead to us getting married in May of 2009. We have never missed a day. Our passion and love to serve and work at the Gathering has only grown. We always say, it's never a vacation when you work 14-hour days, but we wouldn't have it any other way! We love serving at the Gathering and never want to miss another one (we missed the 2012 in New Orleans because our first son was only 1); it means too much to us. We hope that we will serve as an example to our three beautiful boys and that someday they will be able to attend with us and experience the beauty and awe that surrounds you when worshipping with 30,000 other people in one place!

– Kari Gray

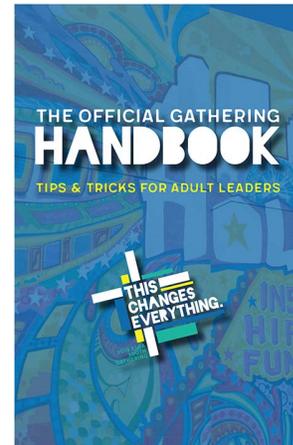
[Applications to volunteer](#) at the Gathering are open until July 15.

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## Gathering pro tip: Choosing adult leaders

Great adult leaders for your Gathering experience could mean the difference between success and disaster. Regardless of the size of the group, being intentional about selecting adults is key. Take this responsibility seriously. Before any firm commitments are made, be sure to talk to the youth and get their recommendation about which adults they respect, relate to 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.

For more Gathering pro tips, get your copy of [“The Official Gathering Handbook: Tips and tricks for adult leaders.”](#)



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## 2018 in-kind offering

The Gathering has recognized the need to lift up literacy in Houston. The foundation of literacy starts before kindergarten. The expectation is that children will have a start in reading and writing before entering school. This relies on parents taking a role in their children's literacy. However, in lower-income neighborhoods, especially when parents have to work more than one job to provide for their families, parents aren't able to buy books for the home or

take their children to the library or other places where they can grow. These children often start school behind in reading and language skills. Seventy-four percent of children in the greater Houston area are considered “economically disadvantaged,” and we recognize that putting books in these children’s homes could have a lasting effect on their education and their future. In joining the Gathering’s Blast Off for Books campaign, you will help ensure bright futures for Houston’s students.



Check out our [resource page](#) to see the list of books we will be collecting.

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## Getting Ready materials webinar

Preparation is an important part of your congregational Gathering experience. We know through conversations and surveys that congregations that are diligent in their preparation together have a much better experience at the event. The Gathering’s Getting Ready resources are based in group building, Bible study and faith-based conversation for use with congregational groups before and after the Gathering. Twelve lessons will be developed – nine for use in the months leading up to the Gathering and three for taking your experience home. It is our goal to create most of the Getting Ready curriculum with themes that could be used for your entire youth-ministry group, not just those attending the Gathering.



To learn more about the getting ready materials, [sign up for our webinar](#) on Aug. 10 at 7 p.m. Central.

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## Interactive Learning applications

Interactive Learning is a “holy playground” of sorts, that invites Gathering participants to encounter God through a variety of learning styles and sensory experiences. All 30,000 participants have a dedicated day in the three-day program rotation to experience the extensive offerings inside the over 700,000-square-foot Interactive Learning space. The area has much to offer, from sports to creative space, and also has partner exhibit space.

Interactive Learning partners invite Gathering participants into an engaging learning opportunity that supports the mission of the Gathering, our theme, and lifts up the work of the partner organization or group. To join us as a partner, please check out our [application](#).

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## Devotion

**Matthew 6:22-24**  
**Treasures in heaven**

The eyes are the window into the soul. Almost everyone in the world has eyes. We use them to see and many say that they are the first things we notice when people meet each other. Different colors, shapes and sizes define our eyes. However, what if our eyes are unhealthy? What if we have no sight? Does that mean we cannot see God? Absolutely not. Our God is an awesome and understanding God who works with us when we cannot see what God sees. A reading from Matthew says: "The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" The verse explains that, whether there is darkness or light, there is only one loving God. The light will be of faith, and if the faith burns brightly, the darkness will be overcome. My own eyesight is helped by glasses and contacts, which help me see God's beautiful world. The world around us is full of both light and dark, however, treasures we hold dear are not seen but are felt by the soul. The soul of a person changes everything because, if the soul can feel God, the eyes will also feel and see God.



– Ally McDonough, South Carolina

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## 2018 Gathering timeline at a glance

- July 15, 2017** – Volunteer application closes; financial assistance application opens
- Sept. 15, 2017** – [Registration opens](#) and early bird rate begins
- Nov. 16, 2017** – Regular registration rate begins
- Feb. 16, 2018** – Late registration rate begins
- May 15, 2018** – Registration closes and all payments are due
- June 24-27, 2018** – [MYLE](#) and the [tAble](#)
- June 27-July 1, 2018** – [ELCA Youth Gathering](#)



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Please [contact us](#) with your ideas and comments. Please forward this email to others who may be interested.  
Mail: ELCA Youth Gathering, 8765 W. Higgins Road, Chicago, Illinois 60631.

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