

Youth Gathering Adult Leader responsibilities:

Many adult leaders ask, “What are my responsibilities?” Great question! Whether you’ve been an adult leader on a Gathering trip before or it’s your first time, it’s important for all of us to have a shared understanding of what we’re about. This will empower us to hold ourselves accountable. More importantly it will help us empower each other and the youth we travel with to have the greatest experience. With God as our center and our guide, we will strive to do the following things:

Who are we? We need to call ourselves Adult leaders or counselors, never chaperones. Leaders and counselors are engaged. Chaperones are watching and unengaged. Leaders and counselors walk alongside and with youth in intentional and authentic ways. Chaperones tend to watch from the sidelines and only interact to direct or correct. Adult leaders and counselors love the opportunity to engage and grow with youth. Youth and adults will learn from each other. In fact, adults come away with so much in an experience like this, they sometimes wonder if they’ve gotten more out of it than the youth. As adults, we often assume we have so much to offer youth, but we can never underestimate what youth have to offer us.

Important to Remember: Have fun!!! This is a different kind of fun. This is not a vacation. It is a working trip. It will be an opportunity you will remember forever – **positively** – we hope!!!

Before the trip:

Study the web-site www.elca.org/gathering.

Learn all you can about the gathering ahead of time:

- go to the web-site or request hard-copy
- read, read, read
- learn about the daily themes
- study the daily schedules
- explore the opportunities available each day

Read about the area(s) you’re traveling through and to.

Pass on information and resources regarding the gathering to youth and parents/guardians.

Be enthusiastic about and help with fundraising.

Provide leadership for pre-trip meetings.

Plan meetings that include sharing or information and intentional group building.

Contact youth to remind of pre-trip meetings, service projects before trips, etc.

Make efforts to connect with youth in their every day lives – through their activities, work, or other interests they have.

Help with writing the covenant.

On the trip:

Have a positive attitude about everything. This spreads and sets a great example for everyone. It makes relationships easier for you. Positive attitudes model an empowering outlook. Seeing opportunity in even the little glitches and challenges that come along goes far in helping a group have an experience to remember. If everything goes well, that’s great. Groups will always remember the positive attitudes of adults especially if there are challenges and the group worked together to make a positive learning opportunity out of them.

Relate to youth positively. Treat them with respect. Don’t boss them around. Use positive reinforcement and no negative chiding. Give them the opportunity for leadership. Rarely do we need to discipline youth when we empower them with respect and responsibilities on the trip. They need to know they are valuable partners in this experience. At times they need reminders. There are times, however, when we need to be strong and firm communicating we care and we’re serious about them changing behavior that is inappropriate and/or unacceptable. This should be done in a positive way. We never seek to humiliate.

Spend time with the youth. Get to know everyone by name and as many as possible personally. Hang out with them. Walk alongside them. Be quiet and listen. Be enthusiastic and engage them. While it's great and ok to have adult conversations, our **number one** focus and concern is youth. Connect those who are on the edge. Help others to invite them in. Help them to reach out. Be where the youth are. Show your genuine interest in them. Don't send them off on their own because you're tired of them and you need a break. We need to have extraordinary stamina.

Leading Bible Study/Discussions. Be a spiritual guide. Encourage open discussion. It's great to share personal stories and spiritual views appropriate to discussion, but don't dominate with your stories or opinion. Listen carefully and draw out each person in the group. Create opportunities for everyone to share, ie. "Let's go around the circle and each share a response to this question...." Gently move the conversation along if one person dominates. Allow people to disagree respectfully with each other. It is important that you do the entire Bible Study and/or discussion. Don't skip parts, unless all the small groups have agreed to that. Usually we have all the time we need to complete the entire discussion. Be the leader for the study, but give youth the chance to read the scripture out loud, ask the questions, etc. This is a great chance for leadership skill development. You may partner with a youth to lead the study, but don't leave them alone to lead the group. The presence of an adult with each group is essential.

Work positively with other adults

We are all in this together. Adults need to empower each other to be the best they can be in terms of walking alongside, sharing mutual experience and caring for the youth. Work to overcome differences with other adults privately. Youth will be deeply affected by adults who "bicker" and are hard on each other. If you have a complaint about another adult, talk to that adult privately. See each other as partners and help each other to be the best you can be for the sake of your entire group and the gathering experience overall.

At the Gathering

Participation in the Gathering

Be an enthusiastic leader with youth and participant in the opportunities of the gathering. Particularly at events in the dome, learning and interaction center, walk alongside youth. Remember that this experience is primarily for the youth.

Be a great listener and guide.

Don't jump in to take over or dominate the experience, discussion or activity.

Help youth look out for others that they get their chance to share, use materials or participate. Sing enthusiastically.

Encourage youth to join in.

Focus on what you feel positively about. Share that with youth.

Resist complaining or speaking negatively about anything, no matter how justified.

Youth look to adults to lead with grace and wisdom. One of the most powerful ways we can do that is to be intentional about sharing a positive attitude and making the most of the opportunities before us.

Waiting for Dome Events to Start

See this as an opportunity. Often we walk to the dome up to an hour before the doors even open, then there is the waiting once we're inside. While we're outside waiting, take the chance to check in with people. Engage them in conversation. Have a deck of cards handy, a conversation book, a list of songs to sing, a fun circle game or something else of interest – just in case. It's a time we might break into singing or join with other groups.

Take the time to meet and greet others. The time of waiting can be an opportunity – not a drag. Again, our positive attitudes will set the tone. It is our job to responsibly lift youth and anyone out of a negative mode.

Help the youth to be prepared to enter the dome. They should be ready with backpacks open, etc. as soon as the doors are opened....then move calmly, but relatively swiftly in packs together for seating. We adults stay connected with the youth as it is essential that we all sit together.

Once we're inside the dome and seated, we can relax a little. There may be time for conversation and even a final trip to the bathroom. Once the music and program starts, we're focused. We hope no one needs to leave for the bathroom.

Community Life after the Dome Events

Youth will check in with small group leaders about their plans for community life. For our group, it will be best to take in most of our night life in the Convention Center or communities close by. Youth must always travel with an adult.

There are many choices. Look at the list. Talk with youth in your small groups about the options. We will always make sure that youth are connected and no one is alone. Also, we prefer that youth are actively taking in Community Life instead of laying around their hotel room. We as adults will take turns checking in at the hotel and will make time for our own meeting before the small group meetings.

We will follow Community Life with our small group time. This is not optional. We'll meet in small group leader rooms from 12:15 – 1:00am. The devotion is written in your guide book. Essentially, we want to reflect on the day. What were some of their experiences? What presentations spoke to them? How was music a valuable part of their day? What did they learn? How was their faith impacted? Etc.

Going Home

When the gathering is done, we will have mixed feelings. However, we will be ready to be home. As adult leaders, we have to keep our energy up and not move to the, "I can't wait to get home" mode. Why? It's a difficult transition for many. For some it will be the last trip of their life as a high school youth. Some may be tired and some may not be ready for it all to end. We as adults need to be the glue that continues to hold it together. Closing worship/sharing time at a location on your way home (before you arrive at the church parking lot or airport) will be an incredibly valuable time for transition. While it is closure for the actual trip, we want to convey the powerful impact this trip will/should have for a long time and how they can continue to access all they have experiences from learning to new friends and much more. We as adult leaders will have mixed feelings as well. It will be good to name and share them.

In all we do, we pray for God's wisdom and grace.....treating others with love, empowerment, forgiveness, patience, kindness and humbleness....in all situations.