

Jesus Justice Jazz

ELCA Youth Gathering

Congregation Covenant

Some Suggestions

The single most important factor to prepare the participants for having meaningful experience at the [ELCA Youth Gathering](#) is the “[Getting Ready](#)” [Bible studies](#) conducted by the youth group during the months before the event. A close second, however, is a clear and mutually agreed upon “covenant.” [Diconaty.com](#) defines “Covenant” as:

3. Ecclesiastical. a solemn agreement between the members of a church to act together in harmony with the precepts of the gospel

The covenant should be understood, therefore, as a solemn agreement between the youth; between the youth and the adult leaders; and between the participants and the congregation. Below are some suggestions of topics and ways in which they can be addressed in such an agreement.

Developing a Covenant

The covenant should not be a list of rules handed down from the adult leaders to the youth. Rather, developing a covenant should be a collaborative effort between all of the participants in which everyone's contribution is valued (a manifestation of “[ubuntu](#)”). This is best done during a “getting ready” session or, better yet, during a retreat. Once the participants have developed a mutually agreeable covenant it should be signed by each participant and the parents of the youth. Some congregations may choose to have the covenant ratified by the church council.

Purpose of Attending the Gathering

First, it is important that everyone involved agrees to the mission of the Gathering and the congregation's participation. A good place to start is

the [mission statement of the ELCA's Youth Ministry](#), the [theme and program of the Gathering](#), and the gathering's [theological statement](#). Then ask why is this congregation participating? Is it to learn the Gospel? To spread the Gospel? To serve others? To learn from others? To prepare leaders of the church? What is NOT the purpose of the congregation's participation? It is not a "vacation;" a tradition; or reward for successful fundraising. Understanding why the congregation is sending these participants should inform the rest of the covenant.

Preparation for the Event

What are the expectations for the youth and adult participants to attend the "Getting Ready" sessions? Who will be responsible for presenting the sessions? What are the expectations of the youth and adult participants to take part in fundraising? What are the financial expectations of the participants? In this section of the covenant physical preparation should also be discussed. For example, all participants should press fluids starting two weeks before the event to become fully hydrated. The event will also require some physical stamina so daily walks of about a mile or two before the event would be a good suggestion. If physical preparation is important, then spiritual preparation must be at least as important. For example, youth and adults attending can be asked to pray daily for the event and the group in the weeks before the event. They can also be asked to study and pray through the second chapter of Philippians.

Dress Code

Why have a dress code? Primarily, the dress code is for the health and safety of the participants; but also for the sake of our witness to the Gospel.

Health & Safety: Wear shoes to walk 3 miles in whenever you leave your hotel. The number one cause of injuries at the last gathering was injuries to toes caused by the use of flip flops. Each day, most participants will walk more than 3 miles in intense heat so blisters, sprains and such will be a concern. Tennis shoes (a.k.a. sneakers) are by far the best choice for walking while flip flops, heels, boots are just silly. Remember, a foot injury not only hurts the injured but will slow up the entire group.

Witness to the Gospel: Saint Paul instructed Timothy to "...keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry (II Timothy 4:5). In order that we

can better “do the work of an evangelist” let there be no clothing that advertises alcohol or tobacco products or contains profanity. No short skirts or short shorts; all shirts must come to the waist; no tube tops, tank tops, or sports bras (without something on top). No homey plumber pants (you know, the one with the waist to your knees).

Behavior

- Be on time for all activities, rendezvous, and “check-ins.” To make the group wait for you is a selfish act that adversely affect both the schedule and the group dynamics.
- Because the days will be physically and emotionally demanding it is important to get enough rest and abide by “lights out” and “curfews” established by the group.
- No profanity should be tolerated. Some groups impose a \$0.25 contribution for each breach of the 3rd commandment to be added to the offering on the last day.
- Your youth leader must know where you are at all times. Some groups may allow youth to move about in groups, I recommend groups of not less than four so that if one participant is injured one can stay and two can go for help. But, I strongly recommend that groups include not less than one adult. Report all illnesses to an adult leader.
- No “drama.”
- No members of the opposite gender in hotel rooms to respect the privacy of your roommates. The hotel hallways and lobby are a great place of conversation and games.
- The hotel and other facilities should not be harmed in anyway.
- The hotel staff, wait staff, and all others should be treated with the upmost respect and cooperation.
- Commit to maintaining a positive attitude regardless of circumstances. Your attitude will make or break the experience of every group member!

Gratuity

Wait staff, bell hops, doormen, cab drivers, housekeeping and many others often have difficulty making ends meet. We cannot say we are doing service work in New Orleans and then make these people suffer by not tipping generously. These people often make a majority of their income from tips. Please include in your covenant a commitment to honor gratuity guidelines like:

Meals: 15-20%

Bellhops \$2.00 per bag

Cabbies per ride \$5.00

Hotel Housekeeping staff \$4.00 per room per day (a nice note attached is a fine touch)

To learn more about the lives of service people see Ehrenreich, Babara. Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America. New York: Metropolitan, 2001. Or Schipler, David K. The Working Poor: Invisible in America. New York: Vintage, 2004.

What to Bring and not

Each participant should bring enough with them for their own safety and hygiene but not so much luggage as to burden the group. It is important to remember that busses will not be able to travel most streets in the French Quarter so whatever you bring you will likely have to carry for several blocks.

Participants will NOT need to bring: dress up clothes, linens, you may bring your favorite Bible but one will be provided at your registration.

Most hotels will provide a hair dryer, coffee maker, soap, shampoo, iron. Participants should NOT bring or at any time be in possession of: illegal drugs, alcohol, tobacco products, fireworks, weapons, or pornography.

Each group should come to agreement on clear rules about when cell phones maybe used. For example, only in the hotel room and never during the Gathering programming or youth group activities. However, the possession of a fully charged cell phone for each participant is strongly encouraged in the event of an emergency or misplaced participant. Many families will not have nation-wide calling plans and each call will be expensive. My advice to those participants is to make every effort to be unaccounted for.

There will also need to be a mutual understanding about the appropriate use of personal music players of MP3/MP4 players and ipods. Of course, listening to music does disrupt community and limited personal interaction. On the other hand, not all youth are extraverts and some have a legitimate need to take a break from so much time together. This will be especially true on long bus rides.

Ramifications

There will be times when, often by accident or forgetfulness, the covenant will be broken by both youth and adults. These issues are best addressed with a kind reminder in private and if after that it is still necessary then addressing the behavior as a group (see Matthew 18:15-16). There are some behaviors which everyone should know in advance will not be tolerated and the ramification will be an immediate dismissal for home at the parent's expense. This is only a valid response, however, if the parents and youth have a clear understanding of these ramifications in advance. If an adult leader engages in a behavior for which there is no tolerance or if the group become unmanageable contact the "hotel life team" or consult with Pr. Anderson at 319-415-1923.

Participation upon return from the Gathering

The ELCA Youth Gathering is not intended to be the final step but only the beginning the participant's involvement in the congregation. The covenant should spell out exactly what the post-event expectations are. Will there be a special worship service for the participants to lead? Will there be "post-gathering" events in the congregation or with the congregations you traveled with? Is there an expectation of a level of involvement in youth ministry after the gathering?

The Congregation

The congregation should covenant to support the group in prayer before, during and after the event. A sending service before the group leaves, inclusion in the bidding prayers while they are gone, and an order for welcoming home the Sunday after they return is appropriate. The congregation can also be asked to covenant into a level of financial support for the gathering and a level of support for youth ministry in the year(s) following the event.