



2018 NE MN Synod Journey Monthly Meeting Overview

An expectation of the Synod Journey is that groups meet at least monthly for group building, Bible studies and other activities to prepare for the Synod Journey and ELCA Youth Gathering. Groups that meet regularly are prepared to encounter the experiences and conversations they will have during the Synod Journey and ELCA Youth Gathering in a way that will transform their faith and lives. There is no required way in which you need to meet. We provide this overview to assist you in determining which resources to use and elements to include in your regular meetings.

Goals

It is helpful to keep in mind the goals of your monthly meetings:

- **Develop group cohesion and trusting relationships.**
Did you know it takes 17 contiguous hours with every group member present to build “groupness” – where members trust each other, hold a common purpose, and develop common rituals and norms. Groups who intentionally spend time developing their relationships with each other foster an environment in which members can wrestle with challenging faith conversations and experiences in a meaningful way.
- **Engage with the stories and justice issues we will encounter in Texas.**
Each day of the Synod Journey and Gathering will bring an overwhelming amount of information, experiences and issues for your group to process. They will be better able to engage with these experiences in a transforming way if they begin those conversations in the months before they get on the bus.
- **Communicate updates and logistics to your group.**
Build a pattern of communication to your young people, their parents, your adult leaders, and the congregation. Your monthly meetings are key opportunities to provide updates on your fundraising, upcoming events, and the Synod Journey/ELCA Youth Gathering.

Choosing Resources

It would be ideal to use all the resources available with your group and congregation. We also know that is not realistic for every congregation and context. The Synod Journey and ELCA Youth Gathering resources have distinct focus areas:

- **The Synod Journey resources focus on stories.** They give you ritual to share your life and faith stories as you engage the biblical stories we will encounter both during the Synod Journey and at the ELCA Youth Gathering. They are shorter and do not require as much preparation from the leader.
- **The ELCA Youth Gathering resources focus on faith, life and justice issues.** They will engage you in deeper discussions and help you begin to wrestle with life, faith and justice issues. These are not “grab and go” resources – adult leaders will need to prepare ahead of time.

We will encounter both focus areas this summer on the Synod Journey and at the ELCA Youth Gathering. Preparation with both is the ideal. But if you need to choose, consider the life and faith understanding/maturity of your group. Which focus area would be most helpful for them to prepare for the Journey ahead? Are they newer to faith, struggle to go deep and be vulnerable with each other? Then you might want to primarily use the Synod Journey resources. Are they ready to go deep, be challenged, and wrestle with faith and life issues? Then you might want to primarily use the ELCA Youth Gathering resources. One is not better than the other - just keep in mind the goals and what your group needs the most!

(If you are still struggling to determine which resources to use and must choose, the Synod Journey Team recommends using the Synod Journey resources.)

Meeting Template

We suggest meeting monthly, for a minimum of 90 minutes in order to have enough time for rich discussions and interactions. The consistency of monthly meetings keeps the conversation going over the course of the year and the Journey fresh in the minds of your group members. If monthly meetings are not possible for your group, you might consider:

- Combining sessions in a day long or weekend retreat (ideally at a camp or away from the church so youth aren't tempted to come and go).
- Shorter meetings on a weekly basis (Sunday mornings/evenings, Wednesday evenings, etc.) using sections of each resource.

Remember – the goal of these meetings is not to check off a “to do”, but to build groupness, engage with the stories and issues, and communicate with your group so they are prepared for a rich and transformational faith experience when they board the bus next June! How will that best be achieved for your group?

Elements of a monthly meeting include:

Group Building (15 minutes)

What does this mean?

Group building activities help groups to trust each other so they can be vulnerable to go deep in discussions and to support each other. Some groups need to start with name games...others have known each other since birth and are ready to move from a surface level to a deeper level of knowing each other. You can find a plethora of group builder games and activities with a Google search. Group building does not always mean games – working together (a fundraiser), sharing personal stories (the Synod Journey ritual questions), and problem solving (planning a fundraiser together) are all examples of group builders. Group building elements are also built into both the Synod Journey and ELCA resources.

Study and Discussion (60 minutes)

What does this mean?

This is your time to dig deep in scripture, wrestle with issues, and connect what we are learning to our daily lives. This is the content from the Synod Journey and ELCA Youth Gathering Getting Ready Curriculum resources.

Housekeeping (5 minutes)

What does this mean?

Each meeting should include time to share any updates from the Synod Journey or ELCA Youth Gathering, and announcements for upcoming fundraisers, events or other logistics. Remember to communicate these announcements to parents, and to the congregation as necessary!

Prayer (5 minutes)

What does this mean?

Each meeting should include a time of prayer. If you are using the Synod Journey or ELCA Youth Gathering resources, prayers are included. Always feel free to add your own as well!

Include Your Whole Youth Group...and Congregation!

These resources are rich and engaging for all young people, whether or not they are going on the Synod Journey. We encourage you to include your entire youth group in the monthly meetings. You can easily use the template above, then ask the Synod Journey participants to stay for 10-15 minutes afterwards for the “Housekeeping” portion. You will also want to find time throughout the year for the Synod Journey participants to do their own group building so they can develop “groupness” for the actual Journey.

You are also invited to use these resources with the entire congregation! The more a congregation is talking about the same stories and issues, the deeper your young people will experience the Synod Journey...and the more adults will support the young people (while they are growing in faith themselves!). Use the worship services for your Sunday morning service, offer adult Bible studies with either the Synod Journey Story Kits or the ELCA Youth Gathering Getting Ready Materials, use elements of each for Sunday school, confirmation retreats, children’s sermons...or incorporate these resources into any program you are already doing!