



Gathering

CULTIVATING AUTHENTIC COMMUNITY

LEADERSHIP GUIDE

Gathering

CREDITS

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For more information and materials visit us at WWW.SACONNECTS.ORG/GATHERING
Available in Spanish also! WWW.SACONNECTS.ORG/REUNAMONOS

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INTRODUCTION

The Eastern Territory Women's Ministries Department is excited to explore a new small group program modeled after Embrace, created by the Central Territory and later adapted by the Southern Territory. **Gathering** is a focus group or outreach program option and vision to bring together women in groups of 6–8 within your Corps community (*and beyond*) to encourage **purposeful conversations about life and Jesus and to build friendship and sisterhood within the Body of Christ.**

Gathering groups are designed to meet once a month, on a day that works best for each group, for up to two hours at a time. **The intended format of *Gathering* is to share a meal, refreshments or coffee together and then engage in guided discussion with provided questions/ challenges to help open up the doors of sharing and vulnerability – creating true sisterhood.**

VALUES

Gathering includes the following values:

CHRIST – The grace of Jesus Christ created for us a new kind of relationship with God, and also with ourselves and each other. The freedom of authentic relationship is what ***Gathering*** facilitates. Members do not have to believe in Christ though, to enter into an open and sincere community; ***Gathering*** is open to all.

COMMUNITY – The Triune God is a community. God is in a covenant relationship with the Lord's people. Community is part of our spiritual DNA. Communities are characterized by shared experiences, values, tragedies and celebrations, work, strengths and weaknesses. Communities are made up of people who understand they belong to each other.

CONVERSATION – The life–blood of a community is conversation. Community starts in conversation. ***Gathering*** is not an educational program, a needs assessment, or a transfer of skills or resources. It is a conversation. Nobody is here to teach or learn; everyone is here to share and receive.

COMMUNITY CONFIDENTIALITY – What happens in ***Gathering*** stays in ***Gathering***. However, if there is a question of danger, the facilitator should let the person involved know “I have to call an ambulance, child welfare services”, etc. Leaders will need to exercise wisdom as members will share vulnerably. It is important to encourage compassion and support. The person who shared should be informed by the facilitator that s/he must break confidentiality and how s/he will do so.

COURAGEOUS OPENNESS – Members are encouraged to share as much or as little as they are comfortable. Openness is demonstrated well when people share honestly and non-abusively and when vulnerability is met with compassion, kindness and confidentiality. When openness is demonstrated well, people will find it easier to share.

CONSISTENCY– The group should meet consistently. Even if it looks like only two to three people will meet, get together anyway. Consistency keeps it going and growing.

COMMITMENT– Commit to the group. It may take time for the group to “warm up”. Keep contributing. Eventually, the group will become a “group”. Commit to the process. Answer the questions as much or as little as you like, pass on one or two, but answer the questions. Commit to the value of the community. This group can enhance your whole church by facilitating real fellowship. The buy-in of the leaders will be contagious.

COMPASSION– For the group to become a community, compassion is an essential ingredient. Encourage it.

STRUCTURE

Gathering will be reported in stats as a Women’s Ministries Group. It will be the responsibility of the Divisional Secretary for Women’s Ministries to orientate Corps Officers on the program.

Corps Officers are responsible for organizing leadership and delegating meeting materials, as well as give advice or help to leaders as needed. They are in charge of organizing a ‘*Gathering* Launch Party’ to introduce women in the community of *Gathering* and collect data on their interest of participation and/or leadership. Corps Officers will also hold a Leaders Meeting to explain materials and group expectations before beginning. Corps Officers should hold biannual leadership meetings to discuss improvements, praises and leadership changes.

Those selected as leaders must dedicate at least 6 months to the commitment. They are in charge of organizing and leading meetings, delegating the hostess rotation and reporting monthly stats to the Corps Officer.

Members of each group are committing to at least 6 months of meeting each month. They will share (*if possible*) in the responsibilities of hosting whereas they will provide space and a simple meal/refreshments/coffee break.

After 6 months, they can continue in participation, but must be willing to potentially change groups, this will allow for new members to join and adapt without feeling like they are intruding on a ‘clique’.

If needed, leaders help to encourage quieter ones to speak and rambling ones to listen. Leaders remind about community confidentiality, listening, etc. each week. Leaders encourage participants to bless the meal, close in prayer, etc.

HOSTING ISSUES: The home is personal. Entering into each other's homes creates a new level of connection and intimacy. At the same time, this is part of why people may be uncomfortable with this element. What will help is having a core group ready to have open homes, including, of course, the leader.

***Adapted from writing by Captain Maureen Diffley*

MATERIALS

Leadership Materials will be supplied by the Corps Officer. Monthly discussion cards can be distributed by the Corps Officer, as well, or printed offline from SACONNECTS.ORG/GATHERING

- Leadership Guide
- Gathering logos (*for PowerPoint slides or promotional/group material*)
- Group Participation form
- Group Information Sheet (*for leader*)
- Monthly discussion cards (*for leader*)
- Monthly take-home activity for participant
- Monthly take-home Scripture card

CONCLUSION

Simple is always best. We want to encourage the groups to focus on the discussion and time together that they spend with the Lord and with each other over hostess and presentation details. Our goal is to have uncomplicated, friendly fellowship that sparks in-depth conversations that will challenge women to dive deeper in their walk with God and to create a safe space to converse about strong or confusing subjects.

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LAUNCH PARTY

A launch party is a great way to introduce a sampling to Corps and community members of what a **Gathering** meeting entails. This will also serve as your process in dividing up individuals for groups based on the information sheets you collect. Please make sure to use the weeks ahead as an opportunity to announce the party and brief explanation in your Corps bulletin, community fliers and even calling individuals personally. This will ensure individuals attending the party have a general idea of what **Gathering** is.

Feel free to use the graphics from SACONNECTS.COM/GATHERING to personalize materials.

Officers, invite potential leaders to your home for a meal and a **Gathering** experience. Suggest that they might like to lead a group and/or help with the launch party. Share the expectations of a leader. Try to set up a simple system (*group text/email*) to ensure all of your leaders have access to updates and to each other for help and encouragement.

Determine a day and time to host the launch party with a team invested in the concept. This party could be a brunch, lunch, tea, coffee, or a very informal meal held at the Corps.

Invite all the women from your Corps, women from your sphere of influence, etc. Have others do the same. Inviting involves more than announcing. Make phone calls, have face-to-face conversations, send texts, put an invitation card in the mail, etc.

***Gathering material was created to be gender-neutral for those interested in having a men's Gathering fellowship or mixed groups.**

Simplicity is key. Take the most straight-forward approach to food and décor that you can. Pick the month you are currently in and prepare materials from that month for this launch party. This will also serve (*statistically*) as the first month's group meeting. Place a pre-designated leader at each table.

When people arrive, give them a ticket with a number and have them sit at that numbered table. Have the packet of four discussion cards and sign-up cards on the table at each setting.

After the meal, signal it is time to begin the **Gathering** conversations. No PowerPoint is necessary, this is all led at the table. Let a leader from each table pick any of the cards to start and the groups will move at their own pace through the four questions.

Let them know that the sign-up card on the table can be filled in and turned in immediately. Providing contact information on the card will allow those who wish to sign up later to do so.

Introduce leaders and let people know that they will hear from you or one of the leaders about when and where their first **Gathering** group meeting will take place.

***If your leaders would like to hold their first meeting in that same month, suggest they hold a small ‘getting to know you’ fellowship at their home.**

After the event, you will need to form your **Gathering** groups. The composition will depend on various factors that participants have shared: time, day, location, transportation, age-specific, gender open, how many people sign up, etc. Aim for diversity!

***We encourage splitting up families or close friends if possible. This will stretch individuals to broaden their sisterhood circle.**

Share information with those who signed up. Send a nice note to those who expressed interest “at another time”. Send a thank you card to your volunteers.

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EXPECTATIONS

As a participant in **Gathering**, I understand and agree to community expectations:

- Keeping confidentiality within the group
- Hosting or co-hosting at least one **Gathering** meeting
- RSVP'ing in advance for each meeting to the leader, so the host will know how many people to prepare for.
- Committing to the same group for a period of time.
(Groups will be re-assigned after 6 months)
- Accepting that childcare is not provided by the group
(unless otherwise determined by the whole group)

Name _____

Date _____

Gathering GROUP INFO

Leader's Name				
Leader's Contact information				
Participant Name	Cell Phone	E-mail Address	Address	Month Hosting
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				

Gathering MONTHLY STATS

Corps/ARC/Other			Month/Year	
Gathering Coordinator and Officer's Names				
Name, First			Name, Last	
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				
8				
9				
10				
11				

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GROUP RSVP CARD

CHECK AS APPLIES:

____ YES, I would like to join a Gathering group at this time.

____ NO, I would not like to join a Gathering group at this time, but contact me in the future.

____ NO, I am not interested

FULL NAME: _____

TELEPHONE: _____ **Circle:** Cell Home Work

E-MAIL ADDRESS: _____

HOME ADDRESS: _____

AGE: _____ **SEX:** (Male) (Female)

Preferred Day and Time to participate: Sunday Dinner Weekday Dinner (day: _____)

Saturday Brunch Saturday Dinner

Additional Information: *(For example: do you have a pet and/or food allergy? Specify. Do you need to attend a group within your neighborhood? Can you drive at night? Do you have a reliable means of transportation? etc.)* _____

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TOPICS LIST

JANUARY ~ Gathering Wisdom

FEBRUARY ~ Gathering Friends

MARCH ~ Gathering Growth

APRIL ~ Gathering Grace

MAY ~ Gathering Discipline

*JUNE ~ Gathering Rest

JULY ~ Gathering Freedom

AUGUST ~ Gathering Strength

SEPTEMBER ~ Gathering Change

OCTOBER ~ Gathering Worries

NOVEMBER ~ Gathering Home

DECEMBER ~ Gathering Gifts

*An additional meeting should be held. This will be for all groups together to redistribute and add new members at this time.