



# 2019 CHURCH GROUP TIME GUIDE

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# SUNDAY NIGHT CHURCH GROUP TIME

## TRADITION

*Begin each night with a tradition. We suggest the following simple prompt, but check out pages 7–8 for additional ideas.*

- Share a favorite moment and a stretching moment from your day. (Stretching moments are those that weren't necessarily fun, but maybe helped you grow a little by stretching you beyond your comfort zone.)  
*Go around the circle and give each person a turn.*

## TALK ABOUT THE DAY

- Now that we are on our mission trip, here in this community...
  - What are you excited about?
  - What is different than what you expected?
  - Is there anything you are nervous about?
  - What else are you feeling?
- What are your first impressions of the YouthWorks staff team? ... the other church group(s)? ... any community members you've met?
- What are some things we as a team can do between now and tomorrow night to have a really great first full day in this community?

## STORYLINE QUESTIONS

- What do you want to remember from the video tonight?
- How have you seen God be present in your story? How do you want God's presence to continue this week?
- What word or phrase did you write on your wristband? What are some reasons?
- In what way do you hope this week will help start a new chapter in your story?

## PRAYER

*There are lots of ways you could pray to close out your time. We suggest doing the following.*

- **Prayer Focus:** Let's pray tonight that we could we could feel God's presence and that God uses this week to work in and through our stories.
- Are there any other prayer requests?
- Break into groups of two to four and pray for these requests together.

# MONDAY NIGHT CHURCH GROUP TIME

## TRADITION

- Share a favorite moment and a stretching moment from your day.  
*Go around the circle and give each person a turn.*

## TALK ABOUT THE DAY

- Last night we talked about some things we could do to have a great first day in the community. How did we do with those things?
- What was the most challenging part of your day? What was the most rewarding?
- How did God overturn your expectations today?
- How are we doing as a team? Is there anything we can do better to encourage each other or love each other or anything else?
- What's one thing you didn't do today that you want to do tomorrow?

## STORYLINE QUESTIONS

- What stood out to you from the song we listened to? What are some reasons?
- What do you want to remember from the video tonight?
- What was your answer for tonight's discussion question: How can you be like Jesus and love others regardless of their story?
- How were Devotions this first morning? What was meaningful for you about this time?
- How can we as a group be good at caring about the stories of others this week?

## PRAYER

*There are lots of ways you could pray to close out your time. We suggest doing the following.*

- **Prayer Focus:** Let's pray tonight that we can be like Jesus in the ways we care about the true story of each person we meet and love them no matter what.
- Are there any other prayer requests?
- Break into groups of two to four and pray for these requests together.

# TUESDAY NIGHT

## CHURCH GROUP TIME

### TRADITION

- Share a favorite moment and a stretching moment from your day.  
*Go around the circle and give each person a turn.*

### TALK ABOUT THE DAY

- What was the most memorable moment from the day?
- What helped you get to know Jesus better today? What did you learn about Jesus?
- What are you learning about yourself during this week?
- What are some things you're learning about the people you've met in this community? What are some struggles you've seen? What are some strengths?
- What do you think God might be doing by connecting you with some of the people in this community?
- Do you have any ideas for how we might stay connected to this community even after the trip is over?
  - Keep thinking about it! We'll talk about it again later this week.

### STORYLINE QUESTIONS

- What stood out to you from the story of the lost son and the discussion afterward?
- What do you want to remember from the video tonight?
- If you're comfortable sharing, what's one thing you included in your letter to self?
- Today we talked a lot about the "Full Story." How would you describe the full story of what God does for us?  
*This might be a good question to have students turn to their neighbor and answer, then ask if one or two students would be willing to share in the large group.*
- How have you recently experienced God's forgiveness and belonging?

### PRAYER

*There are lots of ways you could pray to close out your time. We suggest doing the following.*

- **Prayer Focus:** Let's pray tonight that we could be a part of God's full story by helping others feel God's forgiveness and belonging.
- Are there any other prayer requests?
- Break into groups of two to four and pray for these requests together.

# WEDNESDAY NIGHT

## CHURCH GROUP TIME

### TRADITION

- Share a favorite moment and a stretching moment from your day.  
*Go around the circle and give each person a turn.*

### TALK ABOUT THE DAY

- If you could have a picture of one moment from today, what would that moment be?
- What did God open your eyes to today?
- This week, how have your ideas of who God is shifted or expanded?
- What do you think God is doing in your life right now? How do you take the next step in that process?
- How will what you experienced today or this week change your life in some way back home?

### STORYLINE QUESTIONS

- What do you want to remember from the video tonight?
- What did you put on your storybook page during The Gathering?
- What stood out to you from Devotions today?
- What would it look like for you to be bighearted in the way you give?
- What is one gift or sacrifice you feel God is inviting you to give?

### PRAYER

*There are lots of ways you could pray to close out your time. We suggest doing the following.*

- **Prayer Focus:** Let's take some time thank God for the good gifts we have, and ask God to give us opportunities to use them to serve and love others.
- Are there any other prayer requests?
- Break into groups of two to four and pray for these requests together.

# THURSDAY NIGHT

## CHURCH GROUP TIME

### TRADITION

- Share a favorite moment and a stretching moment from your day.  
*Go around the circle and give each person a turn.*

### TALK ABOUT THE DAY

- Ten years from now, what do you think you will remember most about this trip?
- What are two things you'll bring home from this trip—one physical and one not-physical?
- This trip is almost over. Looking back, what do you think part of God's purpose was for you being part of this trip?
- Once we're back home, what do you think God wants you to do as a result of being on this mission trip?

### STORYLINE QUESTIONS

- What was meaningful for you about experiencing footwashing during The Gathering?
- What do you want to remember from the video tonight?
- This week, how have you seen each other share in Jesus' story of love and service?
- How do you think Jesus is inviting you to more deeply share in his story back home?

### PRAYER

*There are lots of ways you could pray to close out your time. We suggest doing the following.*

- **Prayer Focus:** Let's pray tonight that we would continue to answer Jesus' invitation to share in his story. Let's pray the same thing for the people we met in this community.
- Are there any other prayer requests?
- Break into groups of two to four and pray for these requests together.

# 5 TRADITIONS YOU CAN DO ALL WEEK IN CHURCH GROUP TIME

Opening or closing your time in the same way each night can be a powerful approach to building a sense of camaraderie, creating great memories and aiding your team in meaningful processing. Pick one (maybe two) of the following traditions, adapt it to fit your group and build it into your Church Group Time each evening.

1. **CONSISTENT QUESTION** Begin with the same question each night. After a couple days, when they know it's coming, students will begin to think about the question even before you ask it.

Depending on your group size and students' willingness to share, this question could take a significant portion of your time. This may be just fine, or you may decide to split students into smaller groups to answer.

Here are a few questions that might work for this purpose:

- What has God been teaching you today?
- Today, what stood out to you as meaningful?
- What did you wonder at or about today?  
*e.g. What amazed you and why? OR What caused you to question and what questions do you have?*
- How does what you learned or experienced today connect with life back home?  
*e.g. We served at an elderly care facility, and there is the same need back home. We heard about forgiveness, and I have someone I need to forgive. What I learned today from the community speaker makes me want to keep learning about this issue after the trip.*

NOTE: During The Gathering each night we ask the following two questions, so the above questions are intentionally different.

- *What did you see someone else do today that you are thankful for?*
- *How have you seen God working today?*

2. **MEMORY BOX** Each night before you begin, pass out pens and small colorful slips of paper slightly larger than fortune cookie fortunes. Have students write a one-sentence memory from the day. Without sharing them, students will put them into a small box or bag. After the week is over, perhaps during a gathering on your way home or a team gathering back home, open the box and distribute the slips of paper evenly around the circle. Go around and have each person read one slip at a time. (If you want, collect the slips of paper and glue them into a frame with a team picture at the center as a memorial to your trip together.)

**3. PRAYER SHARE** Begin or end your time by having everyone share a new prayer request for the day. You could tip this time off with a question like, “After today, what is one thing you want to ask God to do in this community or in our group or in your life?” Go around the circle and try to have each person share one thing—even if it’s very small. Then go around the circle again having each person pray for the request on their left. To gracefully limit this time, invite students to pray one-sentence prayers or break into smaller groups for this sharing of prayer.

**4. LIFELONG SERVICE AFFIRMATION** Starting the second or third night of the trip, invite students to share how they have seen each other use their gifts and abilities to serve others during the week. Put one student in the “hot seat” and give other students a few minutes to affirm the ways they have seen God working in and through them. Close this time by having two or three team members pray for the student.

This activity connects well with the mission trip only if the focus is on service. Help team members share affirmations that directly connect with the student’s ability to respond to Jesus’ invitation to “do as I have done for you” (John 13:15)—aka: serve others wholeheartedly with your whole life. As students take the “hot seat,” prompt other team members to answer “What gifts have you seen [student’s name] use to serve others this week and how can she use those gifts to be a lifelong servant to others?”

Throughout several meetings, work your way through each member of the team. Let the team know who’s going to go the next night, so team members can think of what to say. Ask a few leaders to always be ready to share in case others do not. If you have students on the trip who are less known to the group, have them go later in the week so others have a chance to get to know them better. Also, don’t miss the opportunity for adult leaders to take the chair and be encouraged. If you have a larger group, you may choose to divide the group for this affirmation time.

**5. EXAMEN** Give a few minutes for quiet reflection resembling St. Ignatius Loyola’s Examen Prayer. Have students think through each of the following quietly:

- How and where did I notice the presence of God today?
- What gave me life today?
- What drained life from me today?
- Based on what I experienced today, what might God be inviting me to?

After a few minutes, have students share their answers with the group, in small groups or with partners.

Alternatively, you might simply ask each of these questions and invite students to give one sentence responses as they think of them. Spend a minute or two on each question at the beginning of your time together before moving on.

# QUESTIONS TO DISCUSS THE DAY IN CHURCH GROUP TIME

**Don't wait until the trip is over to debrief each day.** Processing as you go is an important part of the experience. Pick a couple questions from a few categories to create a conversation with your students. And remember that sometimes your scripted questions will help center the conversation, and sometimes it will be more helpful to follow the conversation and see where it goes.

## ICE-BREAKERS

***These accessible questions give a starting place for deeper discussion.***

- What happened today that you did not expect?
- What was the most memorable moment from the day?
- Ten years from now, what do you think you will remember most about this trip?
- What was the most challenging part of your day? What was the most rewarding?
- Who did you get to know better today?
- What are three words that describe your day?
- If you could have a picture of one moment from today, what would that moment be?
- What did you do today that you've never done before? What was that like?
- If you could bottle up and keep forever a feeling or experience from today, what would it be?

## CONNECTION Qs

***These reflective questions highlight God's work through today's events.***

- Through today's events, what was God telling you?
- What helped you get to know Jesus better today? What did you learn about Jesus?
- How did God overturn your expectations today?
- What did God open your eyes to today?
- How did you need to rely on God today?
- Think about this week so far. Why do you think God wants you on this trip?
- This week, how have your ideas of who God is shifted or expanded?

## COMMUNITY Qs

***These community-focused questions invite deeper thought about the community you are visiting and your community back home.***

- How is God at work in this community?
- What are some struggles you've seen in this community? What are some strengths?
- How is this community like our community back home?
- What needs have you seen here that also exist in our own community?
- What are some things we could learn from this community?
- After this trip is over, how could we keep serving this community?
- Where have you seen God at work in this community? How have you been able to be a part of that?
  - What do you think God is doing in our community back home? How could we be a part of that?

## APPLICATION Qs

*These forward-facing questions help apply mission trip learnings to everyday life.*

- How is this trip changing you?
- What do you think God is doing in your life right now? How do you take the next step in that process?
- This week, how is God changing the way you see others?
- How will what you experienced today or this week change your life in some way back home?
- It's easy to just be thankful for what you have after a mission trip. What are you more thankful for? Is it OK *just* to be thankful? What action can that thankfulness fuel in your life?
- What are you learning about yourself during this week? What will you do with that new understanding?
- What are two things you'll bring home from this trip—one physical and one not-physical?
- What do you think God wants you to do as a result of going on this mission trip?

# QUESTIONS TO PROCESS THE THEME IN CHURCH GROUP TIME

All week, students will hear about how God wants to continue a good work in them by moving them onward in their perspectives, passions, possibilities and pursuits. Take some time to talk about what students are hearing, what they are struggling with and what they are grabbing onto with the theme of *Onward*.

## ALL WEEK

- What stood out to you from Devotions this morning or from the video/activity this evening?
- Today, what did you learn about how God is working and through your story, as well as the stories of others?

## SUNDAY

- What do you want to remember from the video tonight?
- How have you seen God be present in your story? How do you want God's presence to continue this week?
- What word or phrase did you write on your wristband? What are some reasons?
- In what way do you hope this week will help start a new chapter in your story?

## MONDAY

- What stood out to you from the song we listened to? What are some reasons?
- What do you want to remember from the video tonight?
- What was your answer for tonight's discussion question: How can you be like Jesus and love others regardless of their story?
- How were Devotions this first morning? What was meaningful for you about this time?
- How can we as a group be good at caring about the stories of others this week?

## TUESDAY

- What stood out to you from the story of the lost son and the discussion afterward?
- What do you want to remember from the video tonight?
- If you're comfortable sharing, what's one thing you included in your letter to self?
- Today we talked a lot about the "Full Story." How would you describe the full story of what God does for us?

*This might be a good question to have students turn to their neighbor and answer, then ask if one or two students would be willing to share in the large group.*

- How have you recently experienced God's forgiveness and belonging?

## WEDNESDAY

- What do you want to remember from the video tonight?
- What did you put on your storybook page during The Gathering?
- What stood out to you from Devotions today?
- What would it look like for you to be bighearted in the way you give?
- What is one gift or sacrifice you feel God is inviting you to give?

## THURSDAY

- What was meaningful for you about experiencing footwashing during The Gathering?
- What do you want to remember from the video tonight?
- This week, how have you seen each other share in Jesus' story of love and service?
- How do you think Jesus is inviting you to more deeply share in his story back home?

# QUESTIONS TO ASK ABOUT { \_\_\_\_\_ }

If your students experience any of the following during the week, take time to talk about it. These are a few questions you might ask as well as a suggested introduction to each topic. Adapt these to meet the needs of your students.

## ... THE CHURCH SERVICE

There are a lot of different expressions of worship, and maybe this week you experienced worship that was different than what you're used to. Every community of Christians is different and we all have something to learn from each other. Let's think about differences, similarities and what we learned from attending another church's worship service.

- What word would you use to describe the church service we attended?
- What stood out to you as different than what you're used to?
  - How did that difference make you feel?
- What's something you thought this church does really well?
- What's something our church back home does really well?
- For you, what was valuable or worth remembering about attending this service?

## ... THE COMMUNITY SPEAKER

Sometimes the best service we can offer is not with our hands, but with our ears and our time and our attention. This week, we got to listen to someone from the community share about this place. Let's take a few minutes to talk about what we heard and what we learned through listening.

- How would you summarize what the speaker talked about?
- What didn't you know before that you learned from the speaker?
- What really resonated with you? In other words, what did you really agree with?
- Was there anything you disagreed with or are not so sure of? What are some reasons?
- Is there anything you want to change or do differently after hearing this speaker?

## ... SERVING TOGETHER AFTER THE TRIP

Our mission of loving God and loving others is way bigger than a trip. This trip is to prepare us to serve others back home. Of course, you can do that on your own! You can do simple things to serve your family at home and your friends at school. But there is also great potential to serve others in our community together—as a team! Let's talk a little about what that could look like.

- What are the needs in this community we have been serving on our mission trip?  
*If possible, write these on a whiteboard or poster, so everyone can see. At very least, write them on a piece of paper to reference and add to during the discussion.*
- Of the needs we just listed, which are also present in our community back home?
- What additional needs are there?
- Of these needs, which do we as a group feel most drawn toward? Let's pick two or three.
- Of the needs we picked, who are some people or organizations or ministries who are currently meeting those needs?
- How could we serve by either starting something new or partnering with a person, organization or ministry already meeting that need?
- It's good to make a plan, and we have the beginning of a plan, but a big part of identifying needs is listening and learning from others. Who are the people we would be serving? What questions do we need to ask them or people close to them in order to truly understand their needs?
- During this mission trip, hopefully we've learned some things from the people we've been serving. As we seek to meet needs back home, what might we learn from the people we serve?

Now that we have some ideas of who to serve and how to serve, plus some questions to ask. What next steps can we take once we are back home?

### ... CONFLICT (ON OUR TEAM, BETWEEN GROUPS or BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS)

This week is all about serving others, and there are lots of things that could distract our team from doing that. Maybe one of the biggest distractions is conflict and disunity. In John 13:34–35, Jesus says this about how people will know we are his followers:

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

Jesus says it three times in a row: We should love each other! As we serve in this community, we want people to know who Jesus is and that we are his followers, but it isn't loud announcements or 15-passenger vans or matching T-shirts that will show them Jesus. If we want people here to know we follow Jesus, we need to love each other! How silly would it be to travel all this way to love and serve people in this community if we can't love and serve the people next to us. So as we talk about the conflicts we're having, let's decide together that we will try our best to come at this conflict from a place of love for each other.

- What does Jesus mean when he says, “As I have loved you, so you must you love one another”?
- Briefly describe what happened with only the necessary details.
- Share how you felt and how you feel about it now?
- What could have *you* done better in this situation? What was your part in creating or continuing the conflict?
- What opportunity to love others is God giving you in this conflict? How can you respond in a way that shows you are a follower of Jesus?
  - If applicable, think about an apology. Saying you're sorry doesn't mean you are the only one to blame, but it does mean you are taking responsibility for your part and seeking to heal the relationship. Are you able to apologize for your part in this conflict?
  - If applicable, think about forgiveness. Forgiving someone doesn't mean their actions were OK, but it does mean you are choosing to release them and yourself from the burden of this wrong. Are you able to forgive the person (or people) who wronged you?
- What does it look like to live out Jesus' love for each other for the rest of this mission trip? What about after the trip?

# PRACTICAL TIPS FOR LEADING CHURCH GROUP TIME

## BEFORE THE TRIP

**Talk to your pastor or priest.** In the event that this open and honest environment reveals any sensitive personal issues (e.g. abuse, eating disorders, psychological issues, etc.), be sure your trip leadership team is on board with your church or parish's protocol for responding to and reporting any issues of concern or misconduct. Your pastor or priest might also be able to provide some training on how to respond.

## USING YOUR SPACE WELL

**Circle Up.** Go around and ask each person to share. Ask a specific person what they think; sometimes they may need a little encouragement.

**Pay attention to space and posture.** You will be assigned a meeting room/area by your YouthWorks staff. If your room is huge and full of scattered seating, move your group to a small circle on the floor. Sit together, creating an intimate space where everyone is part of the group—don't sit in a classroom style or at different levels. Sit at eye level so you can engage with each other.

**Create space for quiet.** Allow time for students to think and pray about the experience of this night and/or this week.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

**Don't talk.** You, that is. It can be easy to want to squeeze in a few more ideas and few theological nuggets, but students' brains are already full! Your success as a facilitator of small group discussion begins with your own silence. Let students talk so you can listen.

**Listen.** You can only know where your youth are at and the direction of the conversation if you are giving full attention to the group. Do not plan your next question or your next announcement while students are sharing. Be a good and compassionate listener. Truly hear what students are saying.

**Don't force conclusions or answers.** It is good to teach, and if you want to do some teaching during these times, you can. When you feel like a teachable moment arrives, take it. However, remember that students will greatly benefit from processing. Allow students to share in a free and open environment. Realize these discussion questions are not designed for definitive answers, but to get youth talking about their faith and experiences.

**Have a plan, and be ready to change it.** If great discussion and interest flow from your introduction question, do not force the group to move on to the next question just for the sake of the agenda. Go with your youth and dig deeper into the areas with which they connect. That's what processing is all about.

**Give students permission to talk.** Emphasize that this is a safe place to share. They do not *have to* talk about their experience with the entire group, but encourage students to talk with someone with whom they feel comfortable.

**Allow time to answer.** Our tendency is to answer the questions we ask. Five seconds of silence can seem like an eternity. A good practice is to ask a question and then mentally count to ten. It will seem awkward at first, but it will allow for students to think and answer when they are ready.

**Rephrase effectively.** If you wait several seconds and it seems no one understands the question, then you can rephrase it, but do so carefully. Keep the question open-ended. Do not answer it or change it to a "yes or no" question. Questions with one-word answers do not promote processing. For example, if the question is, "After

*what you saw today, how do you feel?*” do not rephrase it to “*Do you feel sad about what you saw?*” Instead, rephrase it to “*What do you think about what you saw today?*” (This helps students transfer abstract feelings to somewhat more concrete thoughts and keeps it open to a wide range of answers.)

**Redirect when necessary.** While it can be helpful to step back from your plan when youth are engaged in great group discussion, stay keenly aware of the tone of the conversation and redirect if the group wanders into unhelpful or confusing territory. As the facilitator, you should pull the conversation back by gently jumping in (trying not to interrupt but waiting for a break) and reframing the conversation. Do not shame anyone for what they shared, but clearly put a halt to any inappropriate or destructive talk.

**Do not over-discuss powerful, emotional experiences.** If you just participated in a footwashing experience, your students might not be ready for group discussion. Instead, you might want to start with some time to just hang out and celebrate together informally. This also allows those youth who need longer to process what they are feeling to do so individually or with a friend or leader.

**Show respect.** Set boundaries for listening to one another. For some groups (especially junior high students), it is a good idea to have an object that represents who has the floor. For example, a stuffed toy can be passed as people share. If you do not have the toy, you are not talking; rather, you are listening to the person with the toy.

**Follow up on their questions.** Listen for underlying beliefs/opinions/feelings and help bring them out. Give permission for them to be discussed. Help students go a bit deeper by asking, “What are some reasons for that?” or “Can you explain why?” Repeat answers. Turn conversation towards others: “Did anyone else see/notice that?”

**Mix it up.** If your group is large (over 10), one big discussion circle every night will mean a few students dominate most of the conversation. Consider breaking into smaller discussion groups led by various adult leaders. Then act as an emcee, reading through the questions from the front, but allowing discussion in small groups. Try having students do some discussion in groups of two or three during one night as part of your Church Group Time. Different students respond to different ways of processing, so changing it up will allow more students to connect.

## FOLLOWING UP

**Follow up the next day.** If you hear something but you feel there might be more below the surface, check back at another time.

**Bring your discussion home.** When you return home, make time to continue to process all that happened this week. Debriefing is an important part of what happens after the trip.

**Continue to process.** The process of returning home from a mission experience can often be a difficult one. Seeing and experiencing new things every day can provide a lot to think about. Consider connecting regularly with your group to unpack this experience together.

**Back home.** Research shows that the lasting impact of mission trips is only as good as the follow-up students experience back home. Use the questions in this guide to continue your own Church Group Time at home. You can also utilize any number of resources at [youthworks.com/aftertrip](http://youthworks.com/aftertrip). Students have a lot to process. Talking a week or a month after the trip about some of these same questions can help bring the intensity of this experience back to their everyday life. If you are not already doing small group discussion at youth group, this is a good time to start.

**Move toward ongoing transformation.** As good as processing is, it’s only half of what should happen after the trip. More than simply understanding their experience, students should *do something* with it! Move your after-trip conversations toward action steps in students’ lives. Help them think about how they can integrate their experience into their everyday lives.