



## LEADING A LARGE GROUP

First, let's define a "large" group. The average church in the LCMS brings 10 students and 3 adult leaders. For the unique challenges that come with bringing a large group, we can safely define a "large" group as any group of more than 25 students and 5 adult leaders. Check out the bullets below of some tips, tricks and resources from veteran Primary Adult Leaders, DCE's and pastors who have led large groups to the Gathering before:

### Small Groups

- **Create small groups within your larger group.** Girls or guys, mixed groups and grades, whatever you think is best. Make a few groups of no more than 4-6 youth and 1 adult leader. In all pre-gathering meetings, allow time for team building, getting to know each other and trust building.
- **Make sure at least one adult leader doesn't have a small group.** A floater if you will. That way when an emergency arises (and it will every trip with a large group) you have a leader who can handle the emergency, so you aren't down a small group leader.
- **Train your leaders to listen actively and intently to your students.** Go deep, ask questions that make the student think about what they are learning. This trip could be the first time a kid is traveling without a parent. By listening to the student's anxiety, homesickness, friend drama, etc, you can fix issues before the student burns out or has an anxiety attack. With a larger group it can be harder to see the issues with a particular student, and thus harder to see an issue when it first rears its head. Students are more likely to open up in a smaller group. Especially those who struggle with anxiety and depression. Even consider using a training like Mental Health First Aid to prepare them to care for teens.
- **Make sure your leaders are getting face time with their small group** multiple times a day, and not just texting to check in. Use this time to ask them questions, hang out, be a listening ear. The hope is that they become supportive adults these youth can count on long term as lasting relationship blossom on this trip.



## Engage Youth in Service and Leadership

- **Get your student's input** as much as possible. When you can, let them give meaningful input into the experience. If there are a few options on food, schedule, or planning that are equally acceptable to the adults, give them the ability to choose. Listen to ideas they have that might be what you never considered, but extremely helpful.
- **Get small groups serving the whole group** by helping with the organizing and planning. Give each small group a task like making a restaurant reservation ahead of time for the whole group or having an activity/game that can be done when the group is waiting. Be sure to give them important information (like budget and schedule) and support as you do. Empowering your students and other adult leaders relieves some of the planning burden from the Primary Adult Leader (PAL), but it also teaches them life skills, responsibility, communication skills and accountability!
- **Empower your older student leaders** to take responsibility for the trip, during the trip. Make them prayer leaders, student small group leaders working with the adult leader, assigned mentors for younger students who might be overwhelmed or even the person who helps ensure everyone drink enough water. You can even ask them what kinds of roles they might be good in. Give the students the power to make the trip better for everyone attending.
- **Consistently remind and teach youth and adults to be flexible**, to be ready for the unexpected, and be able to roll with the punches. Large groups always tend to have more unexpected things pop up, no matter how well you plan your every move. Having an attitude of joy and peace amidst the potential chaos will help your group roll with it too! Groups of people traveling together and hanging out with a lack of sleep over a long period of time, can quickly turn negative. Ask students help in trouble shooting problems that occur. Start each day in your room, small group or large group by having everyone shout out a word to "elevate encouragement." This will help your group own the morning and own the day with positivity amidst whatever struggles arise.



## Communication and Logistics

- **Many groups have daily t-shirts** so everyone in your group is easily identifiable. This is especially important while traveling if you're flying! Have students design them! Have fun with them!
- **Investigate alternative methods of transportation.** Sometimes a bus across the US sounds fun, but it's simply not possible if you live too far away. Flying with a large group might sound difficult, but if you communicate the expectations clearly, it's fun. Depending on your location, travel by train might be possible and a fun, new, affordable option! Keep in mind that youth will want to sit by their friends, so help empower them to make wise choices with who they sit near on the long adventure to Houston.
- **Have quick daily small group leader (chaperone) time without the students,** just 5-10 minutes. Make sure everyone is on the same page with any situations or drama that may be popping up. That way your leaders can redirect, handle, or stop a situation before it blows up. Spend time going over logistics, schedule for the day, and allow your leaders to share issues, ideas or solutions they have for the day.
- **Make sure each adult leader is caring for themselves.** Leading youth to and from an LCMS Youth Gathering can be stressful. Hearing about their life joys, problems and struggles can really be a huge weight. They need you to be fresh and emotionally focused the whole trip. The only way to do so is make sure you take time to do whatever it is to keep yourself healthy (drink water, get alone time, chat with family back home, eat well, get a few more minutes of sleep, take a nap mid-day, go to an adult session.) You get the point. You know what you need, do it so that you can survive and thrive the whole trip.