



Dear Youth Leaders (Deacons, Pastors, Youth Ministry Leaders & Parents),

Blessings to you, your family, and congregation! All 9th-12th students are invited to the Synod's annual Senior High Youth Gathering! It will be held March 8-9, 2024 at Best Western Convention Center in New Ulm, MN. This event is coordinated and planned by the SW MN Synod Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO).

Our theme this year is "Forever Unbroken," based on Romans 8:37-39.

We have an outstanding gathering planned for you:

"Nothing shall separate us from the Love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

- Band: Hans Peterson and the Synod Youth Band
- Nightlife: Variety of activities including games, snacks, dance, large group games, etc.
- The Spirit Garage (a relaxing place for peace and prayer)
- Small group sessions led by trained youth to help dig deeper into the theme
- Service learning opportunities with meaningful service project and growth
- LYO board elections (more info below!)
- Lively worship, dancing, singing, fun, faith and relationship-building

Make sure you follow our Social Media—this is where we will be posting pictures and updates about our gatherings, events, LYO Board, or our ELCA youth. Please use the hashtag: #swmnyouth

- **FACEBOOK:** SWMN Youth, ELCA
- **INSTAGRAM/SNAPCHAT/TWITTER:** @swmnyo

REGISTRATION
OPENS January 25th
AND
Ends February 16th!

PLEASE NOTE:
Hotel block ends
February 20th

After submitting your registration, you will receive a confirmation email. Once you receive the confirmation email, you may contact the hotel to book your housing.

You will also receive, via email, information, and updates as we get closer to the gathering. Thank you for promoting the gathering in your congregation and with your high school students.

SPECIAL:

The FIRST 65 SH students who register: Their church gets \$10 off each spot for the November 22-23, 2025 JH Synod Youth Gathering.

See you in March! In Christ,
 The Southwestern Minnesota
 Lutheran Youth Organization

Questions regarding the Gathering?

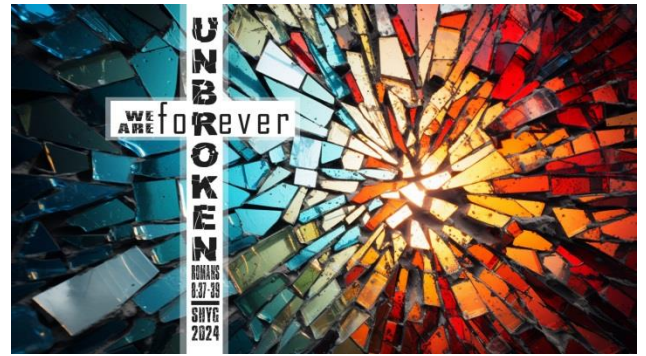
Gathering Manager Chloe Halvorson
chalvorson03@hamline.edu or (320) 220-1364

Questions regarding Gathering registration?

Registrar Shaun Luker
gatheringregistrar@yahoo.com or (507) 317-8968

All Other Questions

Interim LYO Coordinator, Pastor Christa Forsythe, "PC,"
christaforsythe@gmail.com or (320) 535-0641



Senior High (Grades 9-12) Youth Gathering Registration Info

COST: \$115 per person (payment due with your registration) (\$125 after February 16)

- Includes programming and a Gathering t-shirt, also includes Friday snacks, Saturday breakfast & lunch
- **REGISTRATION: Opens January 25th @ 5:00 pm --- Closes February 16th @ 4:30 pm**
- **GROUPS:** Groups must register with one adult (21 yrs. or older – for liability reasons) for every 7 youth.
 - If HS students wish to attend, but their church is not attending and/or they do not have an adult to attend with them– please, contact Interim Coordinator, Pastor Christa Forsythe, contact info above.
- **ROOMS:** The hotel block of rooms at the Best Western in New Ulm are held through February 16th. You will receive an email confirmation from Gathering Registrar, Shaun Luker, once you are registered. After receiving that confirmation email with the hotel registration form, please, email Erin Lafferty at the Best Western in New Ulm and use our hotel form. Form will be emailed to you as confirmation of registration.
 - Hotel contact: Erin Lafferty with New Ulm Best Western, erin@birddoghospitality.com
 - Persons from different churches may be housed together in order to reduce gathering costs, if interested in joining another church, please, contact Pastor Christa (PC) or Registrar, Shaun Luker.
- **TO BRING LIST:** sleeping bag, pillows, bedding, towel/wash cloth, toiletries, sleeping attire, change of clothes, weather-appropriate clothing, etc., supper or money for supper as you travel to and from the Gathering Friday night and Saturday night, prescription medication if you take it in its original container/packaging. Optional: spending money for Merchandise table, snacks as you travel & if you choose to bring phone/electronics (& chargers)– other than camera use, please, refrain from using phones during mass gatherings/worship.
- **HEALTH PROTOCOLS:** If you are sick, please do not attend the gathering.

Register online at <https://swmnsynod.formstack.com/forms/srhighyouthgathering2024>

PAYMENT: Either pay online (with check/credit card) or make ONE CHECK out to the “SW MN Synod” & mail to synod office, PO Box 499, Redwood Falls, MN 56283.

Registrations are non-refundable and will not be confirmed until payment is made.

FRIDAY

4:30 - 6:30 pm Registration
6:30 - 7:00 pm Pre-Assembly Music
7:00 - 8:15 pm Mass Gathering #1
8:15 - 9:10 pm Small Groups, Adult Orientation
9:10 - 11:30 pm Nightlife, LYO Board Info Meeting
11:30 pm - 12:15 am Mass Gathering #2
12:15 - 12:45am Church Family Time
1:00 am In Rooms
1:30 am Lights Out

SATURDAY

9:00 - 9:45 am Breakfast Buffet
9:45 - 12:15 pm Mass Gathering #3, LYO Elections
Small Groups & Adult Education
12:15 - 1:45 pm Lunch & Free Time
1:45 - 3:00 pm Service Projects & Digging Deeper into Theme
3:15 - 4:00 pm Small Groups
4:00 - 4:45 pm Mass Gathering #4, LYO Installation, Sending
5:00 pm Go in peace to love and serve the Lord!

LYO BOARD ELECTIONS

Your new SW MN Synod Lutheran Youth Organization (LYO) Board will be elected at the Senior High Youth Gathering. This is an amazing opportunity for youth to serve their church, synod and community while growing in faith and leadership skills. Please encourage youth from your congregation to run for this board. It is a rewarding leadership and faith building experience.

The LYO Board is responsible for planning and leading the Jr. and Sr. High Youth Gatherings and representing the voice of youth on a synod level. The LYO board is a leadership team that requires maturity, leadership skills, responsibility, openness, creativity, a significant investment of time, faith and trust in God and sharing the Good News of God's love with others, and a desire to grow in and share one's faith. Board members receive training to grow in their skills and accomplish their assigned tasks.

Youth from your congregations in grades 9-11 are eligible to run for one-year LYO board terms—thirteen seats are up for election. The elected youth will choose their own officers during LYO training in June. After the gathering, the current 2023-24 LYO board will appoint 2 additional board members to increase diversity on the board.

Serving on the LYO board involves a time commitment of attending LYO training in the summer, 2 weekend meetings/retreats, and planning/leading the Jr. and Sr. High Gathering.

Forms received by the online deadline (March 6th at Noon) will be distributed to gathering participants to aid in the election process. (Students may still fill out an application in person, due by March 8th at 10 PM) All youth who run for the LYO board will need to fill out an online application (electronic form only), which can be found on the Youth Gathering webpage - <https://swmnelca.org/event/sryg/>.

If you have any questions, please contact Pastor Christa Forsythe by email or phone:
christaforsythe@gmail.com or #320-535-0641

From past LYO members: *How have you seen God at work through your service on the SW MN Synod LYO board? . .*

Within the first five minutes of my first ever junior high youth gathering, I knew that I wanted to be on LYO. In particular, I saw God through the members giving their faith talks. I remember one key phrase from almost all of the faith talks I heard, and that's when I heard God through them. After giving my own, I realized that many participants felt the same way. One other way that I have seen God through LYO is how close the group is. We all support each other through anything. I love how we open our arms to the gathering participants that we don't and automatically feel so close to them. - Emma Thompson, Olivia, MN

I see God work every gathering we do, I love seeing the smiles on the youths face when they arrive at the gathering and during, it is awesome to see how appreciative they are, and because I know that the people on the LYO are there to support me through whatever, and whenever! - Harper Groves, Buffalo Lake, MN

I have seen God working through each one of the LYO members and the work that we do. Whether that work is individually, in a group, during the gatherings or outside of the gatherings, God is constantly working in and through us to make us the best that we can be. We're not just a board, but a big happy family and I wouldn't trade in my time on the LYO board for anything. - Olivia Hanson, Olivia MN

The 2024-2025 LYO board must commit to attending all of the following events:

- Training: June 9-11 , 2024 (Gustavus Adolphus College, St Peter, MN)
- Planning: September 14, 2024 (Synod Office in Redwood Falls)
- JH Gathering: November 21-24, 2024 (Willmar Convention Center)
- Training: January 17-18, 2025 (Green Lake Lutheran Bible Camp)
- SH Gathering: either March 6-9, 2025 or April 3-6, 2025 (location TBD)

If you know you will be unable to attend more than one meeting or will not make your participation in the LYO board a priority, please consider letting someone who is able to make the commitment and be present for more meetings have the chance to serve on the LYO Board. Your commitment to LYO starts with a training to build foundational skills in leadership and create relationships of trust within the LYO community. Participation in training is essential and expected. If you miss more than one meeting, other than for illness, an emergency, a death in the family, or unavoidable school conflict like a school play – your term on the board may be ended due to scheduling conflicts.

All candidates must fill out an online application (electronic form only, found on the [Youth Gathering webpage](#)) before voting takes place on March 9, 2024. If you do not receive confirmation that your form was submitted successfully, please contact Pastor Christa Forsythe at christaforsythe@gmail.com

SMALL GROUP LEADERS

Small groups are a SUPER-MEGA-IMPORTANT part of the Senior High Youth Gathering and are awesome for creating friendships between youth from all over the Synod. It makes the whole gathering much more unforgettable for the youth.

We are asking you as an adult leader to find 10-12th grade youth that you believe would absolutely ROCK at leading a small group. We are looking for 25 youth who can own this kind of leadership role. Past experience in leading a small group is helpful but not required. We trust your judgment to ask youth who would be gifted listeners and leaders.

Small groups are made up of approximately 8-10 youth from similar grades. Each small group leader should attend a required training on Friday, March 8th beginning at 5:45 PM. More information will be emailed about this training time as we get closer to the gathering. If a student cannot make the training during that time, please contact LYO Board Vice-President, McKenna Jensen at kenna1544@gmail.com, to make other arrangements.

Visit the Youth Gathering webpage – www.swmnelca.org/event/shyg2024 to fill out the Small Group Leader online application.

You may either denote someone's interest in leading a group on their registration or by sending an email to McKenna. McKenna will contact you via email to let you know she has received your application. If you do not hear from her 2 days after submission, please contact her (or Pastor Christa) to be sure we have it.

GATHERING COPY

Medical Release/Information/Media Release Form
SWMN ELCA Synod: Senior High Youth Gathering 2024

Please reproduce this form: One form is needed for every youth and adult participant.

Participant Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Parent/Guardian Names (youth only):

Parent/Guardian Phone Numbers (youth only):

Medical Conditions/Allergies:
(attach further explanation, if necessary)

Emergency Contact (for **youth** participants, who can we call if parent/guardian is unavailable, for **adult** participants, who can we contact in case of an emergency):

Emergency Contact Phone # _____

Insurance Company name and policy #:

Photo/Media Release Permission (It is OK for gathering planners to use photos and videos that include the above participant for Youth Gathering communication and promotion of the event – including printed & social media platforms.):

___ YES ___ NO

Parent/Guardian Permission (youth only): I hereby grant my permission for my child to attend the SW MN Synod Junior High Youth Gathering, to be held at the Best Western in New Ulm, MN from March 8-9, 2024. I also give my permission, in case of an emergency, for medical attention to be sought by the chaperones for my child's group and/or the persons in charge of the gathering. I understand that all efforts will be made to notify me immediately of any such happenings.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

CONGREGATION COPY

Medical Release/Information/Media Release Form
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Please reproduce this form: One form is needed for every youth and adult participant.

Participant Name: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Parent/Guardian Names (youth only):

Parent/Guardian Phone Numbers (youth only):

Medical Conditions/Allergies:
(attach further explanation, if necessary)

Emergency Contact (for **youth** participants, who can we call if parent/guardian is unavailable, for **adult** participants, who can we contact in case of an emergency):

Emergency Contact Phone # _____

Insurance Company name and policy #:

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___ YES ___ NO

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Signed: _____ Date: _____