



Guidelines for Gather 'Round Writing

Immerse yourself in the Bible story

Study the scripture text and Bible insight essay carefully. Consulting a Bible commentary is helpful. Immerse yourself in the story with special attention to how it exemplifies the session's faith focus.

Make the biblical foundation of each session shine through

Use the story elements and the faith focus to create a cohesive session plan. Follow the outlines for your age group to develop your session plan. In the best sessions there is a clear—although generally unspoken—connection to the faith focus in every section. This, along with transitional sentences, helps the session flow smoothly.

Share the session's connection to Anabaptist principles. How does this text help us understand and develop our faith? How does it teach us about the meaning of discipleship, of how we can walk in the footsteps of Jesus? Does it show us how to witness to our faith? Does it lift up themes of peace and justice? Does it emphasize the importance of the faith community?

Get the Bible into participants' hands in age-appropriate ways. Even very young children can open a Bible to the day's story if you have placed a bookmark there. By showing learners of all ages where the stories come from, they will learn to value this book. Also help participants carry biblical words in their hearts by teaching the Bible memory passage in every session (except in the Youth unit).

Write clearly and naturally

Use language that we speak and understand today. Address the teacher's guide to the teachers! Be helpful and friendly without being corny. Avoid religious or denominational jargon. Write with depth but simplicity. Use short, crisp sentences. Do not use convoluted sentences or strings of clauses. Complex sentences are difficult for those who don't read well and for those who are looking down to find their place during the session. In children or youth pieces, use language appropriate for the age level. Read your writing out loud and listen carefully to yourself. Then go back and smooth out the rough spots.

Explain processes and instructions carefully and completely. Test your written instructions with someone else. Make directions succinct. When giving directions, begin each instruction with a directive verb, such as respect, use, make, provide, study, explain, ask, or say.

Provide helps for the teacher

Write for all kinds of teachers. Create sessions that will capture and hold the interests of children and their teachers. Many teachers are creative, able, energetic, and knowledgeable. Many also have time and budget limitations. Some have been teaching for years; others are first-time teachers. Some teachers are limited by small rooms and a lack of resources. Before-class preparation may be meticulously carried out by some teachers while others pick up the teacher's guide for the first time right before their group meets.

Make the material welcoming to newcomers to the church. Do not assume previous Bible knowledge. Explain key concepts about God and the church in words that children and youth can understand. Avoid denominational jargon.

Limit preparation time. Plan sessions so teacher preparation is generally not more than an hour. Provide an easier alternative if you offer an interesting but complex activity.

Offer options and teaching tips. Some teachers have regular assistants, others work solo. Some groups have 10 children, others one or two. Some groups may include people with disabilities or language limitations. Some may include a majority of children at one end of the spectrum or the other in terms of skills or maturity. Help teachers by offering teaching tips and options to accommodate these different kinds of groups and teaching styles. Also offer tips with more background on the Bible story, advice on dealing with developmental issues or discipline problems, reminders about previous or upcoming themes, and support for breaking away from familiar patterns.

Judge the length of the session. Expect that a typical session will last 45–60 minutes. Roughly speaking, allow 5–10 minutes for Gathering, 20–25 minutes for Sharing the Bible story; 15–20 minutes for Responding; and 5 minutes for Sending.

Think outside the box and make the session fun! Draw on multiple intelligences throughout the session. Come up with fresh options for familiar stories and new twists on overused ideas. Avoid activities that involve collages, lists, charts, “brainstorming,” and writing projects unless accompanied by prompts to make them manageable and interesting. Would the children and youth you know enjoy this activity?

Write with a lens of awareness

Demonstrate global awareness. Include stories about people from other countries, use names that reflect a variety of cultures, teach words in languages other than English, and respect and celebrate other countries and people.

Be sensitive to differences and disabilities. Include tips for modifying activities for participants with physical, emotional, or mental handicaps, or learning disabilities. Do not assume all families are composed of a mother, a father, and more than one child. Explain idiomatic language and cultural references.

Display awareness of regional diversity. Gather 'Round is used in Canada and the United States. Measurements are given in both standard and metric systems (1 C / 250 ml). Material should be relevant to both urban and rural churches.

Maintain gender awareness and balance. Use both females and males to illustrate stories. Do not assume that gender determines roles in family, church, or community.

Use rich and balanced God language. Convey the fullness of God in the language you use. Avoid gendered pronouns for God, either masculine or feminine, except when quoting scripture (use the NRSV).

Prepare age-appropriate material. Familiarize yourself with the latest best practice understandings of the needs of children and youth. Refer to the stages of child development in chapter 9 of the *Gather 'Round Handbook* for tips on the age group you are writing for.

Provide options for children or youth at both ends of the age spectrum. For example, a primary group will likely include both readers and nonreaders; a junior youth group may include preadolescents as well as young people who are physically and emotionally mature.

Do careful research

Uncover interesting facts and create fun activities. Use books and websites as you create fresh and engaging activities, but find reliable sources and observe copyright laws. For Bible facts and theological information, use Bible dictionaries and theological reference books, as well as Internet sources.

Make it your own. Gather 'Round does not print copyrighted song lyrics, prayers, or craft ideas. It is your responsibility to come up with unique and engaging ideas. If a story is adapted from another source, always include the source as a reference.