

The Meeting After “The Bus Ride Home”

Processing an event after it happens is the difference between incorporating an experience into one’s life and faith formation, creating change and new ways of thinking, or forgetting about it and staying the same. Your group of teens has just had an experience that can be discussed, examined, and incorporated into their faith life.

This curriculum, for teens who have attended a *March for Our Lives* event, is designed for the first meeting after you get home.

Set-up:

Create a welcoming environment for the group. Chairs should be set up in a circle, or around a table. The most important thing is that your teens feel welcome and safe, and that you’ve made time to be together.

Needed materials:

- Flip chart/markers or printed discussion questions
- Bibles, or smart phones with Bibles
- If doing an activity, read the activity options to see what materials are needed.

Learning outcomes:

- Participants will be able to articulate their experience of the march.
- Participants will be able to identify where they saw God in the experience.
- Participants will be encouraged to think about how they can incorporate faith-motivated activism into their lives.

Timeline for session:

This timeline may be modified to fit your needs.

45 Minute Session:

Gathering Prayer & Check-in (10 minutes)

Group Conversation (30 minute)

Check-out and short Closing Prayer (5 minutes)

60 Minute Session:

Gathering Prayer & Check-in (15 minutes)

Group Conversation (30 minutes)

Check-out (5 minutes)

Worship (10 minutes)

90 Minute Session:

Gathering Prayer & Check-in (15 minutes)

Group Conversation and/or Group Activities (60 minutes)
Check-out (5 minutes)
Worship (10 minutes)

Reminders about leading a Teen Small Group:

- **Don't be afraid to talk honestly about real issues.** Teens can smell inauthenticity a mile away and crave honest discussion about things that matter with their peers and adults who are not their parents. That being said, it may take a while to build trust with your teens. **Just be a trustworthy adult in their life.** It matters more than you know.
- **Give explicit permission for teens to think that something is boring, stupid, or irrelevant.** Give them opportunities to voice these feelings in a constructive way, and be ready to move onto a new question or activity that resonates with the group. For this reason, this curriculum provides many discussion questions and activity options. Feel free to add pertinent activities and questions that you know will work for your group.
- **If an activity or conversation is going great, don't stop. If it's not working, stop!** If the discussion is eliciting a lot of engagement and bringing up real concerns and issues, let it keep going even if it's veered away from what you're "supposed" to be talking about. However, if the discussion has veered into utter silliness, this is probably a sign that your teens are bored and ready to move into a different activity or a need an opportunity to stand up and move around.
- With some groups, thoughtful discussion will really work. For other groups, not so much. **Try to anticipate what will work best for your teens.**
- **Sometimes teens have very adult struggles. Sometimes they don't. Both are okay.** Be present to them regardless.

Gathering Prayer:

Invite a teen to open in prayer, or have an adult lead the prayer. You can invite them to pray spontaneously, or you can use this prayer:

God of peace and love, we thank you for bringing us back together again. We thank you for our experiences together, for the joy and the struggle. We pray for all those who have returned home, that their hearts and minds may be opened to living out your will for us. We pray that we also maybe witnesses of hope and love. We pray all these things in your name. Amen.

Check-in:

This is an opportunity to allow the teens to get warmed up to deeper conversation than many of them would normally have. We recommend using "mutual invitation" which is when the person who goes first invites another person by name to share their experiences. Then that person chooses the next person, etc. Teens are certainly allowed to pass. If someone passes, be sure to invite them to comment one last time before you move on to the next activity. You may ask one or both of these questions.

Check-in questions:

- What was your favorite sign at the march?

- What has it been like to return home?

Small Group Activities:

Not all teens enjoy sitting around and talking, so here are some activities you might try. You'll likely have time for only one. Of course, you could do these different activities over the course of several meetings.

Tell your story to your faith community. Encourage teens to create something that will tell the story of their trip together. For instance, your group could go through their photos and create a video slideshow (most smartphones can do this automatically) and upload the slideshow to your church's social media page. Or the group could write a group sermon, or a five-minute presentation to be done during announcements at worship, or write a piece of music or host their own prayer vigil or... you know what will work and won't work for your teens and your community. The most important thing is that they get to tell their story.

Share the Love. Go outside your church and use sidewalk chalk to write messages of love and encouragement that are inspired by your time at the march. Invite your teens to tell you why they wrote or drew what they did.

Write a letter as a group to your local representatives or your local newspaper. Have the teens write about their concerns and experiences, craft the message together, and sign it jointly.

Come up with one course of action in response to the march. Invite your teens to think about something, just one thing, that if they worked together, they could change for the better. This could be something simple, like having a conversation with your church board about banning guns in the worship space, or inviting a speaker, or something much larger. Again, this will be highly contextual, but invite the teens to lead the way and figure out what they themselves can do. The important part is letting the teens be in the driver's seat. Help them understand their undertaking, but don't tell them what is and isn't possible. You never know what teens can actually accomplish when they put their minds to it.

Small Group Conversation:

Directed conversation is the heart of a small group, and can be especially helpful for teens as they figure out who they are and process their new life experiences. Some groups will be very good at these conversations, others will not initially be good at these conversations and will get better, and other groups will need a lot of help, or different approaches, like starting your conversations around group activities. It depends on your teens.

Here are some questions to get your conversation started. It may be that you move through all of them, or end up having a deep and long conversation with the first question you ask. You may choose to ask your own question that speaks to the needs of your group. **What matters is that participants are engaged with each other.** These questions are based on the experience of the God in individual lives, and responses will be unique to each person. There is no right or

wrong answers, there is only further discussion and exploration of our relationship with God and one another.

Questions for Discussion:

These questions are designed to help the teens reflect on their experiences.

What surprised you about the march?

What was your favorite part about the march?

What do you wish had been different?

What have you been thinking about since your experience at the march?

Where did you see God during your trip?

How did your faith influence your desire to go to the march?

What is one thing that you can do on a regular basis to keep up the struggle against gun violence?

What do you hope will change because of the march?

Scripture-based Discussion Questions:

Invite teens to open their bibles to Matthew 5. The following questions invite teens to reflect on their experience and Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.

In light of your experience, what do you think it means to be a peacemaker? Where did you see peacemakers working, and where do you see them working now? Do you see yourself as a peacemaker? (Matthew. 5:9)

Have you experienced pushback from people who do not agree with your point of view on gun control? What has that been like? How have you dealt with this conflict? How does Jesus invite us to deal with conflict? (Matthew 5:11-12, 38-42, 43-48)

Read Matthew 5:13 together.

13 "You are the salt of the earth; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything, but is thrown out and trampled under foot.

What does "saltiness" look like in your own context? What does it mean to be a salty Christian in your world?

Read Matthew 5:14-16 together.

14 "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. 15 No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

How did your light shine at this event? What was it like to lift up the bushel? What can this passage teach us about how to be disciples of Jesus? How can you let your light shine into the future?

Worship:

We recommend that all groups allot 10 minutes or so to worship together if this session is not part of the principal service. Design a brief worship service that reflects your own tradition. One thing you might consider is lighting candles not only in remembrance of those who have lost their lives to gun violence, but also those who are working to end gun violence and working to make the world a brighter place.