

SUMMER FRIENDSHIP GATHERINGS

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REGISTRATION

- Thank you for your willingness to help with your congregation's Summer Friendship Gathering. We appreciate your willingness to review these training materials.
- This material explains the importance of early registration prior to the event. You will also better understand which participants and volunteers need to register, those who do not, and the process for background screens.
- Typically, when I start talking about applications and criminal background screens, some people's eyes glaze over. I get it! It is hard to get group homes to return their applications, and some volunteers may not understand why it is important.
- Churches and Christian organizations all too often are in the headlines because individuals who are considered vulnerable didn't receive proper care or were even abused. It is important that we protect the people we are serving in the same way we would protect the children in the nursery or in our youth ministries.



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- Completing criminal background screens on registered volunteers reassure families and service providers that your church is doing their best to protect its friends with disabilities from potential abuse or neglect. It can also protect your congregation from criminal negligence because they have taken these precautionary steps.
- It is important that our Friendship groups protect our friends with disabilities, their churches, volunteers, and Connection Ministries from any hint of criminal negligence or abuse.
- Everyone who is involved in a Gathering comes from one of five groups. These groups include our friends with intellectual disabilities, their families, direct support staff, registered volunteers who participate in the Gathering, and support volunteers who help with food service and facility management.
- Most of our friends with disabilities will also be involved with the church's weekly Friendship group. However, they are encouraged to invite friends from their homes, where they work, and other social groups.
- Families of our friends with disabilities and direct support staff are encouraged to participate in all aspects of the Gathering. It is our hope they will find Christian community in your church. Their presence at the Gathering will be an asset that will help you with communication and the personal care needs of our friends with disabilities.

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REGISTRATION CONTINUED

- The Registered Volunteers are the volunteers who will be involved with the Gathering activities and interacting with our friends with disabilities. Registered volunteers are mostly the leaders and volunteer companions from the weekly Friendship group.
- Registered volunteers can also be members from the church who want to learn more about the Friendship ministry and choose to serve where they would be interacting with our friends with disabilities.
- Support volunteers will be filling a variety of roles that provide hospitality and help the event run smoothly. Support volunteers will not be participating in the Gathering sessions or activities. They will be assisting with facility management like set-up and cleanup. Other support volunteers will provide food service, worship music, photography, publicity, and other roles.
- These groups have different registration requirements;
- The **Participant and Volunteer Registration Application** are completed by all our friends with intellectual disabilities, their families who attend with them, and registered volunteers.
- **Registration is done using the online application** that can be accessed through the home page of our website at www.connection-ministries.org. Just click on the Summer Friendship Gathering banner on our home page.
- The direct support staff and support volunteers are the two groups who do **not** need to complete this application form.

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- The application provides the Gathering and Friendship group leadership teams and Connection Ministries with important information that includes personal contact information, emergency contacts, description of disabilities, and special dietary needs. This information is necessary for the safety of every participant at the event.
- It also helps us plan with an accurate meal count and provides us with a liability and photo release.
- The Participant and Volunteer Registration application reassures Friendship leaders that there will be enough registered volunteers and family members to provide for the needs of our friends with disabilities that have registered. No one wants to limit the number of friends who can attend.
- The online application allows participants to register for this year's Summer Friendship Gathering and for their Friendship group that will start back up the following fall, all at the same time. You will need to check the box for both the Gathering and your Friendship group at the beginning of the application and select the locations you wish to attend. This will update your registration for both your Friendship Group and the Gathering.
- The congregation for each Friendship group should complete a Criminal Background Screen for registered volunteers who are 18 years of age or older. It is not needed for our friends with intellectual disabilities, their families and direct support staff or support volunteers.

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- If someone planned to be a support volunteer but later has an interest in participating in the event sessions and small group discussions, they may. However, they do need to talk with the leaders of the Friendship group and complete the registration process.
- Anyone who interacts with our friends with disabilities by participating in the event sessions needs to complete the registration process as a registered volunteer. For this reason, last-minute walk-in volunteers can only serve in support volunteer roles.
- A registration table will be ready to receive guests at 5:30 p.m. Friends with disabilities, their families, and volunteers that registered will find nametags that were prepared in advance by Connection Ministries. Along with their name, the tag will include special dietary needs on the front and a schedule on the back. Extra name tags will be available for non-registered individuals.
- **Support Volunteers** are the people who will be supporting the event with meal donations, food service, worship music, setup, cleanup, and facility coordination. These people do **not** need to complete the Participant and Volunteer Registration Application or the Authorization for Criminal Background Screen form. Likewise, members of the church or visitors only attending the worship service also do not need to register.
- Support volunteers who plan to have dinner with their team need to notify the Friendship leaders and the food service team, so they have an accurate meal count and are aware of any special dietary needs. Sign-up sheets will be available for meal group volunteers.

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- Friendship leaders will also need to increase their meal count for both their support volunteers and provider staff having dinner with the group.
- Connection Ministries will provide event t-shirts for our friends with disabilities, their families, direct support staff, and all registered volunteers.
- Due to our inability to plan for the number of support volunteers and cost, Connection Ministries cannot provide event t-shirts for support volunteers.
- The Gatherings that take advantage of the Thrivent Action team projects can receive 25 “Live Generously” shirts for each project. These shirts can be given to the Support Volunteer teams.
- For our friends with intellectual disabilities, their families and registered volunteers, please do not put it off. There is so much to do to get ready for this summer.
- Connection Ministries will be helping with many Gathering events, sometimes 2 per week. We ask that you complete your registration as quickly as possible, preferably before May 15th.
- There will be a firm registration cutoff two weeks before each event. This allows us time to finalize meal counts, discussion groups, and print materials. Volunteers who do not register by the cutoff date, may only serve as support volunteers.

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- We ask Friendship leaders to encourage their groups to register as soon as possible, particularly in the spring while their group is still meeting. Connection Ministries will provide Friendship leaders with up-to-date rosters as registrations are received. It will be necessary to follow up with participants from your group that have not registered.
- At each Gathering, Connection Ministries will provide Friendship leaders with a roster and copies of the registrations for everyone who registered at each Gathering. These updated registrations are good for the upcoming Friendship season if the Friendship group's church was entered on the top of the form.
- We will also send rosters with special dietary needs two weeks before the event. This information will go to the Friendship leader or the Support Volunteer leader responsible for the food service if we have the contact information.
- Connection Ministries will send all our friends with disabilities confirmation letters about 2 weeks before their event. The letter will contain information about the event with times, dates and location. A confirmation email will be sent to all registered volunteers.
- It is recommended that the Friendship team make reminder phone calls to our friends with disabilities, families, and group homes one week before their Gathering.
- If you are unable to register online or need help, contact your Friendship group leader or Connection Ministries and someone will work with you to complete the registration.

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REGISTRATION CONTINUED

- You are encouraged to review the notes for this presentation. The link can be found on the Connection Ministries website next to this training video.
- We thank you for your willingness to be part of this year's Summer Friendship Gathering. If you have any questions or need information you can email us at connect@connection-ministries.org or call our office 317-646-5067.