

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 episode explains the importance of early registration. You will also better understand which participants and volunteers need to register, those who do not, and the need for your Church to do background screens for volunteers who will participate in the Gathering with their friends with disabilities.
- It is important that we protect the people we are serving. Our friends with disabilities are considered a vulnerable population just like the children in your church's nursery or youth ministries.
- The responsibility of background checks is given to each church of the Friendship or SonRise group for registered volunteers who are 18 years of age or older. It is not needed for our friends with intellectual disabilities, their families, direct care staff or support volunteers.



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- Completing criminal background screens on registered volunteers reassures 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 when these precautionary steps are taken.
- **Everyone who is involved in a Gathering comes from one of five groups. These groups include:**
 1. Friends with intellectual disabilities
 2. Families with a Friend with an intellectual disability
 3. Direct care staff
 4. Registered volunteers who participate and interact with our friends
 5. Support volunteers who help with food service and facility management but do not interact with friends.
- Most of our friends with disabilities are also involved in your church's weekly Friendship/SonRise group. Many invite friends from their group homes, workplace, and other social groups.
- Families of our friends with disabilities and direct care 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.
- Registered volunteers: The Registered Volunteers are the volunteers who will be involved with the Gathering activities and interacting with our friends with disabilities.

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- Registered volunteers are the large group leaders, small discussion group leaders, and volunteer companions from your weekly Friendship or SonRise group who may help in a small group, or maybe a companion to just someone who needs a friend to sit with.
- 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: Support volunteers fill a variety of roles that provide hospitality and help the event run smoothly. Support volunteers do not participate directly with our friends with disabilities in the Gathering sessions or activities.
- Their role is assisting with facility management such as set-up and cleanup. Other support volunteers will be involved with meal preparation and serving the meals, worship music, photography, publicity, tech support, and other roles.
- Support volunteers who do not participate directly with our friends with disabilities do not need to register. They are an integral part of the Summer Friendship gathering team and should communicate with the Group leaders for direction in their roles.
- Direct support staff or caregivers do not need to register. We have found there are too many changes in caregivers from the time of registration to the Gathering. Direct support staff and caregivers are very important as they can assist with personal care, communication, or behavioral management with our friends with disabilities.

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REGISTRATION CONTINUED

- **Who should complete the Participant and Volunteer Registrations?**
Registration should be completed by all our friends with intellectual disabilities, their families who attend with them, and volunteers who directly interact with our friends with disabilities.
- **How do I Register?**
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 “Register” button located under the large banner of friends on our home page.
- **Why do I have to register for the Gathering every year?**
Registration provides the Friendship Gathering leadership team and Connection Ministries with important information that includes personal contact information, emergency contacts, description and challenges of disabilities, and special dietary needs. This information may change from year to year. Registration is necessary for the safety of every participant at the event.
- It also helps us plan for an accurate meal count, name tag information, and provides us with liability and photo releases.
- The Participant and Volunteer Registrations reassure Gathering leaders that there will be enough registered volunteers and family members to provide for the needs of our friends with disabilities.
- The online application for registration allows participants to register for this year’s Summer Friendship Gathering and for their Friendship/SonRise group that will start back up the following fall.

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- You will need to check the box for both the Gathering and your Friendship group. There will be a drop-down button for you to select the location you wish to attend. This will update your registration for both your Friendship/SonRise Group and the Summer Friendship Gathering.
- **What if I change my mind and want to be a registered volunteer instead of a support volunteer?**
If someone who began as a support volunteer but later has an interest in being a volunteer companion, participating in the large and small group sessions, they may. However, they will need to talk with the leaders of the Friendship group and complete the registration process.
- **Can I show up the day of the Gathering and be a volunteer?**
Sure, But 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 their nametags that were prepared in advance by Connection Ministries. Along with their name, the name tag will include special dietary needs on the front and the schedule of the 3 evenings on the back. Blank name tags will be available for direct care staff.
- Members of the church or visitors only attending the Day 3 worship service starting at 7:00 do not need to register.

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REGISTRATION CONTINUED

- **If I am a Support volunteer, can I still eat dinner?**

Support volunteers who plan to have dinner with their team need to notify the Gathering leaders and the food service team, so they have an accurate meal count and are aware of any special dietary needs. The Gathering leader is responsible for finding meal service support volunteers from their congregation, small groups, women's/men or youth ministries, etc.

- The Gathering leaders will also need to adjust their meal count for both their support volunteers and direct care staff who will be having dinner with the group.
- Connection Ministries will provide event t-shirts for our friends with disabilities, their families, direct care staff, and all registered volunteers. Due to our inability to plan for the number of support volunteers Connection Ministries cannot provide them with event t-shirts.
- The Gatherings that take advantage of the Thrivent Action team projects can receive 25 "Live Generously" t-shirts for each project. These shirts can be given to the Support Volunteer teams. If you would like more information on how your Gathering can take advantage of the Thrivent Action team project, you can contact Connection Ministries.
- For our friends with intellectual disabilities, their families and registered volunteers, please do not put it off. There is so much to do to prepare for this summer to make it a successful Gathering.

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REGISTRATION CONTINUED

- Connection Ministries will be helping with many Friendship Gatherings, sometimes 2 per week. We ask that you complete your registration as quickly as possible, preferably before May 16th.
- There will be a firm registration cutoff two weeks before each Gathering. 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.
- We ask Friendship/SonRise 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/SonRise 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 Group leaders with a roster and copies of the registrations for everyone who registered for the Gathering. These updated registrations are good for the upcoming Friendship/SonRise group season in the fall. Please be sure to enter the church you attend for Friendship/SonRise group.
- We will also send rosters with special dietary needs two weeks before your Gathering. This information will go to the Gathering leader and the Support Volunteer leader responsible for the meal service.
- Connection Ministries will send all our friends with disabilities confirmation letters about 2 weeks before their event. The letter will contain information about the Gathering with times, dates and location. A confirmation email will be sent to all registered volunteers.

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REGISTRATION CONTINUED

- It is recommended that the Gathering 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 or SonRise group leader or Connection Ministries and someone will work with you to complete the registration.
- 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.
- Thank you so much 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.