



So, you want to host a gathering for women who are discerning the good life with no child of their own? *Good for you.*

No, seriously. It electrifies the soul when women come together to connect and count ourselves in. To sit with each other—in the hard and the happy. To say out loud what makes us tick (and what doesn't.) To hear another affirm, "You are not alone. And you are not crazy."

This is a guide to gathering, complete with invite template, event planning tips, group touchstones, discussion prompts (both for the small-talk and big-talk), and follow-up resources. There's even recommended poetry. Because you can't come at what matters most without poetry.

Here's the hard truth: Women who don't have, want, or center kids are often marginalized in American communities that still idolize parenting as the highest social good. But we don't have to settle for this tired script. We can do what women have always done throughout history when their humanity is threatened. We can gather. We can speak. And we can feast.

The Good for You gathering is an invitation to tell a better story about our lives. Because there is so much more to tell.

XO,
Erin

Sample Invite [3-4 WEEKS BEFORE]

SUBJECT: An Invitation to the Good for You Gathering

Hello!

[FIRST, A WORD ABOUT WHO YOU ARE AND HOW YOU KNOW THE RECIPIENT(S)]

I'm writing to invite you to the Good for You Gathering on [DATE that's 3-4 weeks in the future] in celebration of women who are discerning the good life without a child of their own. Not for you? Permission to delete now. Want more details? Keep reading below and **RSVP** to me by [DATE that's 1-2 weeks in the future].

THE WHY

Did you know that scientists have never proven the existence of a reproductive biological clock? Or that researchers have shown that purpose—not parenting, per se—is the foundation of human happiness? Even studies of nursing homes have found no special regret between women who had children and those who didn't.

Few of us heard this growing up. Instead, women without biological children (which is nearly 45% of us now) are often marginalized in American communities that still idolize procreation as the highest social good. This is an invitation to tell a better story about our lives.

THE WHO

The Good for You gathering is open to any adult woman—single or coupled, step-parent or foster-parent, infertile or unsure—who is without a child of her own and ready to reframe that lack as an asset. We'll share the pains and pleasures of finding our alternative purpose, mine the gifts that are distinctly ours to share, and celebrate the good news of our lives whether we ever partner, parent, or procreate.

THE WHAT

The gathering will start with a casual time of socializing from [TIMEFRAME of 30 minutes], followed by a facilitated conversation from [TIMEFRAME of 90 minutes]. Heavy appetizers will be served, along with bubbly water, a signature cocktail, and wine. Please e-mail me with any special dietary needs.

This is an evening for women to step into the circle of firelight and let our light shine. To hear and honor the complexity of one another's stories. To leave feeling empowered with truth, poetry, and nerdy SWAG. In other words, it's an invitation to show up in solidarity as our fullest selves.

Cheers,
[YOUR NAME]

Sample Reminder [1-2 WEEKS BEFORE]

SUBJECT: Details for the Good for You Gathering

[NOTE: AN IDEAL NUMBER OF YES'S FOR THIS TYPE OF GATHERING IS BETWEEN 12-24 GUESTS.]

Hi Ladies,

I'm so glad you RSVP'd "Yes" to the Good for You gathering on [DATE & TIME]. Our guest list includes some of my favorite women—and women that I trust will become your favorites by the end of the night. Because, as Benedictine nun Mary Lou Kownacki wrote, "There isn't anyone you couldn't love once you've heard their story."

As a reminder, please plan to arrive at [START TIME] to [EVENT VENUE + ADDRESS]. We'll start with small bites and big talk—made palatable for you introverts by some soulful conversation starters. Then, a facilitated conversation will follow about how we're each discerning the good life with no child of our own. We'll end with a closing ritual that celebrates where we've been and where we're going. Bubbly water, a signature cocktail, and wine will be available to sip on throughout the night.

Please don't forget to reply to me with any special needs you may have for the night, dietary or otherwise.

Thank you for taking a risk by saying "Yes" to this night: Yes to being celebrated, Yes to speaking truthfully, Yes to listening to women's unheard desires. This is going to be good.

With heart,
[YOUR NAME]

Sample Supply List [1-2 DAYS BEFORE]

Signature Cocktail
Bubbly Water
Wine Bottles
Appetizers/Desserts
Disposable Cups/Plates/Napkins
Name Tents w/Icebreaker Questions on Back
What We Practice Here Handouts
Good for You Postcards w/Stamps (optional)
Additional Handouts or SWAG (optional)

Sample Planning Outline

Words of Belonging [30 Minutes]

Make name tents in advance for your guests. Place these near the entrance, preferably with someone standing nearby to greet.

On the back of each name tent, write a “soulful small talk” question they can ask of (and answer for) others. Ideas include:

- Finish this sentence: If you really knew me, you’d know that...
- What city has most shaped your identity?
- What book/song/show/movie are you an evangelist for?
- What do you know about your name?
- Was having children good for your mother?
- Did you imagine you’d become a mother?
- Who taught you what it meant to be a mother?
- Finish this sentence: If I could master any skill, it would be...
- Who is the coolest kid you know?
- What were you like as a kid?
- Who was a woman you admired growing up?
- What are you learning about your body?

Give folks about 30 minutes to arrive, be greeted, and grab food before settling in for the facilitated conversation.

Words of Welcome [5 Minutes]

Remind guests why you’ve gathered them.

Tell a brief story about your personal stake in the conversation.

Name the metric of success for the evening: belonging, i.e. being with our longings (or lack thereof) in the company of other women.

Words of Introduction [30 Minutes]

Invite guests to take a minute or less to say their name, something that gives them purpose (work, hobbies, relationships), and how they identify themselves today: childless by choice, chance, calling—or something else?

- Acknowledge that childless is not a perfect word, so permission to translate into another word or phrase throughout the night that works better for you.
- Acknowledge that it’s normal, but sometimes difficult, to have a mix of motivations in the room, and in one’s self.

- Acknowledge there will be time to go more in depth about how they've come to identify this way later.

Model the length of introduction you're looking for by going first, i.e., "Hi, I'm Erin Lane. Something that gives me purpose is writing for people who practice off-script spirituality. And I understand my biological childlessness as a calling—"childfree for the common good" is how I put it."

Words of Invitation [5 Minutes]

As a way of co-creating brave space together, ask the group to read the "[What We Practice Here](#)" guidelines aloud. (You'll want to make a handout so they can refer to it throughout.) Invite different voices to read each heading and subheading popcorn style (i.e. Let voices pop-up as moved, rather than asking for volunteers or assigning people to each one).

After you're done reading, ask for any additional group covenants to consider.

Give permission for anyone to remind the group of its guidelines, if it feels like they're drifting from them.

Words of Conversation [40 Minutes]

To start, do a "State of the Union" to see who's in the room and why. These are meant to be sort of quick, first-reaction answers, and not everyone has to speak up. [5 Minutes].

In one word or phrase, what is a hard part of being childless for you?

In one word or phrase, what is a good part of being childless for you?

Thank the group for their answers. If time, ask them to reflect on any similarities or differences in the answers they noticed, without singling anyone out.

Next, invite them to go deeper in groups of 2-3 to reflect on their BACKGROUND [15 Minutes] Give each person 5 interrupted minutes to share how they narrate their path to childlessness. Volunteer to be the group time-keeper. If someone doesn't want to share, encourage the partner(s) to hold silence for that member rather than cede their time. If someone doesn't use their whole five minutes, they have the option of inviting gentle questions from their partner(s) when finished.

Bring the group back together to reflect on their responses. Remind them to share from their own story, not the story of their partner. Now, move them to reflect aloud with the larger group for the rest of the time. You can continue to use the questions below, write your own, or respond to themes in the moment. [20 Minutes]

ON PURPOSE:

Where does the desire (or lack of desire) for children live within you? What do you desire more than mothering?

ON RELATIONSHIPS:

How have others—family, friends, potential or current partners—responded to your feelings on motherhood? How does the community you're from shape these responses?

ON LEGACY:

What are the fruits of your currently childless life? What do you long for others to celebrate about your legacy whether you ever partner, parent, or procreate?

Words of Conclusion [10 Minutes]

To close, invite each person to take five minutes to write themselves a quick letter on a Good for You postcard (or any note card/envelope) with something they want to remember from the night: an insight, a feeling, a conversation. Make sure they don't forget to address it to themselves! Tell them you will mail the postcards in a month or so that it arrives as an unexpected encouragement.

You might also send them home with a few extra postcards, pre-stamped, (or any note cards/envelopes) to send to women in their lives who needs to hear Good for You—whether non-moms or moms; it doesn't matter.

Words of Sending

Read "[Circle of Firelight](#)" as a way of thanking your group for doing the work of showing up, being with their longing, and allowing themselves to be seen. You can read it over them, or print it out and have people read it in unison.

It has always been scary to step into the circle of firelight, to show up in the company of strangers, to ask for entrance or to offer it. Our hearts race— Will we have the courage to see each other? Will we have the courage to see the world? The risks we take in the twenty-first century are based on risks human beings took thousands of years ago.

We are not different from our ancestors, they are still here,
coded inside us. They are, I believe, cheering us on.

— Christina Baldwin in *Calling the Circle*

Sample Follow-Up E-mail [1–2 DAYS AFTER]

SUBJECT: Good for You Gathering Afterglow

All,

Thank you for stepping into the circle of firelight with me on [DAY OF EVENT]. I left wishing we had so much more time to hear and honor the complexity of each other's stories *and* trusting that just being in a room where we were celebrated for making meaning beyond mothering was enough.

There is more to marinate on. More on who shaped our longings to mother or not. More on what we feel and what we're supposed to feel about children. More on how we find community when we find ourselves outside of convention. More on the risk of partnering with someone who may not partner our desire. More on how we re-parent ourselves. If you would like to muse on this "more" together, I'd love to meet-up with you one-on-one or connect you with other women who are interested in continuing the conversation.

Finally, I'm attaching a couple resources from the night for you to take and use as you see fit. One is the "[What We Practice Here](#)" guidelines that you're welcome to share in other spaces you show up in. The second is the Christina Baldwin poem, "[Circle of Firelight](#)," that reminds us we are never alone in our risk-taking and meaning-making.

Don't forget to send your Good for You postcards to spread the love to non-moms and moms alike who need to be celebrated. And if you need some encouragement of your own, please consider signing-up for author Erin Lane's [Good for You Newsletter](#) that offers more tools for the childless, childfree, and unlikely families, including a guide to host your own Good for You Gathering, if you're so inspired.

Cheering you on,
[YOUR NAME]