

Vacation Bible School Tips and Undated Programs

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Preparation

Start early! - Although you can put together a VBS in less time, it's best to start at least six months ahead of time.

Recruit volunteers - You'll need to know that you have enough adults for a safe adult to child ratio and that you'll have leaders and assistants for all the different activity areas. If you don't have enough adults, you may have to limit the number of children in your VBS or not offer some activities.

Assess your resources - This includes knowing your budget as well as figuring out what areas inside or outside of your church you can utilize, what supplies you already have, etc.

Set the date - Try to pick the best date and time for your staff and children. Ask your volunteers when they're available and check to see what kinds of things are going on in your community: other VBS programs, day camps, etc. VBS is not limited to five mornings from 9 to noon, so consider having an evening or weekend VBS or even having it once a week over several weeks.

Choose and order curriculum - You'll want to do this as soon as possible, so you can get materials out to your leaders and start publicizing your program. Don't wait too long to order add-ons, such as student pages and giveaways, as the publishers often run out of these items before summer even begins.

Publicize and register - Try to get your families to register as soon as possible so you have an idea of how many children you'll have. If you charge for VBS you can offer an early bird discount to encourage people to register ahead of time.

Train staff and youth helpers - It's important to have one or more training sessions for your staff so they know what's expected of them; it will also get them excited about VBS as they learn about the theme and activities. Don't forget to offer training for your youth assistants as well. Make sure you follow your church's safe church or safe sanctuaries program.

Pray - Pray for a successful VBS and ask others in your church and community to pray as well.

Follow-up

Most people are exhausted when VBS is over, but follow-up is very important. Plan your follow-up now to make sure you don't miss the opportunity to connect with new families and to get feedback on your program.

Connect with families - If you have VBS families who aren't a part of your church, make sure you invite them to attend Sunday school, services, and other activities that you offer. Try to get your pastor or outreach team involved in this as well. Have a brochure available to give them with information about your church and mail out a letter inviting them to services and Sunday school.

Evaluations - These are important and should be done when VBS is still fresh in people's minds. Ask volunteers as well as families for feedback on how your program went. You may find out some things you didn't know and can make improvements for next year.

Thank - Don't forget to thank your volunteers, not just at your VBS closing ceremony, but in a worship service as well. Celebrate the many hours that your staff gave to make your VBS a success, so they know they are appreciated! Dedicating your staff in a worship service before VBS begins is another good thing to do.

Continue the adventure - Consider using your VBS theme in Sunday school, leaving up decorations and playing the VBS music. Some companies even sell curriculum to do this. You could also plan a morning reunion a few weeks after VBS is over.

Think about next year! - It's not too soon to start thinking about next year! Let your volunteers and families know that you're looking forward to seeing them all at your next VBS and use whatever you've learned to make your program even better in the future!

Choosing curriculum

Cost - What sort of budget do you have? Will you be charging for VBS? Will you be able to get people to donate food and supplies or will you need to purchase them? There are free VBS curriculums available but most of the starter kits cost anywhere from \$60 to \$200. Will you be buying a lot of extras, such as student pages, decorations, craft kits, etc.? Consider having a joint VBS with one or more churches or find a church that's doing their VBS at a different time than yours and you can share the cost of curriculum, decorations, etc.

Theology - Most VBS curriculum can be adapted to coincide with your church or denomination's theology, but sometimes this can be difficult. For instance, if the words to some of the songs express a viewpoint that differs from your church's theology, you'll have to eliminate those songs. Some curriculums include suggestions on how to lead a child to make a commitment to Christ. If that is something that isn't done in your church, you'll have to clarify that for your teachers.

Students - The curriculum you select will also be based on what sort of students you expect to come to your VBS. Some curriculums are better if you have a lot of younger children and some work better with older kids. You might also want to consider your setting, such as whether it's rural or urban.

Theme - It's important to have a theme that you and your staff are excited about and that you think your children will enjoy. Some themes are also easier to decorate for than others. If you plan to come up with your own craft ideas, some themes may work better for this than others.

Music and video - When selecting a curriculum, the music is important because, unless you have talented musicians who can come up with their own music, the music is something that is difficult to change. Again, some curriculums have music that is more appealing to younger children and some have music that is better for older children. If you don't have musicians, then look for a curriculum that includes a music DVD.

Ease of use - This is a consideration, although most of the kits are pretty user-friendly.

Marketing - Publicity is important, so it's helpful if the curriculum you select offers tools that make this job easier for you.

Where to purchase

Some publishers who offer a different VBS curriculum each year include Abingdon, Cokesbury, Concordia Publishing House, Group Publishing, Lifeway, MennoMedia, and Orange. There is a great difference in theological perspectives among them, so make sure you choose a VBS kit appropriate for your church.

Once you've decided on a curriculum, you have a number of choices as to where you can purchase your kit and other supplies. If you anticipate returning any material, check the return policy of the companies, as they vary in what they'll accept for return and deadlines for returning material.

Directly from publisher - This may not give you the best price. However, sometimes publishers will offer freebies or free shipping along with your purchase. Since the publishers know their products, you may find that you'll get better answers to your questions when you order directly from them.

Third party - There are also third-party companies that sell VBS kits. Most of these offer discounted prices. Here's a list with links to some of them:

[Christian Book Distributors](#)

[Church Partner](#)

[Cokesbury](#)

[Concordia Supply](#)

Concordia Supply offers a [catalog](#) online or by snail mail which has information about VBS in general as well as extensive information about the most popular kits.

Undated downloadable programs to purchase

Sparkhouse sells a downloadable curriculum called [ReNew: The Green VBS](#) for \$79.99. It's a 5-day curriculum for children PreK-Grade 6 which explores Jesus' Parable of the Sower as they learn how to care for God's creation. Sparkhouse also offers [Creative Arts Camp](#) with four choices for 5-day VBS themes: Praise, Creation Care, Who Is My Neighbor?, and Saints & Holy Helpers. It's available in print or as a download for \$29.95.

Leader Resources sells downloads of [VBS programs](#). There are various themes; a number of them are based on popular children's books. The prices range from around \$50 to \$75.

- Aslan Is on the Move! is based on *The Lion, The Witch, and The Wardrobe*.
- Dare to Be Different! is based on *A Wrinkle in Time*.
- The Peaceable Kingdom uses Dr. Seuss and other children's book characters to teach children the principles of anti-bullying.
- Pilgrimage: Seeking the Kingdom of God has a medieval pilgrimage theme.
- Praying All the Time uses different books to teach about prayer.
- Second Pilgrimage explores the lives of biblical and historical saints.
- Wild Willy & The Prodigal Son is based on the book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.
- Wizards & Wonders is based on the Harry Potter books.

Illustrated Ministry offers [Compassion Camp](#) for \$149.99.

[B.A.S.I.C. Elements](#) and [Elements of Trust](#) are science based VBS programs.

Living Waters for the World offers a downloadable VBS for \$47 called [Water All Around the World](#) which helps children learn the value of clean water and how children in other countries struggle for clean water.

[God's Garden, God's City](#) links with the Beulah Land felt board materials and sells for \$75.

Undated free downloadable programs

[Global Ministries](#) of the UCC (United Church of Christ) and Christian Church: Disciples of Christ offers a number of options. The Kids-to-Kids VBS programs available are:

- Journey to Columbia
- Journey to Congo
- Journey to India
- God's Love Is Everywhere, where children visit a different mission site for each of five days.

Global Ministries also offers:

- [All God's Children](#) will help children learn about different places, cultures, and faith traditions present in Southern Asia.
- [Embrace the Fruits of the Spirits](#) helps children discover the fruits of the spirit and how to apply them in their daily lives while exploring the Caribbean.
- [Bethany Village Live](#) re-visits the basic aspects of the history and theology of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in an experiential environment.

The Episcopal Church offers the [Abundant Life Garden Project](#), an interactive, scripture-based children's curriculum for those who seek to share the ministry of the

Episcopal Church's Relief & Development program. It's for elementary age children and explores five areas: water, seeds, soil, animals, and harvest.

The Society of St. Andrew (Gleaning America's Fields - Feeding America's Hungry) offers a free VBS program called [Abundance Orchard](#). There is an Old Testament version and a New Testament version. They will mail the materials free to those in the US and Canada. They ask that you collect daily mission offerings for the Society of St. Andrew.

The PCUSA offers a free download of [Won't You Be My Neighbor](#), four intergenerational sessions based on Mr. Roger's Neighborhood.

[ELCA World Hunger](#) has several VBS programs to download: God's Good Creation, On Earth As in Heaven, River of Life, and Who Is My Neighbor.