

VBS!

review fair
2016



keyhallonline.org/vbs



Welcome to the Center for the Ministry of Teaching (CMT) Vacation Bible School Reviews for 2016. Both new programs developed for 2016 and recaps of perennial resources are among the reviews. This year new programming ranges from visiting foreign lands to a host of water themes.

Be sure to check out the CMT's Top Picks, five programs we found stood out from the rest. The criteria for our Top Picks are:

1. An emphasis on God's love and care for all people
2. The unity of a program around a distinctive theme supported by a cohesive program of stories and activities
3. Sound learning strategies based on developmental traits of the targeted audience

The Perennial section includes time-tested favorites, such as the two Pilgrimage programs that help children learn about the people that have molded their faith traditions.

The review team this year includes CMT staff, trusted Christian educators with experience in planning and leading VBS programs in different settings and denominations, and students at Virginia Theological Seminary.

We carefully examine starter kits for each program reviewed. The reviews include the name of the publisher, a website url, and basic content of the starter kit and its cost. We note if additional expenditures are needed to operate a program.

Many VBS developers weave sound pedagogical research in their programs with sensitivity toward children with disabilities and developmental needs of children of all ages. A few offer programming for teens and adults, but these usually require additional expenditures. Most programming, thematically and from a design standpoint, is targeted to elementary-age children. Preschool adaptations are available for most programs at no extra cost.

Don't overlook tweens and teens for VBS, even if the program you select doesn't have specific materials for this age group. These young people may be strongest part of your volunteer staff. Pair youth with adult mentors who respect the leadership skills and vision of young people to create dynamic teams who build strong relationships with children and each other.

We believe VBS can be a powerful tool for evangelism for your church. Be sure to select a program that mirrors the mission and theology of your church and community. Look beyond a catchy theme to the way scripture is used and the messages, both explicitly and implicitly, the participants will receive. Often, VBS directors and leaders will need to adapt a program to insure it reflects their church's teaching and beliefs. These decisions and changes should be made before volunteer staff are given materials to use.

Finally, Vacation Bible School should be fun and engaging for everyone involved. This is a time to celebrate God's love and the goodness of creation!

Dorothy Linthicum
Center for the Ministry of Teaching
Virginia Theological Seminary

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Top Picks

Abundance Orchard
Where Faith Grows and Hungry People Are Fed

Society of St Andrew

800-333-4597

<http://endhunger.org/vbs/>

Starter Kit cost: Free download

The theme of food is beautifully woven through the stories, activities, snacks and mission components of the *Abundance Orchard* VBS. Theological themes that run through the curriculum illustrate the abundance of God's love and presence in our lives. The curriculum encourages the development of empathy, and invites the children not only into the Bible stories, but also to reflect on the meaning of the stories in their own lives.

The program's strength is in its theological content, its detailed instructions, and its flexibility. With creative leadership, this program could be modified to fit a wide variety of situations, numbers, ages, and local circumstances and mission projects. For example, organizers could plant a few garden beds that would be ready to harvest at the time of the VBS, and children could harvest the food for the food bank, or take a field trip to a community garden or food bank.

Abundance Orchard contains two full sets of material, one Old Testament-based, the other New Testament-based. Since each day is self contained, sessions could be selected from either set.

Little in the resource is ready-made, but comprehensive instructions invite adult organizers to use their imagination and skills to build a fantastic learning environment. Although all children will enjoy the program, it especially speaks to visual and kinesthetic learners.

This curriculum encourages sustainable practices by enlisting the help of a variety of people and using re-purposed materials. The program could be simplified, but it would lose some of its appeal.

Ages Levels: Preschool and Elementary age

Includes:	X	Two full VBS curriculums	X	Music list with links
	X	Detailed instructions, checklists, and activities.		

Strengths:

- Ten-day curriculum is a free download.
- Sustainable in its theme and its practices.
- Very detailed leader instructions, including check lists, and links to music files.
- Leader preparation for storytelling invites leaders to engage deeply with the material. Reflection questions could be modified to create a program for an older audience.
- Variety of fun activities are engaging and instructive.
- Food themes are cleverly inserted throughout the program.
- Children are introduced to the programs of the Society of St. Andrew to reduce food waste and hunger, and also encouraged to connect with local food organizations.

Weaknesses:

- Requires creative leaders who are committed to the program.
- Detailed description of set up is provided, but few pictures or drawings are included.
- Is not designed for large numbers, but could be modified into rotating stations.

Robin Denney

Kids to Kids

Journey to Congo VBS available [here](#)

Journey to Colombia VBS available [here](#)

Journey to India VBS available [here](#)

Global Ministries (United Church of Christ and the Christian Church – Disciples of Christ)

http://www.globalministries.org/resources_youth_and_children

Cost: Free download

The three Global Ministries curricula – *Journey to Congo*, *Journey to Colombia*, and *Journey to India* – emphasize that we are all God’s people and interrelated despite differences in faith traditions, cultures, skin colors, and geography. Each VBS program is set-up as a learning center/rotation model that includes worship, small group scripture study, crafts, games, and snacks.

The United Church of Christ and the Christian Church have mission centers in each of the countries featured in VBS programs. Scripture, both Old Testament and New, will help North American children understand other culture. The programs are designed to help children explore cultural differences and similarities. Every service activity has two components, one in a church’s local community and one in the country of study. Leaders are encouraged to use the programs’ biblical themes in selecting local ministries. They may also want to adapt denominational mission programs for those outlined in the VBS curriculum.

Age Levels: All ages, but would work best with K-5 grade; preschool adaptations are included.

Includes:

- | | | | |
|----------|--|----------|-----------------------------|
| X | Scope and sequence for each program | X | Timeline/schedule available |
| X | Detailed resources for creating an immersive experience. | | |

Strengths:

- The flow of daily activities is well-thought out and flexible.
- Volunteers with no teaching experience will find lessons easy to use.
- Each curricula was designed by different people, which is reflected in the strengths of each:
 - Columbia has very strong scripture component and is mission-oriented
 - Congo has many details about daily life and very clear lesson plans
 - India makes strong connections between Christian and non-Christian faith communities.

Weaknesses:

- These are not “open the box, it’s all ready for you” programs. Congregation with experience running a VBS are more likely to be successful.
- A rich variety of resources are listed for each program, but leaders will need to select the best for their situation.
- Game suggestions need to be strengthened.
- Although there are no pre-recorded music CDs, guidelines for music selections are provided.
- Group worship details are largely left to the director.

Charlotte Greeson

Joy in Jesus

Everywhere! All the Time!

Abingdon Press

<http://2016.abingdonpressvbs.com/>

\$79.99

Joy in Jesus uses African American culture and history as a lens to examine biblical truths and the Gospel message of Jesus. The writers are particularly responsive to the events of the past year that brought about the deaths of African Americans in Ferguson, Missouri, and Charleston, South Carolina. They ask the question others have voiced: “What is there to be happy about?”

Their answer comes from Nehemiah 8:10: “The joy from the Lord is your strength.” Using art, drama, storytelling, crafts, and games, they affirm the abundance of God’s love and presence in the lives of all people, regardless of race. “As Bishop John Bryant (AME) said at the funeral of South Carolina State Sen. Clementa Pinckney, ‘When god is in the house, there is joy.’”

Psalm 100, which tells us to set aside a room for praise to celebrate God’s faithfulness through the generations, sets the tone for this VBS. Using Old and New Testament scripture, as well as African Americans from history and today, *Joy in Jesus* demonstrates that “even in death-dealing circumstances, we can continue to joyfully hope in God to whom all lives matter, especially those whose backs are against the wall.”

Joy in Jesus predominantly reflects the music, syntax, and visual representations of the African American community, its primary audience. All churches who want to confront the racial issues our nation is facing, however, should consider this joyful curriculum that is filled with hope. Each day includes an opening worship skit with song and dance, structured Bible study time, and time for reflection through crafts, snacks, and music.

Ages Levels: Preschool/Kindergarten and Elementary, Teens and Adults (separate purchase)

Includes:

X Worship DVD with movement activities **X** Music CD with teaching versions of songs

Strengths:

- Detailed community engagement for registration, including structure and ideas for working with multiple churches.
- Each guide explains how each *Joy in Jesus* VBS component complements the whole. Opening sessions conclude with an invitation to worship that reframes the session’s scripture and goal.
- Director’s guide includes pedagogical and developmental guides, alternative schedules, biographies or relevant leaders in the black community, websites, and movies.
- Outreach component focuses on health and life in the community.
- Music is a mix of traditional hymns, hip-hop, and topic-related songs—enjoyable for all ages.

Weaknesses:

- Starter Kit does not include Teen or Adult program guides.
- *Joy in Jesus* does not offer a physical activity or games rotation.
- The program is word-heavy, without multiple activities for each rotation. Leader may wish to add activities, particularly for arts and crafts rotation.

Dorothy Linthicum

Surf Shack: Catch the Wave of God's Amazing Love

Cokesbury

<http://2016.cokesburyvbs.com>

Cost: \$ 159.99

Surf Shack: Catch the Wave of God's Amazing Love is a fun, colorful surf/beach theme with a solid theological background that emphasizes love, grace and God's continuous presence. The Bible stories, the central part of *Surf Shack*, help students see God at work in their lives and experience the love of Jesus. Reflection time led by group leaders is designed to help children think about the daily story and message; there is a positive emphasis on leading children to a closer relationship with Jesus. Each day the water-theme stories from both the Old and New Testaments are reinforced through crafts, science, snacks, recreation, music and mission. The musical selections are a mix of fast and slow, with easy to learn lyrics and engaging tunes.

Age Levels: Preschool, Elementary (primary emphasis), Teen, Adult (separate purchase)

Includes:

X	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	X	Music Action Training DVD
X	Music CD	X	Skits/Drama DVD (opening & closing)
X	Decorating/publicity guide	X	Access to free, online resources

Strengths:

- Crafts options can be adapted for any size or budget. Craft kits are available, but items can be made without purchasing kits.
- Designed with well-known science teacher Steve Spangler, some experiments are clearly demonstration only, while others are better at involving the children.
- Games are easy to understand, and have alternatives for churches with limited space.
- Songs are engaging, with a nice mix of upbeat and slower tunes. DVD has a diverse cast and wonderful scenes of surfing
- Mission suggestions are easily adaptable to your church and include ideas that children can do.

Weaknesses:

- DVD music videos, while well produced and engaging, sometimes have a jarring juxtaposition of voices and exaggerated movements.
- Science experiments are sometimes a stretch to connect to the theme.
- Some of the skits may not engage older children as well, I would recommend definitely using the active learning options or changing them in some way.
- Some snack suggestions are costly for large groups.

Anne Shelton
Director of Children's Ministry
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Surprise! Stories of Discovering Jesus

MennoMedia
mennomedia.org
Cost: \$164.99

Surprise! Is a straight-forward, well-designed program with age-appropriate, Bible-based activities. The activities and program elements are clearly explained, adaptable, and well organized, but will require considerable preparation in selecting specific activities and assembling supplies.

The main program is for children kindergarten through 5th grade. Website resources add adaptations for older children, but some 4th and 5th graders may prefer those adaptations and changes. The Starter Kit contains a separate set of adaptations for preschoolers that allows them to attend on the same days as the elementary children, but in their own group.

This program really shines as a coherent program to teach comprehensively five different Bible stories: Jesus in the Temple as a child; Jesus blessing the children; feeding the 5,000; Jesus and Nicodemus; and Jesus on the road to Emmaus. The emphasis is on ‘discovering’ Jesus both in the Bible and in the world around us. Issues of sin, atonement, and Jesus’ death are not raised.

The program encourages the collection of money for outreach but does not specify to whom it should be given. One Bible verse (Mark 1:14b-16: “Let the little children come to me...”) is memorized over the course of the program.

Age Levels: Preschool, Elementary

Includes:

- | | | | |
|----------|-----------------------------|----------|-----------------------------------|
| X | Music CD, songbook | X | Registration and volunteer forms |
| X | Alternate schedule(s) | X | One set of director guides |
| X | Two sets of activity guides | X | One set of children’s story books |

Strengths:

- Format encourages learning and reflecting on the five featured Bible stories.
- Music is lively, developmentally appropriate, and encourages singing.
- Curriculum is adaptable to different lengths of sessions, sizes of groups, and numbers of days.
- The starter kit is comprehensive and complete. Additional costs, however, may be incurred for supplies for crafts and other activities.

Weaknesses:

- Some activities, particularly some of the crafts, require collecting many supplies, and may be a bit ambitious for some groups
- Requires considerable advance planning to take advantage of curricular components that have to be adapted.
- Some 4th and 5th graders may need enrichments to make the program more age appropriate.

Catherine Gibson

2016 VBS Reviews

Arts Camp

Church Publishing, Inc.

www.churchpublishing.org/artscamp

Cost: \$29.95

Ready to go in a new direction for your VBS? Christina Clark created *Arts Camp* to explore Christian faith through art, music, and movement. Now published as a paperback book, you can create a program that taps into the creative hearts of children. *Arts Camp* is written in an Episcopal church context, but could be modified for other denominations. Five themes are offered: Praise, EcoJustice, Who is my Neighbor, Interfaith Peace, and Saints and Holy Helpers.

This program well integrates your VBS “camp” into the life of the worshipping community. Creating a “Arts Camp Sunday” is a key goal. The program also emphasizes peace, as well as God being revealed in the beauty around us.

Ages Levels: Grades 1 through 5, middle school.

Includes:

- X Overview and schedule for running an Arts Camp as a VBS program

Strengths:

- Includes detailed instructions for crafts and art projects that are tried and tested. These projects are well closely tied into each theme.
- Provides planning schedules, charts, and checklists for running an arts camp.
- Connects with Sunday worship. Each theme has a worship outline for community worship.
- Offers suggestions for easy songs, activities, and prayers.

Weaknesses:

- This program is not intended to have everything “in the box.” For example, a strong music leader should be recruited to make the music suggestions come alive
- In some sections, there is an explanation of how the program would work as a weekly VBS. But there is not a detailed lesson plan for day 1, day 2, etc.

Matthew Kozlowski

Barnyard Roundup: Jesus Gathers Us Together

Concordia Publishing House

vbs.cph.org

\$149.99

Barnyard Roundup: Jesus Gathers Us Together teaches children that Jesus gathers us together as a good shepherd gather his flock. The concept of sin and Jesus' saving grace is discussed each day in relation to biblical stories about Jesus and his parables. The opening and closing and storytelling guides are highly scripted, allowing leaders no leeway for their own words and little space for learners' own thoughts. Each day the first Bible point teachers are told to emphasize focus on sin, such as, "Our hearts are sinful, so we don't want to listen to or receive God's Word." While the barnyard theme with various animals is appealing, the overall message seems heavy handed.

Age Levels: Preschool, Elementary; Teens and Adults (separate purchases)

Includes:

- | | | | |
|---|---|---|---------------------------|
| X | Clip Art/Reproducible CD | X | Music Action Training DVD |
| X | Music CD | X | Skits/Drama DVD |
| X | Alternative/weekend schedule | X | Decorating DVD & Posters |
| X | Online resources (photos, decorating video, registration) | | |

Strengths:

- Snack suggestions are creative, healthy and fun.
- Using the oversize posters and DVD directions, which are both provided, make decorating easy.
- The starter kit is very complete, with posters, files, clip art, sample crafts, among other items.
- Music resources include reproducible sheet music and an action DVD.
- Online tools personalize registration and provide follow-up tips that are easy to use.

Weaknesses:

- The music is somewhat repetitive with simple melodies that are mostly flat. Alternate hymns from the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod, hymnal are also suggested for each day.
- The mission project doesn't offer any tangible activity for children other than raising money for the Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod) project in build roofs for churches in Africa. Children can help "purchase" nails, a toolbox, or a piece of tin roofing, for example. Look for a hands-on mission project affiliated with your church or in your community.
- The craft center depends on purchasing a daily plastic trinket for each child. A few bonus craft ideas are included, but not enough to cover a five-day program.
- Characters in illustrations of Bible stories depict Jesus and other characters as white Anglo-Saxons. No people of other races or cultures are depicted.

Dorothy Linthicum

Cave Quest: Following Jesus the Light of the World

Group Publishing

www.group.com/VBS

\$176.99 Starter Kit

Cave Quest: Following Jesus the Light of the World is a fun VBS program illustrated with effective graphic design. It groups multi-age children together in small crews that promote cooperation and relationship building. Following a typical rotation approach to VBS with multiple stations, preschool and elementary age children learn basic lessons about Jesus through Bible lessons. The overarching theme is that God, through Jesus, provides the essentials of hope, courage, direction, love, and power. Each lesson uses a hands-on approach; the daily theme pervades each of the stations. The overarching message is that of God's unconditional love, acceptance, and help.

Age Levels: Preschool and Elementary

Includes:

X	Music CD and DVD	X	Registration and volunteer forms
X	Downloadable free app	X	Recruiting and Training DCD
X	Decoration plan	X	Clip Art and resources CD
X	Downloadable app for kids	X	Online support and training
X	Comprehensive Director's Manual		

Strengths:

- The multi-age grouping for children is designed to promote co-operation and community. The training materials explain this model quite well.
- Experiential way of telling the Bible Stories engages the children's imagination.
- The characters invented for each day are visually delightful and appealing.
- Healthy snacks are prepared by children for children.
- Quality video clips show real children engaged in real faith issues.
- The games are active and co-operative. Options are given for low, medium, and high activities each day.

Weaknesses:

- The hands-on work through the imagination station is not compelling and need to be purchased separately.
- The theme of Jesus as the Light of the World is not evident throughout.
- The music is adequate, but lacks originality.
- The decorating tips for creating the cave environment are time consuming and pricey.

Marna Franson

Deep Sea Discovery

God Is with Me Wherever I Go!

Standard Publishing

<http://www.vacationbibleschool.com>

\$179.00

Deep Sea Discovery is designed to help children discover and experience the power of God's presence. Activities and stories reemphasize the theme that they are never alone—God is always with them and loves them in profound ways. Service is an important part of the VBS *Deep Sea Discovery* program. Children are not only encouraged to support worldwide mission programs, but also challenged to serve the people they interact with every day.

There is a strong emphasis throughout the program and in the station instructions for leaders to “lead kids to Christ.” The Episcopal Church and other denominations emphasize baptism as the entry point to the church and a relationship with Christ. VBS programs in these denominations will need to instruct leaders about differences in language and theology in talking about relationships with Jesus.

The developmental tips provided to teachers and leaders for children of different age groups are sound and useful. The teaching methodology overall is clear and straightforward.

Age Levels: Preschool, Elementary (younger & older), Teen, Adult (separate purchase)

Includes:

X	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	X	Music Action Training DVD
X	Reproducible music CD/split track audio	X	Skits/Drama DVD
X	Age-level resource CDs	X	Decorating/publicity CD
X	Media disc with MP3 and MP4 files for music/videos		

Strengths:

- Standard produces the most complete starter kit among the major publishers, with decorating panels, downloadable art, worship intros, poster packs for each center, among other materials.
- Bible story presentations are interactive resulting in full participation of the children.
- Clear and complete instructions fully integrate children with special needs into the program.
- All-new songs and music videos were created by Yancy, a Christian rock artist, who injects energy and creativity into the program's music. Permission is given to reproduce the music videos, motions, and sheet music.
- Snack menus are tied closely to the theme and very creative. While many options have a lot of sugar, there are ample healthy snacks to choose from.

Weaknesses:

- Printed leader guides are not available; downloadable “cards” that replace them are not as complete as traditional guides. Some teachers will need more help in navigating the children through their centers. (One set of cards comes in the starter kit.)
- Some of the crafts are too complicated for some age groups.
- Resources for teens are weak and less helpful than materials for other age groups.

Dorothy Linthicum

Egypt: Joseph’s Journey from Prison to Palace

Group Publishing

www.group.com/VBS

Start-up Kit: \$139.99

Everyone will want to learn to “walk like an Egyptian” after spending a week in Group’s Egypt VBS. This simple and fun intergenerational VBS focuses on the Joseph story to teach about God gifts of hope, wisdom, forgiveness, and family. These bedrock lessons of faith are presented in an immersion experience. A marketplace is set up for crafts, games, and snack. A story space, replicating Joseph’s prison or palace is a quiet spot. This is not only cultural immersion, where participants enter into a replicated biblical setting, but also it is intergenerational immersion as participants travel in family groups of all ages to hear stories, have conversation, play games and eat snacks together.

Age Levels: Intergenerational

Includes:

- | | |
|---|--|
| X Music CD and DVD | X Registration and volunteer forms |
| X Alternate schedule suggestions | X Training videos and material |
| X Decorating ideas and plans | X Craft plans, game plans |
| X Promotion and Recruiting DVD | X Online Organizing/Registration Tool |

Strengths:

- The home curriculum for families is practical and consistent with what has been done at VBS.
- “God Sightings” practice that is woven throughout the curriculum teaches all participants how to be attentive to the presence and action of God in everyday life.
- The program’s use of volunteers is very task-specific and style-specific, so it has the potential of easier recruitment.
- Although it is planned to be an intergenerational program, specific suggestions are made for adjusting the program to focus only on children. Also, specific suggestions are made to include preschoolers, middle-schoolers, and teens into the intergenerational concept.
- The fun physical activities combine movement and co-operation. They are inviting and goofy.
- Healthy suggestions are given for snacks.
- The starter kit is reasonably priced, contains examples of all the essential materials.

Weaknesses:

- The arts and crafts activities depend on materials that are purchased separately. Substitutions could be found but will take extra research and planning.
- The mission component is a fund raiser that lacks a hands-on component and has no consistency with the theme. There is no local connection.
- Producing the elaborate set design as presented in the program is time consuming, could be costly, and requires technical skills and tools to accomplish. Making these sets, however, is a way to involve youth and young adults.
- Costs per participant can multiply quickly if all suggested items are purchased.

Marna Franson

Exhibition Norway

Group Publishing

<https://www.group.com/category/ministry-resources/childrens-ministry/vbs.do>

Cost: \$149.99

Exhibition Norway is a unique program that connects children to another part of the world through fun activities, games and stories. The theme – God loves all people around the world – is reinforced each day through stories of children in Norway and through Bible reflections. Children are reminded that when life changes, or is scary, or is sad,, God is good. This positive, playful VBS program reminds kids and leaders that God loves them no matter what.

The program is set up so that kids are constantly discovering new experiences as they rotate through different stations. Making food, playing games, signing songs and acting out Bible stories are just some of the many activities that they get to experience. An adventurous approach allows children to “travel” around Norway and learn about a culture different from their own.

Exhibition Norway gives children and adults a very thorough and well-researched program about Norway. The aspects of prayer and spiritual development in the Christian faith, however, could be more deeply explored and connected to the overall program. Churches could easily modify and enrich this VBS program to fit the spiritual needs of their community.

Age Levels: Preschool and Elementary

Includes:

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| X | Clip Art/Reproducible CD | X | Music, Action, Training DVD |
| X | Music and Lyric CD | X | Decorating DVD |
| X | Detailed curriculum and materials | | |

Strengths:

- Good options for different age groups (pre-K through pre-teen).
- Solid balance of stories, songs and sharing time.
- Adventurous theme with a focus on the outdoors and travel.
- Beautiful, well organized materials that are easy to use; clear guides for leaders.
- Significant online support available.
- Very respectful of different cultures and beliefs.
- Sensitive to different learning styles.
- Culture-specific games that are interactive and interesting.

Weaknesses:

- Requires much time preparing for activities beforehand.
- Very little racial and economic diversity in stories about children in Norway.
- Some activities feel tedious and disconnected from overall goal of program.
- Very few options for art and creative forms of expression.
- Requires many supplies and access to technology to run entire program.
- Could be very expensive if you order the additional crafts, books, decorations, etc.

Emily Sutterfield

Submerged: Finding Truth Below the Surface

Lifeway Christian Resources

www.lifeway.com/VBS

JumpStart Kit: \$34.99

Kid's Starter Kit: \$99.99

The main focus of *Submerged* is a message of salvation. Throughout every aspect of the curriculum it is clear that the underlying purpose of this VBS is evangelism. The scripture focus from Psalm 139 primes participants to see themselves as sinners before God in need of salvation through the saving work of Jesus. Throughout the week, participants are “submerged” or “brought deeper” into a handful of gospel stories that demonstrate how God looks below the surface to see people as they really are. These Bible stories are used to present the steps to salvation.

Submerged is a comprehensive curriculum that includes a broad range of resources. The tone of the curriculum, both for the participants and the leaders feels heavy, with little emphasis on God’s love or enjoying God’s wonder in creation and in each other. The lightness of the program is found in the music and the decorations, which invite participants into a beautiful undersea world. Be prepared, however, for a one-dimensional message overall.

Age Levels: Preschool, Elementary, Teens, and Adults (Separate Purchases)

Includes:

X	Music CD and DVD	X	Administration CD
X	Alternate schedules	X	Detailed Decorating Plans
X	Promotional Videos	X	Preparation Timelines
X	Clip Art CD	X	Activity Deck
X	Snack Deck	X	Detailed Curriculum Materials

Strengths:

- Detailed lists, charts, and timelines result in ease of planning.
- A concrete method for memorizing the Bible verse and reinforcing the theme is easy to use.
- The Submerge VBS website is attractive and easy to navigate.
- The mission videos are well done and appealing.
- The music for school-age children has an inviting “pop” quality. The music for the preschoolers is appropriately simple and rhythmic.
- Available in Spanish

Weaknesses:

- Some of the crafts require purchasing kits (with limited creativity) or extensive prep time, a problem if a large number of children attend VBS.
- The decorating necessary to create an underwater environment is labor intensive.
- The majority of the games are competitive in nature, which may not meet a child’s needs.
- The snack suggestions mostly include sugary or salty choices.
- The Jump Start Guide provides an overview, but to offer the program to preschoolers, school-age, teens, and adults, a Starter Kit must be purchased for each age at \$99.99 apiece.

Marna Franson

**2016 Español
Currículo
para la Escuela
Bíblica**

¡Agua! Currículo para la Escuela Bíblica (VBS) para Comunidades de Habla Hispana

Publicado por la organización presbiteriana Living Waters for the World, 2009

www.livingwatersfortheworld.org/vbs.php

Para más información en español envíe un correo electrónico a

kendall@LivingWatersForTheWorld.org

(615) 261-4008 (inglés)

Precio: \$42 (para comunidades de habla hispana)

¡Agua! es un programa de Escuela Bíblica de Vacaciones (VBS) de cinco días, creado para niños del kínder al quinto grado, con opción de ser adaptado para preescolares. La meta del programa es celebrar el agua como regalo de Dios para la creación y crear conciencia en los niños sobre la importancia de esa agua y el gran número de personas en el mundo que no tiene acceso al agua limpia. Cada día el programa ofrece lecciones de tres horas diarias donde se incluye una historia bíblica, manualidades, música y tiempo para la recreación. Aunque el diseño gráfico de este recurso es muy sencillo, su contenido es sólido. Me gustaría que mis propios hijos pudieran participar de la experiencia que ofrece este programa.

Temas y citas bíblicas:

Creación Buena de Dios – La Creación (Génesis 1)

Dios Nos Ayuda – Cruzando el Mar Rojo (Éxodo 14)

Agua Para Limpiar – La Higiene y el Agua Limpia

Agua Como Una Señal del Amor de Dios – El Bautismo

Agua en el Pozo – Jesús y La Mujer Samaritana en el Pozo (Juan 4)

Niveles:

Del kínder a quinto grado (con opciones para preescolares)

Materiales Incluidos:

- X** Paquete del Líder (disponible en forma digital)
- X** Música en CD
- X** Horario alternativo (para preescolares)

Ventajas:

- Crea conciencia sobre el gran número de personas en el mundo que no tiene acceso al agua limpia y les presenta un ejemplo de cómo podemos ayudar a los más necesitados.
- Enseña la importancia de lavarse las manos con agua limpia para mantenerse saludable.
- Educa a los niños en cuanto al valor del agua en sus comunidades y en el resto del mundo.
- Las instrucciones generales están bien escritas en español (una buena traducción).
- Currículo que integra bien la lección con las actividades interactivas.
- Buenas instrucciones para los instructores.
- Los instructores enseñan la misma lección a grupos diferentes cada día.
- Hay tiempo para reunir al grupo completo al comienzo y al final de cada día.
- El programa se organiza para que los niños tengan la misma persona acompañándolos cada día del programa.
- Precio muy razonable (\$42).

Desventajas:

- La sección de reproducibles no está completamente en español.
- Algunos de los materiales que se necesitan para las lecciones en algunos casos pueden ser difíciles de conseguir.
- Los cantos en español en el CD de música necesitan revisión.
- El recurso con la letra de los cantos está incompleto y no provee partituras ni acordes.
- Hace falta una manera de proveer servicio al cliente en español.

La organización presbiteriana Living Waters for the World (Agua Viva Para el Mundo) y sus colaboradores ha proveído más de 750 sistemas de filtración alrededor del mundo, a comunidades que tienen acceso a agua, pero es agua que no se puede beber. Por ejemplo, una iglesia episcopal en la Florida se organizó para llevarle un sistema de filtración de agua a su iglesia compañera en Cuba. Gracias a Dios, a Living Waters for the World y a su iglesia hermana, esta comunidad ahora tiene agua limpia para beber.

Eduardo Solomón Rivera

¡Sorpresa! El camino del perdón

Concordia Publishing House

<http://vbs.cph.org/spanish>

Precio: \$59.99 (español/English)

1-800-325-3040

Este programa utiliza porciones del libro de Génesis para explorar la historia de José desde el momento en que se vende en esclavitud en Egipto a su reencuentro con su padre muchos años después. Los temas presentados incluyen una comprensión de que Dios está presente en la adversidad, que Dios tenía planes para la vida de cada persona, y que el perdón de los demás es una virtud importante. Como con muchos textos bíblicos de las escrituras hebreas, las conexiones o inferencias a la vida y obra de Jesús o perspectiva teológica del Nuevo Testamento son tenues en el mejor. Este programa de VBS los Estados, "estas cinco historias nos muestran cómo José es un precursor de Jesús, presagiando lo que nuestro Salvador haría para nosotros..."

Niveles: Level 1 (3-6 years), Level 2 (7-10 years), and Level 3 (11-14 years)

Includes: X Leaders Pac/ Paquete del Lider X Music CD/ Música en CD
X Adult Bible Study/Estudios bíblicos para adultos

Ventajas:

- La historia de José y sus muchas vueltas y vueltas, puede proporcionar una aventura interesante en las relaciones de los personajes bíblicos en las escrituras hebreas. La fascinante historia de José se centra en perdón, generosidad y sobre todo fe en la presencia continua de Dios.
- El programa es bilingüe.

Desventajas:

- Estudiante folletos son coloridos, pero las actividades carecen de creatividad.
- Artes de tres de los cinco son versiones de cruces. Hay un oficio de la capa de José y otra de un marco de imagen de desierto. Ninguno de estos parece ser vale la pena el costo de los kits.

Amy Dyer

Perennial VBS Programs

The Abundant Life Garden Project: A Program for Children of the Episcopal Church

Episcopal Relief & Development (ERD)

<http://www.er-d.org/children>

Free (download)

The Abundant Life Garden Project is a five-session curriculum that focuses on the importance of *Water, Seeds, Soil, Animals, and Harvest*. Although each session is designed for a one-hour time period, additional activities are available in the appendices. Through this program children will learn Bible stories and participate in activities that reinforce each day's theme. Children will also explore stories from the Episcopal Relief and Development (ERD) website that show the needs of people throughout the world

Age Levels: Preschool - Elementary

Includes:

X Director's Guide

Strengths:

- Emphasizes a loving God.
- Curriculum is free.
- Heavy emphasis on environmental concerns and encourages being good stewards of the world's resources.
- Calls attention to the suffering of those around the world and highlights ways that children can make a difference.
- Daily themes connect well with Biblical stories.
- Incorporates using a Litany of Thanks and meditation into daily activities.
- Includes alternative schedules.

Weaknesses:

- Lacks variety in daily activities
- Heavy emphasis on drawing and writing with no alternative options for children who learn through physical activities.
- Curriculum is difficult to find on the ERD website.
- Options for Extended Time Periods in Appendix A do not include any theme-related snack or play time activities.
- Stories from the field available on the ERD website are geared towards an adult audience and may not hold the attention of children.
- Music must be purchased and added by the user.

Lori Daniels

All God's Children: The Church Family Gathers for a Very Blessed Summer

GenOn Ministries

<http://www.genonministries.org/products/all-gods-children-the-church-family-gathers-for-a-very-blessed-summer>

\$45.00 (download)

GenOn Ministries' intergenerational program allows the entire church family to grow and celebrate their faith together. Using psalms and Gospel readings, this VBS explores what it means to be a follower of Jesus, from the very young to the very old, and everyone in between. Each of the 5 sessions includes time for all ages to share a meal, listen and respond to scripture, play games, work on a craft, and sing together. In addition, each day has "at home" conversation starters that allow families to extend and remember the topic.

This VBS is not intended to replace age-specific events or programs, but is intended to broaden your congregation's opportunities to build relationships, carry one another's burdens, and celebrate joys.

Age Levels: Specifically intergenerational

Includes:

X Director's Guide X Fully resourced Pinterest pages

Strengths:

- Perfect for a small congregation, with little set-up or significant volunteer time.
- Excellent use of Pinterest to offer ideas for decorating, crafts, food, and mission/outreach.
- Take-It-Home Blessings keep the topic relevant for more than the 2 hours of VBS time.
- Each session stands alone so those who attend will be fully included and not feel they have missed content. "Blessing Others" outreach component can extend the entire set of lessons.
- Strong explanation of purpose of intergenerational faith programming

Weaknesses:

- Planning details are inadequate. VBS leader needs a good grasp of group planning as there are no specific supply lists or volunteer responsibilities.
- Safe practices guidelines need to be addressed for such a multi-age gathering.
- Scripture readings are designed for short attention spans. Leader will need to decide how to present Bible stories to capture wide-range of comprehension levels.
- Scripture responses are all verbal. Mixed-media responses, not all words, would be welcome, i.e. respond with Legos, with painting, with poetry, with movement.
- Without specific guidelines for time, VBS director will have to test out each activity

Charlotte Greeson

Aslan is on the Move!

Leader Resources

www.LeaderResources.org/vbs

\$59.95 (download)

This creative intergenerational curriculum uses C.S. Lewis' beloved fantasy *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* to explore theology. While it does not contain any direct references to Scripture or Church history, this VBS explores Christian theology on a broad scale.

C.S. Lewis wrote the Narnia series "as an unconscious preparation of the imagination" to explore the deep power of faith and belief. Acting in the imagination prepares us to respond in faithful ways when we are confronted with meanness and treachery.

Themes of the five days are:

Day 1: Discovery of Narnia: how ideas color behavior.

Day 2: Discovery of the Beavers and the abiding hope that Aslan will return: how values lead to action.

Day 3: Father Christmas and Spring return, Aslan greets the group at the Stone Table, and Peter wins his first battle: how fear and love affect actions, and the power of forgiveness and reconciliation.

Day 4: Aslan and the Witch strike a bargain: the meaning of a willing sacrifice, abiding belief, grief and joy.

Day 5: Joy of Coronation: how this adventure expresses truth and reality for us and connects to familiar celebrations.

Age Levels: Intergenerational

Includes:

X Director's Guide

Strengths:

- Offers opportunity for profound new understandings about life for all ages.
- Creates a magical VBS with the lamppost, the wardrobe door, Turkish Delight, and all the other fantasy elements from the story.
- Includes interactive activities plus discussion questions.

Weaknesses:

- Does not include scriptural references.
- Constructing props calls for creative use of materials and space.
- Does not have a traditional VBS flow; if space or time are limitations, it can be challenging to adapt.
- Does not include fully-developed large motor games.

Lori Daniels

Dare to be Different

Leader Resources

www.leaderresources.org/vbs

\$49.9 (download)

Film rental is extra; churches may also incur costs for public performance rights to show the film.

Dare to be Different is a one-week journey into Madeleine L'Engle's book, *A Wrinkle in Time*. Portions of the 2003 Disney film by the same name are shown each morning. Through games, activities and crafts, children learn about spiritual gifts, differences among people and the power of love. Characters from the novel act as guides for the 5-day program including Meg Murry, her brother Charles and a friend, Calvin O'Keefe, along with a number of out-of-this-world beings.

Themes for each day:

- Our Special Gifts
- Following the Footsteps of Saints
- Daring to be Different
- Foolishness, Faith, and Free Will
- The Power of Love

Age Levels: K - Elementary

Includes:

X Director's Guide

Strengths:

- Primary expense is the downloadable curriculum.
- L'Engle's book, a best-seller for more than 50 years, is grounded in Christian tradition and theology, mixing faith and science, religion and fiction
- Staffing may be easier when using a beloved children's book as the VBS theme.
- There is room for great creativity.
- Children are introduced to yoga, a valuable resource.

Weaknesses:

- No information is provided about securing public performance rights for showing a feature-length film, or how to acquire the film.
- Instructions for crafts and snacks are minimal, as is information on organizing the week.
- Many adults (or youth) with acting talents are required.
- There is no suggested mission/outreach focus.
- Music consists of a simple list of titles, without reference to specific hymnals or songbooks.

Joyce Walker

Peaceable Kingdom

Leader Resources

www.LeaderResources.org/vbs

\$69.95 (download)

Peaceable Kingdom explores anti-bullying themes through the use of favorite children's literature characters such as Horton the elephant, Yertle the turtle, Gertrude McFuzz, Mama and Papa Bear, Old Turtle, and Gerald the giraffe. Through the Biblical experience of Shalom, and our Baptismal mandate to "see the face of Jesus in those around us," participants spend time together learning how to be respectful to everyone, to identify what bullying looks like in their worlds, and to find the strength to stand up to bullies. The themes for the 5 days include Be Your Best Self, A Place for Everyone, Turn the Other Cheek, Made in God's Image, and Be Courageous – all done through Bible stories and children's literature. The curriculum also includes major bullying research results that are incorporated into each day's presentation.

Age Levels: Elementary

Includes:

X Director's Guide

Strengths:

- The theme is a timely one and the program could be used at any time, in any venue.
- Set-up is minimal.
- No set snack ideas so you can do whatever you please AND they do recommend a lunch component to end the time together.
- Activities such as games and gathering time are based on cooperation instead of competition.
- Only need 3 major volunteers for recurring speaking parts each day.

Weaknesses:

- The activities are geared for an older audience.

Kellee Wattenbarger

Pilgrimage: Seeking the Kingdom of God

Leader Resources

www.LeaderResources.org/vbs

\$74.95 (download)

A Second Pilgrimage: Still Seeking the Kingdom of God

www.LeaderResources.org/vbs

\$74.95 (download)

Using the same program structure, this curriculum journeys with Teresa of Avila, Mary the mother of Jesus, Francis of Assisi, the Apostle Paul, and Hildegard of Bingen.

Pilgrimage transports students into the Middle Ages to journey as pilgrims to sites where they learn from the lives of people of faith. During the Middle Ages, Christians began the practice of journeying to distant locations, as a way to deepen their experience of God and others.

On this pilgrimage, participants travel to the ultimate destination for God’s faithful people: the Kingdom of God. Over five sessions, children find a road map that helps them to know themselves and others in new ways as they seek to know God as Creator, Savior and Holy Spirit.

Participants travel to five sites that were common destinations for medieval pilgrims: Rome, Italy; Canterbury, England; Santiago de Compostela, Spain; Dumfermline, Scotland; and Croagh Patrick, Ireland. Each day features not only a different destination but a different saint: St. Peter, Thomas Becket, James the Greater, Margaret of Scotland, and St. Patrick.

The heart of the daily experience is the Street Fair. Children become bakers, bookbinders, clothiers, painters, needle workers, stonemasons, woodworkers, and storytellers. Guilds of students then meet to discuss their experiences in the Street Fair. The day closes with community singing, prayer, and worship.

Age Levels: Intergenerational (Preschool needs separate program)

Includes:

X Director’s Guide

Strengths:

- Children learn about medieval and church history as well as the lives of saints.
- Exciting medieval setting, with shields, street fairs, and crafts from woodworking to bookbinding.
- Important daily themes – such as “The Kingdom of God is within you” -- and memory verses.
- Clear and complete instructions.

Weaknesses:

- Requires considerable advance preparation for street fair activities.

Lori Daniels

Praying All the Time

Leader Resources

www.LeaderResources.org

Cost: \$49.95

Praying All the Time introduces prayer to children through literature. The program is theologically sound and uses attractive, classic children's book to introduce the concept of prayer and different ways to pray for younger children.

Five children's books are featured:

The Story of Francis, by Tomie de Paola

The Very Hungry Caterpillar, by Eric Carle

The Red Ribbon, by John Lasne

Old Turtle, by Douglas Wood

The Legend of the Bluebonnet, by Tomie de Paola

The guide directs the leader to begin by reading one book each day to the children. The children discuss its relevance to five methods of praying and complete a craft. The session ends by sending the children forth with a sending ritual.

Levels: Kindergarten through grade 5

Includes: **X** Leaders Guide **X** Activity CD (also contains guide)

Note: Copies of the five books must be purchased separately.

Strengths:

- Crafts are engaging and relevant to the stories.
- A half-day schedule for five days is provided. Designs and ideas to promote the program are also included.

Weaknesses:

- Does not contain any biblical or theological references to prayer.
- The guide provides very little support for the inexperienced teacher.
- Additional costs are significant.
- Books and activities are appropriate for Kindergarten and early elementary. Children beyond second grade might not find the program engaging.

Amy Dyer

Wild Willy and the Prodigal Son

Leader Resources

www.leaderresources.org/vbs

\$49.95 (download)

This Vacation Bible School experience is based on the children's story book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and the 1971 version of the movie, *Willie Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. The curriculum examines the five children who are characters in the story and their character traits, which are then related to the sins of Greed, Pride, Envy, and Sloth. The story of the Prodigal Son (*Luke 15:11-24*) is the biblical basis for the program. Charlie, the main character who exhibits the traits of hard work, caring, sharing, honesty, and repentance, is compared to the prodigal son at the end of the story when he asks for forgiveness from his grandfather.

Age Levels: Elementary

Includes:

X Director's Guide

Strengths:

- Provides opportunity for children to learn character traits from the negative characters and the contrasting character of Charlie Bucket.
- Includes a craft each day which focuses on the character trait of each child.

Weaknesses:

- Biblical connections are tenuous.
- Requires materials to be purchased from specific distributors.
- Candy was given out each day; the "grand prize" was a lunchbox full of candy.
- The movie must be rented or purchased separately.

Amy Dyer

Wizards and Wonders: A Hero's Journey with Harry Potter

Leader Resources

www.leaderresources.org/vbs

\$59.95 (download)

This Vacation Bible Experience uses the popular Harry Potter character to explore theologically life's journey as a path to the inner self and to the Creator. The curriculum connects Harry Potter's experiences with Biblical teachings. For example, the New Testament teaches that the Kingdom of Heaven is all around us and in us, and Jesus advises: "Let he who has ears hear and he who has eyes see." Likewise, in the Harry Potter books, the Wizarding World – representing magic with its possibilities for transformation – is all around and in the midst of the Muggles, but they do not see it.

The five sessions and the daily Bible stories are:

Day 1: Platform 9-3/4; Moses is called by God (*Exodus 2-4*)

Day 2: Quidditch; Jesus calls his disciples (*Matthew 4, 9, 10; Mark 1,2,3; Luke 5,6*); and One body, many parts (Paul's letter to the Corinthians)

Day 3: A Night in the Forbidden Forest; Elijah and the still, small voice (*1 Kings 19:9-15*)

Day 4: Snares, Dares and Potions; Temptations in the wilderness (*Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 4*)

Day 5: The Mirror of Erised; The Resurrection (The Baptismal Covenant)

Age Levels: Intergenerational

Includes:

X Director's Guide

Strengths:

- Inclusion of resources with direct connection to the Harry Potter books, including a Hogwarts Acceptance Letter for each child, the Sorting Hat, Invisibility Cloak, Owl Mail Delivery and other wonders from the imaginary world of Harry and Hermione.
- Opportunity for children to learn a lot about themselves (in "identity" exercises) and to gain confidence for the life journey ahead of them.
- Theological background for each day is provided for the leaders.
- Includes lots of active games and the Hogwart Song.

Weaknesses:

- Requires free-spirited leaders.
- Requires advance preparation of space and materials.

Lori Daniels