

Keep Faith Alive in the Summertime

By Debbie Kolacki of
PRC– Practical Resources for Churches

www.prcli.org



Sunday Morning Summer Sunday School? Or not?

Reasons to have a summer Sunday school on Sunday mornings:

- Christian education for children is so important that we need to offer it year round and some families only come to church on Sunday mornings.
- If there is no Sunday school, there is less chance that parents will want to come to church.
- If the worship service is geared strictly to adults, children who attend may be disruptive and/or learn that church is boring.



Reasons *not* to have a summer Sunday school on Sunday mornings:

- The teachers need a break and we can't find anyone else to teach.
- Teachers prepare lessons and then no children show up.
- The worship service is child-friendly and the children and adults (including parents) enjoy being in worship together.

Will you offer summer Sunday school on Sunday mornings? If the answer is "yes" then consider this:

- Ask your regular teachers if they would like the summer off. If so, look for summer teachers among those who might not want to teach during the regular school year. Consider college students on summer break, school employees who have the summer off, retirees summering in the area, or perhaps a family who would enjoy teaching together. Make sure you follow your church's child protection policy in recruiting teachers.
- If summer attendance is low, run your program as a one room Sunday school. There is a curriculum called the *One Room Sunday School* as well as other curriculum which offer lessons for children in a multi-graded classroom. A list of appropriate curriculum is included in the back of this booklet.
- Do something fun and different in your Sunday school for the summer.
 - ✓ Introduce computers.
 - ✓ Focus on a mission project for a particular country; decorate your classroom and do activities related to that country. Issue "passports" to the children and stamp them each week.
 - ✓ Focus on a mission for an organization such as Heifer International or Habitat for Humanity. Heifer offers [free curriculum](#) and there is a [Habitat for Humanity VBS](#) available for purchase.

- ✓ Use a rotation lesson where you focus on one theme or Bible story and then explore it in a different way each week: games, science, art, video, food, etc.
- ✓ Focus on nature and creation and get the children outdoors when weather permits.
- ✓ Use a Vacation Bible School (VBS) curriculum for Sunday school.
- ✓ If your church is having a VBS, keep your decorations up and continue the theme in your Sunday school lessons.
- ✓ Focus on the church year, the various colors and seasons.
- ✓ Introduce children to spiritual practices. Take a trip to a local labyrinth or borrow a floor labyrinth from your resource center. You can also use [paper finger labyrinths](#) or have the children [make their own labyrinth](#).
- ✓ Base your lessons on a popular children's book series. There are numerous ones available for the Narnia and Harry Potter series.
- ✓ Go back to Bible times. Hang fabric and bring in rugs to create a Bible storytelling tent. Let the kids wear simple Bible time costumes, eat Bible foods, and do Bible time activities.
- ✓ Get some popcorn going and turn your Sunday school into a movie theater with any of the many Biblical and Christian video series that are available.
- ✓ Invite members of the congregation to share their gifts and talents. Fishing, cooking, weaving, etc. can all be shared with the children and used to supplement Bible lessons.

Some Free Curriculums for Download

[Several free downloads](#) are available from the UCC (United Church of Christ) and Christian Church: Disciples of Christ on the KidsToKids website. Kids to Kids is a children's mission program that gives children in North America opportunities to learn about and serve children from other parts of the world. The VBS programs available are:

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

The Episcopal Church also offers free downloads that can be used for VBS.

The [Abundant Life Garden Project](#) is 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. A children's program on malaria which can be used as a VBS curriculum is [Rita Mosquito](#).

You can also find other free programs online, such as [The Armor of God](#) and [BigHeart Farms](#) based on the fruit of the spirit.

Will you offer summer Sunday school on Sunday mornings? If the answer is “no” then consider this:

- Is it possible to have “Sunday school” at a time other than Sunday morning? Consider an evening or weekday morning and consider an intergenerational class as well.
- Host one time programs at the church and/or plan some outings and field trips.
- Stay in touch with students by e-mail, snail mail, or a Sunday school Facebook page. You can even set up an online virtual classroom with simple assignments, links to Christian children’s websites, etc.

Vacation Bible School? Or not?

If you usually have VBS then consider this:

- If you have a director and a willing staff then you’re probably looking forward to another great VBS program.
- If you’ve had VBS in the past but aren’t sure about continuing, look at the positives and negatives and see whether it’s time to make some changes. If it’s too hard to get volunteers or children during the day, try an evening VBS. You can either meet for five evenings in or a row or pick one night of the week and then meet on that night over the course of five weeks. Some churches do their entire VBS program on one Saturday and some have experimented with having VBS after Sunday worship. You might consider an intergenerational VBS. Be creative and don’t be afraid to try something new.



If you’ve never had VBS before, why not consider it now?

Whether you’ve had VBS before or not, it might be a good idea to team up with another church (or several churches) in your area and do a joint VBS.

Special Summer Programs

How about some intergenerational or special children's programs?

Summer's the perfect time for a one time laid-back program either during the day or in the evening. Depending on the program, you might find that right after Sunday worship is a convenient time for many people. Consider these:

An arts festival to show off children and adults' creative works which can be created either at home or at church.

A summer party with a theme such as the 4th of July or a safari.

A stargazing evening; perhaps someone in your congregation has a telescope and would like to host this event. Appropriate scripture readings and hymns could be used to add a spiritual component.

A movie evening. Families could either watch the movie together or it could be a chance to give parents an evening out together.

A storytelling event. If there's a park nearby where you can make a campfire and roast marshmallows that would make it even more fun.

How about an old-fashioned square dance? Children and adults can enjoy this together.

A game night where everyone brings their favorite board games to play.

An ice cream social. Children and adults will enjoy creating their own sundaes and the fixings are easy to provide.

A tea party, perhaps for mothers and daughters.

A Christmas in July celebration.

A preschool story hour.

A scavenger hunt.

Field trips to a local park, museums or a ballpark, such as the Long Island Ducks. A nature hike could include conversation about God's creation.

A morning of service, perhaps to do yard work at a homebound church member's house, followed by doughnuts.

A book discussion, either with children alone, or children and parents together.

A talent show.

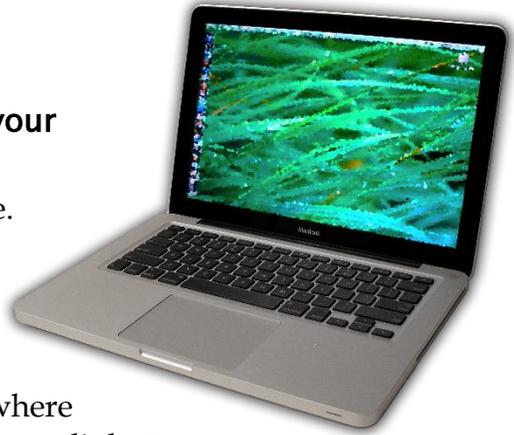
A summer reading club.



No Matter What, Stay in Touch

Ways to stay connected even if you don't see your students in person

- E-mail is easy, inexpensive, and unobtrusive. You can send e-mails to families with ideas and activities for spiritual development. E-mails can include a simple "thinking of you message," attachments of a Bible story with coloring and activity sheets, a contest where children answer questions about Bible stories, or links to Christian websites for children. Encourage correspondence and invite parents and children to ask any questions about the Bible or faith that they may have.
- Postcards are available from Christian publishers that can be sent to children. It takes only a minute or two to write a simple message and the postage cost is less than a regular letter.
- Pair up children with "church buddies"; buddies can be other children or adults. Encourage church buddies to pray for each other, call, e-mail, etc.
- Create a Facebook page so families can share what's going on in their lives during the summer. You can restrict access to the page to ensure privacy.
- Create an online Bible study or online book club for children and parents to do together.
- Get a summer mascot, such as a stuffed animal and give him/her a cute name. Take him to various places, either locally or when you go on vacation, and take photos or video of him, then post these to Facebook or e-mail them. Your mascot can also give weekly advice or have a weekly prayer.
- An alternative idea is to let families borrow your mascot when they go on vacation and share photos and video.
- Use your church website to stay in touch with families. Create special pages for children and youth with links to appropriate websites and suggestions for service and outreach. Update throughout the summer with ideas to appreciate God's creation and promote earth-friendly family activities, such as hiking and biking. Include a different prayer concern each week. Record guided meditations and post them as audio files.
- If you have a reproducible music CD from your VBS or Sunday school curriculum, make copies for all the families in your church to play at home or in the car.
- Set aside a bulletin board in your church where information about family vacations and activities can be posted. Invite families to send a postcard to the church when on vacation and post these on the bulletin board.



Partner with Parents

Give families the tools they need to continue the learning

- Provide a [take-out church box](#) to help your families continue their faith formation during the summer, within their own timeframe.
- Create your own “faith chests” with things to help parents share faith with their children including table tents with mealtime prayers, a fill-in-the blanks prayer outline, discussion questions for the car or dinnertime, and craft activities.
- Clean out your Sunday school office and invite families to take old curriculum, craft supplies, etc. home for summer activities.
- Invite your families to visit your church library to take out books, music CDs, and DVDs for the summer.
- Have a book/music/DVD sale with children’s Bible studies, devotionals, and other Christian books for children and parents to read together, as well as CDs of children’s Christian music and children’s Christian DVDs. Contact a Christian store or publisher to see if they will let you borrow resources on consignment.
- Provide a prayer bear and journal for families to take on vacation. Suggest that they record in the journal where they went and what blessings they experienced in that place.
- Give out a list with information about VBS programs in your area even if your church is having their own VBS; encourage your families to attend more than one VBS.
- Suggest ways for families to incorporate God into their daily live such as a “creation picnic” where they talk about and give thanks for the many wonderful things in nature that God has given us.
- Give families ideas for summer service projects. Suggestions could include providing food for a food pantry or going through old toys and donating them to a homeless shelter or the church thrift shop.
- Send children home with materials to create their own books over the summer. They can write, draw, or color in the books. Different theme ideas are “God’s Creation,” “God’s Gift of Water,” and “God’s Night Sky.” Have children bring their books to Sunday school in September and take a photo of the children with their books. You can also create a video of the children talking about their books.
- Encourage families to have a bedtime ritual that includes reading a Bible story and prayer. Invite parents to make a small cross on the foreheads of their children as a blessing before going to sleep at night.....if your faith experience uses holy water, bless the children with holy water as well. Encourage your families to practice [Faith Five](#).
- Encourage families on vacation to include visiting a church for worship as part of their travel plans. Ask them to bring back a worship bulletin and complete these sentences on the front of the bulletin, “We saw _____.” “We heard _____.” “We thank God for _____.”

Curriculum Geared toward Classrooms with Multiple Ages

If you don't have many kids in Sunday school during the summer, you can switch to a one room or multi-graded curriculum. This is also called multi-age or broadly-graded curriculum. It's set up so that there are activities for children of all different ages. There are usually activities to do as a group as well as activities for specific ages. There may also be tips for having children of different ages work together. [The One Room Sunday School](#) curriculum is ecumenical and is for ages 3-12. Some curriculums that have resources for various age levels also publish a multi-graded version of their curriculum.

Some other multi-age curriculums or curriculums that include multi-age components are:

- [Feasting on the Word](#)
- [Growing in Grace and Gratitude](#)
- [Shine: Living in God's Light](#)
- [Living the Good News](#)
- [Seasons of the Spirit](#)

Please consider making a donation on our website so that we can continue to offer our booklets free of charge.

www.prcli.org



Practical Resources For Churches
consultants - webinars - workshops - resources