

Vacation Bible School Tips and 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 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. The [Vacation Bible School](#) page of Building Faith's website has an article about VBS publishers and does an annual review of VBS curriculums each year.

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 fairly user-friendly.

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

Curriculum: Dated, Undated to Purchase, or Undated Free

Dated Curriculum

Some publishers who offer a different dated VBS curriculum each year include Cokesbury, Concordia Publishing House, Group Publishing, Lifeway, MennoMedia, Orange, and Urban Ministries. You can find information about each VBS program on the publishers' websites.

If you've decided on a dated 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.

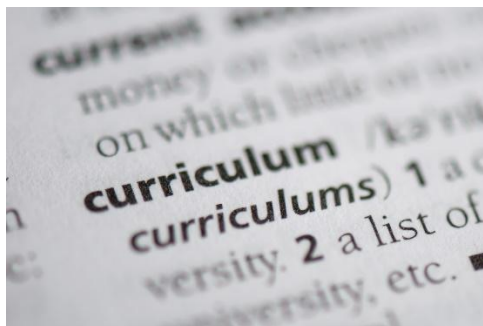
Third party - There are also third-party companies that sell VBS kits. Most of these offer discounted prices. Here's a list with links to some of them:

[Christian Book Distributors](#)

[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 programs to purchase

[All God's Children: The Church Family Gathers for a Very Blessed Summer](#)

GenOn Ministries offers an intergenerational VBS program; the digital curriculum sells for \$51.75.

[All Together Now](#)

This curriculum from PRC–Practical Resources for Churches is described as a VBS alternative and is designed to offer five days of structured, multigenerational programming that fosters spiritual growth and meaningful connection among family members of all ages.

[Compassion Camp](#)

Illustrated Ministry offers three versions of this progressive Christian digital program: **Be Loved. Be Kind. Be You, Changing the World with Loving Kindness**, and **What Every Living Thing Needs**. The price of the programs is based on church size.

[Creative Arts Camp](#)

This Sparkhouse curriculum offers 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.

[FaithFix](#)

They sell inclusive and affirming church resources. They offer two downloadable VBS curricula: Rainforest Rescuers and Love Burst, as well as a Custom VBS, a personalized program that lets churches request tailored Christian lessons, activities, and materials designed specifically for their unique ministry.

[God's Garden, God's City](#)

This curriculum links with the Beulah Land felt board materials. A CD with all the materials sells for \$75.

[Just Like Me: Digging In and Growing Deep](#)

This program comes from the Reconciling Ministries Network and is “an inclusive VBS curriculum that will help kids celebrate their identity as God’s beloved creations just as they are! Through scripted lessons and extension activities, students will practice sharing, asking questions, using their voice, finding community, and speaking up for others.” A Youth Track and an Adult Track are available.

[KidMin Science](#)

[B.A.S.I.C. Elements](#), [Elements of Trust](#), and [Faith Lab](#) are science-based VBS programs. Each digital kit sells for \$329.99.

Kindom Crafters

This program was inspired in part by the ultra-popular "Minecraft" and is sold by Chalice Press.

Leader Resources

These downloadable products can be used for VBS. 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.
- **S.P.Y. Parables** can be used for a three-day VBS.
- **Wild Willy & The Prodigal Son** is based on the book *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*.
- **Wizards & Wonders** is based on the Harry Potter books.

Learning Together

This curriculum from Spirit & Truth Publishing is nondenominational and can be used with just children or for an intergenerational VBS. Each unit includes a Unit Overview, Grouping Activity, Service Projects, Music Suggestions, Unit-long Project, VBS Suggestions, and Unit Supply List. Each lesson includes a Lesson Overview, Background for Leaders, Large-group Opening Activity, Five Activity Stations (Storytelling, Craft, Science, Games, and Snack), Closing Prayer, and For the Home take-home guide. There are several themes available with more to be added.

One Room VBS

Cokesbury offers six options for a VBS which can be done with as few as two leaders and in just one room. It is for ages 3-12. Each of the five sessions includes Activities, Bible Story, Science, Active Learning Option, Recreation, Crafts, and Music.

Operation Restoration

This VBS from Augsburg Fortress has a restoration theme that "inspires everyone to be menders of God's world." Daily themes are feed, heal, forgive, pray, and rest. Multisensory activity centers include art, music, science and nature, service learning, and storytelling.

ReNew: The Green VBS

Sparkhouse sells this download for \$89.99. 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.

[This Little Light Ministries](#)

This publisher states that they offer inclusive, progressive Vacation Bible School curriculum and liturgy. The programs to download include: "All Aboard: Joining in God's Journey," "Oceans of Love," "Taste and See," and "Who Do You Say I Am?: Investigating the Ministry of Jesus."

[StoryMakers VBS Kits](#)

A number of VBS Starter Kits are available and some are in Spanish as well as English.

[Water All Around the World](#)

Living Waters for the World offers a downloadable VBS for \$85 which helps children learn the value of clean water and how children in other countries struggle for clean water.

Undated free downloadable programs

[Abundant Life Garden Project](#)

The Episcopal Church offers this 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.

[ELCA World Hunger](#)

This organization offers the VBS program "At the Table," which is available in English and Spanish.

[Global Ministries](#)

This organization 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:

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

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.

[Kingdom Seekers](#)

The Bible Project offers this biblically based VBS that teaches kids about Jesus and how to engage with God's Word.

[Ministry-to-Children.com](#)

This website offers seven free VBS curriculum downloads: Bible Boot Camp VBS, Big Heart Farms, Running for the Prize VBS, Minecraft Theme VBS, Outlaws for God VBS, Super Fruit VBS, and A Week with Jesus VBS.

[Song of the Season](#)

This five-day curriculum based on the book [Song of the Seasons](#) can be used for all ages and be adapted for use outdoors or indoors. Each day begins and ends with a shared Gathering Time that follows the same pattern each day. There are three stations that groups rotate around: Bible Time: A gentle, "wondering" exploration of the Bible verse and how *Song of the Seasons* relates to it. Art: This station is less focused on making crafts and more focused on sensory experiences. Games: The games have been chosen carefully to avoid having just one winner.

[Won't You Be My Neighbor](#)

The Thoughtful Christian offers this free download of four intergenerational sessions based on Mr. Roger's Neighborhood.