The spring/summer issue of Episcopal Teacher focuses on summer camp and Vacation Bible School. The Center for the Ministry of Teaching (CMT) strongly supports the role of camps and conferences in Christian formation for all people, but especially for our youth.

“We have an extraordinary opportunity to form disciples with well-designed, holistic Christian camp programs,” says Lisa Kimball, CMT director, in her article “(W)Holy Criteria for Camps and Conferences” on p. 10. “I am more convinced than ever,” she says, “that intentional immersion experiences in Christian community offer a unique window into the Reign of God.”

Her sentiment is echoed in Beth Magill’s reflections on summer camp on p. 4. “The gift of summer camp continues to blossom in my life in new ways,” she says. “It is the renewable nature of this gift that peaks my curiosity about what exactly makes summer camp something which we ought to attentively nurture.”

Students at VTS assess their own experiences in summer camp on p. 8. Sarah Bentley Allred, reminiscing about her camping experiences on a river, said, “We were truly present with creation, ourselves, one another, and God, whose presence I longed for when the trip was over and still try to recapture to this day.” Charles Cowherd, who has been a camp counselor, said he will never forget “the irresistible image of the energy of those children whose faces were filled with joy.”

Jacob Sorenson uses his long experience with camps to describe research that captures the unique characteristics and goals of Christian camps. He shows on p. 8 that statistically growth in “horizontal faith showed clear and lasting impacts” in young people.

The final pages of this issue feature the CMT Top Picks for Vacation Bible School 2017. We also suggest on p. 12 a new way to look at mission and outreach projects for VBS.

Those of you who subscribe to paper copies of Episcopal Teacher will find an envelope insert in this issue to use in making a contribution to Virginia Theological Seminary. The seminary provides the funding for resources like this one and the Building Faith website. You can also contribute online at https://give.vts.edu. Your gift to the VTS Annual Fund ensures that valuable resources like Episcopal Teacher and Building Faith are available at no cost.

Have a wonderful summer!

Dorothy Linthicum

Lisa Kimball and Dorothy Linthicum, editors

On the cover is Kanuga Lake at Kanuga Conference & Retreat Center in North Carolina (kanuga.org).

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around the country

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Faith Forward 2017
Chicago, Illinois
http://faith-forward.net/

June 5 – 6, 2017
eFormation 2017 Conference
Virginia Theological Seminary
Alexandria, Virginia
http://www.formationnews.org/conference/

June 12 – 16, 2017
Faith Formation in an Era of Change
Christian Formation Conference at Kanuga
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June 25 – 25, 2017
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http://www.godlyplayfoundation.org/2017/nagpc/

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The Gift of Summer Camp

By Beth Magill

I’d had my way, I would completely reset the way in which society deals with gifts. Currently, we have a system in which individuals are given gifts for particular occasions, be it a birthday, religious celebration, anniversary, or to mark an accomplishment. While the sentiment behind these exchanges is not inherently bad, it cultivates laziness and fails to encourage us to live into the intended spirit of gift giving.

The true nature of a gift is that which is given voluntarily and without expectation of return. I wonder what it would be like if we were to begin to pay attention to the people in our lives who might be celebrated because of who they are and what they bring to our lives, without the reminder of a calendar.

One of the greatest gifts I have ever received was summer camp. Originally, I’m sure my parents hoped I would have the reminder of a calendar. They connected to campers, counselors, God, and nature that enticed me to return year after year as a camper. It was that sense of connectedness that compelled me to take a risk and become a counselor as a young adult.

Twenty-four years later, it is a recognition of the value of that deep connectedness that brings me back to camp as an adult. The gift of summer camp continues to blossom in my life in new ways. It is the renewable nature of this gift that peaks my curiosity about what exactly makes summer camp something which we ought to attentively nurture.

There are several gifts of Episcopal summer camps that seem to ring true across our tradition. They provide an opportunity for counselors and campers to experience leadership first hand. Summer camps are by nature missional outposts for the church, attracting and nurturing those who are new to the tradition or the faith. Summer camps are rare opportunities to learn how to be truly present – in community, with nature, and God.

Learning Lifelong Values and Skills

In my role as college chaplain, it was inevitable that the students who stepped forward for leadership roles were those who had attended or worked at Episcopal summer camps. Without exception, they shared their passion, joy for the Good News, and willingness to share the responsibility of leadership with the community.

Whether through opportunities to lead worship, teach a song, or take on a prominent role during a ropes course activity, summer camp offers both campers and counselors countless opportunities for leadership development. Once this seed has been planted, my experience has been that the gift of leadership potential only continues to grow.

Episcopal summer camps should also be considered one of our greatest missional opportunities. Counselors and campers come from a variety of backgrounds – a lifetime in the Episcopal church, no church at all, church in a different denomination, or no exposure to Christianity. Through worship that must be creative to appeal to active children, the richness of our tradition is offered in its most expansive form.

Getting to Know God

As cabin mates, staffs, and sessions build community during the course of their time together, the incarnation of the Body of Christ is made real to all who are present. The transformation experienced when enveloped in a loving Christian community is a gift that lasts a life time.

The gift of presence is one that has transcended my time on the physical mountains of Shrine Mont. The opportunity to build community beyond the confines of my comfort zone requires truly showing up, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

The reprieve from technology, the opportunity to get lost in the woods, and the simple pleasures of a week without the normal creature comforts cultivate this habit of being truly present. It is a gift that continues to serve me in the daily challenge to be present where I am physically present.

The nature of Episcopal summer camp lives into the true essence of a gift. I was not richly blessed by Shrine Mont because there was an expectation of a return. But the nature and abundance of blessings that came from being a part of that community continues to flourish. I cannot help but give of myself in response.

In this way, the ministry of camp seeks to mimic the gift of Jesus in each of our lives – excessive, loving, and generous. It is our joyous mission to share this good news! ●

The Rev. Beth Magill, Associate Missioner for Congregational Initiatives, Episcopal Diocese of Texas, works with vestries and rectors to develop a missional lens for ministry. She also oversees campus ministry throughout the diocese.
Reflections on Summer Camp Experiences

Four students at Virginia Theological Seminary offer their memories of summer camp from the perspective of both camper and counselor.

SARAH BENTLEY ALLRED

Summer camps have been invaluable to my formation. In high school, I participated in the River Adventure Program (RAP) of the Diocese of Southwestern Virginia for several years. I loved the simple rhythm of life during those week-long trips. Each morning we would rise with the sun and eat breakfast. When we finished eating we would pack our gear into canoes and push off into the river for another day of paddling. When we got hungry, we would stop for lunch. In the late afternoon, we would find a place to set up camp for the evening, eat dinner, and sit around the fire chatting, singing, and praying. When it was fully dark, we went to bed.

Along the way, we learned how to read the river, navigate rapids, fix a meal in a canoe, set up a tent, and dig a latrine. I returned year after year to experience the stunning beauty of God’s creation, deep friendships, new challenges, and a different sense of time. My favorite memories are the ordinary activities of life on the river.

BROOKS BOYLAN

When he came to camp, Brooks Boylan experienced “a moment as a child when I was embraced and comforted by God and the Christian community.” Before coming to Camp McDowell, which is operated by the Episcopal Diocese of Alabama, Brooks noted that the non-religious camps he had attended earlier as a child were missing that element of security. When he moved from camper to counselor, he got to see all the details that went into creating special moments for campers. “It is so important to give that perspective to people,” he said. “A relationship with God can be both fun and transforming, even when you don’t have the words.”

One of Brooks’ favorite memories is a liturgy written for high school students around the stations of the nativity. The young people arrived for a retreat night after Christmas, unusually active and acting very silly.

The liturgy was scheduled at night when the chapel was very dark. After everyone entered the chapel, the leader instructed the group to close their eyes when the bell rang, and open them when it rang again.

The bell rang and people opened their eyes. Several youths were frozen in a tableau illustrating one of the stations. They never moved for several minutes,” Brooks said. “They never moved for several minutes.”

When it rang again.

When we saw what was going on, we started clapping and singing and laughing. "They never moved for several minutes," Brooks said. "Not only the actors, but everyone in the crowd was silent and focused."

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Brooks embraces that memory, knowing that the youth had gone from an animated food fight in the dining hall to the silence and awe of the chapel. These are the moments he wishes every young person could have.

CHARLES COWHERD

Looking back at his summer camp experiences as a counselor at Shrine Mont, the conference center for the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia, Charles Cowherd realized that he gained skills that would meet the criteria of many employers. He mastered skills in:

- Leadership
- Speaking
- Conflict management
- Time management
- Working with diverse personalities
- Teamwork
- Relationship

Most people don’t realize, he said, that this kind of on-the-job training happens. “When you spend time 24/7 with campers and other counselors, you are forced out of your comfort zone.” Being responsible for telling people what to do, he added, doesn’t happen to many 19- and 20-year-olds. Charles said that working at a camp gave him a different model for leadership that has been particularly good for someone in a nurturing profession.

Before entering seminary, Charles was a high school history teacher. The emphasis of both the school and parents was the importance of students preparing for the “real world.” The real world for most meant getting into the right college.

Charles, however, had seen a different “real world” through his camp experience. “Camp provided me a ‘real world’ that was more accurately representative of the Kingdom of God.” The real world changes all the time, said Charles, “but the values of the camp world (the Kingdom of God) don’t change.”

Looking up one day at the mountains surrounding Shrine Mont, he saw a large group of children racing from a mountain trail into the camp. He will never forget “the irresistible image of the energy of those children whose faces were filled with joy.”

That image captures the essence of his camp experience, Charles said. Time spent at camp, he added, is priceless. “You cannot stay on the mountain very long—it can be dangerous—but it makes you want to embrace the precious time you have there.”

DARREN STEADMAN

My favorite staff-bonding trip was in the summer of 2001 because it never actually happened. After a strenuous two-mile afternoon hike, we set up camp and later gathered at a beautiful rocky overlook, laughing and having a blast.

Then the camp director said, “Oh no!” He was staring at one of the cabin counselors who had long, straight hair. We all turned to see that most of his hair was standing straight up and out in every direction. We finally noticed the dark clouds that were rushing in over our heads when the director said, “We have to get out of here. The clouds are using Patrick as a lightning rod.”

We sprinted up and furiously broke down camp. The rain hit us hard as we hit the trail to hike the two miles back down. Through a pounding rain, we even had to bypass a flooded bridge.

That summer, I learned to hope for the best, prepare for the worst, and at least stay flexible. And: the best bonding experiences happen when we least expect it.

As a second-year cabin counselor, I was having a tough time. I tried to steal a minute to put supplies away, just to give my brain a chance to collect my thoughts and take a break. I am sure I looked ragged, exhausted.

Something happened that I remember as clearly as if it were yesterday: Our assistant director Melissa, who is my age, came up to me and grabbed me by both arms and looked closely into my eyes. She smiled and said “Hey, I need you to know that you are doing an amazing job!” She gave me a quick pat on the arms, smiled again and walked off to continue cleaning up.

One of the strongest principles for summer camp staff is radical support for each other. It takes courage to be so direct with love, but quickly it just becomes a way of life. We may only have a second to lift someone’s spirits, but sometimes that’s all it takes.
Christian Summer Camp Has Lasting Impacts

By Jacob Sorensen

More than 2 million young people attend Christian camps in the United States every summer. Data from the National Study of Youth and Religion indicate that 39% of all American teenagers have been to a religious summer camp at least once, and this includes more than half of all mainline Protestants (Smith, 2005).

There is no question that Christian camps have a wide-ranging influence. The question is whether any of it matters long-term. Conventional wisdom says that any benefits fade quickly after the last goodbye and that stories of life-changing experiences are simply exceptions to the rule. What, if anything, are the lasting impacts?

There is an emerging body of research that is demonstrating that camp is much more than fun and games. There is something deeply significant and deeply theological happening at Christian camps across the country. This research is revealing the long-term impacts of camp, impacts that go far beyond a “camp high” that fades quickly after the experience.

The American Camp Association (ACA) began scratching the surface of the ongoing impacts of camp with their 2005 Directions study. They have shown that diverse camp experiences lead to growth in self-confidence, leadership, social skills, and other important elements of positive youth development. This growth persists at least six months after the camp experience.

Camp directors agreed overwhelmingly (92%) that faith practices should be incorporated into all elements of the camp experience. These are not secular camps that include an occasional Bible study or worship service. They are also not manipulative camps designed to elicit an emotional conversion experience.

Campers at ECCD and other mainline camps are immersed in a faith-forming environment in which the songs, games, and activities become part of a sort of theological playground. They do not just study God or take in information about God, as they might be asked to do in confirmation class or listening to a sermon in church. They experience a life that is caught up with and dependent on God’s ongoing activity in the world.

Effective Camp Research Project

The Effective Camp Research Project is shedding new light on the distinctiveness of the Christian camp model and the long-term impacts of camp. The findings suggest that the Christian camp model consists of five fundamental characteristics: camp is participatory, faith-centered, different from home, relational, and a safe space. These characteristics interact in a sort of dynamic interplay to give rise to the camp experience and open the possibility for a whole series of impacts. The findings confirm that a kind of “camp high” exists, but the evidence for long-term growth is much more compelling.

Surveys of more than 1,000 campers and over 300 parents indicated that there were temporary increases in general happiness and agreement with doctrinal statements (e.g., “God created the world”), but the lasting changes had to do with the relevance of faith in everyday life (e.g., “Faith in God helps me in my daily life”). In other words, growth in what might be considered vertical faith did not last, but horizontal faith showed clear and lasting impacts at least three months after camp. Campers’ increased interest in worship services faded shortly after camp, but their increased agreement in the value of belonging to a church persisted, along with the belief that they could turn to Christian friends or adults at church in times of need. Campers were also participating more frequently in devotional practices that sustain faith long-term, including Bible study, prayer, church attendance, and conversations with their family about faith.

A three-month impact is wonderful, but there is additional evidence from the National Study of Youth and Religion that these lasting changes continue years after the experience. Participants in the study who attended religious camp as teenagers or youth were significantly more likely in their young adult years to participate in communal religious practices like group Bible studies, college religious groups, and church attendance than those who never attended summer camp. Even more astounding, those who attended religious summer camp as children or youth were over three times more likely to remain religious five years later than those who did not attend (Sorensen, 2014).

Role of Camp in Faith Formation

These findings are so compelling that they may reshape our understanding of the role of camp in faith formation. We can now say with confidence that the camp experience has much stronger lasting impacts than temporary ones.

Young people are participating more deeply in their faith months after camp is over, and this continues affecting many of them for years. They have gained something much more valuable than simple knowledge about God: a desire to be in Christian community, a hunger to learn more, and the assurance that faith makes a difference in their lives.

Whether you are a deacon, priest, youth worker, parent, or other caring adult, you can work with this information. Connect with these young people. Find out about their camp experience. Walk alongside them and participate in the lasting impacts of camp. You can help these impacts continue to bear fruit long-term.

Jacob Sorensen is a practical theologian and researcher who has a deep interest in bringing scholarly attention to outdoor ministries. He has a Ph.D. from Princeton Theological Seminary. He has more than 15 years of experience as a youth minister and camp minister and has published multiple articles on camping ministry. For more information on the Effective Camp Research Project, visit www.effectivecamp.com.

Works cited:


By Lisa Kimball

Church leaders often describe their own experiences of summer camp with fondness, respect, and a large dose of nostalgia. We tell colorful stories about campfire traditions, sneaking out of cabins, and candlelight services on the beach. There is no doubt among camp enthusiasts that our own lives have been positively impacted by sleep-away camps, and that we are eager for others to experience the wonder.

But what actually makes a Christian camp (or retreat or conference) distinct? How is it similar to and different from a quality YMCA camp, or a great summer residential soccer program?

These were some of the questions that led me to design (W)Holy Criteria for Christian Camps or Retreats: Experiential Learning to Transform Faith and Church. Having now taught the class twice and received very positive feedback from my students, I am more convinced than ever that intentional immersion experiences in Christian community offer a unique window into the Reign of God.

Individuals often have life-changing encounters with the Divine at a summer camp or during a retreat. Too often, however, these experiences are episodic and disconnected from ongoing Christian formation in local congregations. In this course, students are encouraged to explore their own discipleship and to pursue spiritual care for campers.

Counselors who are mature in their faith and able to recognize what it means to be children of God are given time to nurture their own faith through individual reflection and study as well as group study; this kind of care will be important for counselors to model and to nurture spiritual care for campers.

Believing and teaching a God that is ever present.

Experiential learning is used to teach campers about God. They are encouraged to engage in faith practices through bodily expression, which allows them to relate the presence of God to all aspects of their lives.

Programming is sensitive to the diversity of God’s creation.

Directors of camps will intentionally offer programming that is reflective of the experience of all God’s children. Counselors will be trained to look for and beyond the dominant worldview as presented in communal living spaces such as cabin dorm, dining hall, teaching spaces, and worship spaces.

Invite people to play.

Invitations to play allow people to try on different roles, thoughts, and expressions of themselves in short-term, non-threatening ways that can lead to transformation.

Community rooted in Christian living.

The camp environment will foster a sense of fellowship and community building structured around daily Christian living. Campers begin and end each day with some form of spirituality in combination with Christian practice, such as worship, prayer, Bible study, or shared meal. A sense of community will not only help individuals toward faith development and a greater sense of self but also will enable campers to take risks.

Failing well is part of the learning process.

Growth is inhibited if there is no risk of failure. Activities and lessons will create opportunities for both success and failure to allow campers to grow in self-knowledge and confidence, and to deepen their faith as they learn to rely on God and others. Failures will be mild and supported in ways that encourage reflection and positive growth.

Create healthy environment for questioning/seeking.

Because questioning is a natural part to growth and faith development, campers and counselors will be encouraged to see questioning as a gift from God. Camp will be a place for people of all ages to feel safe asking questions about their faith, providing a model for campers and counselors to create spaces for themselves and others to continue asking questions about their faith in their home communities.

Flexibility is built into the program.

Counselors and directors will understand that each new group of campers brings new experiences. Programming will not be rigid as the community is always changing. Each week will bring new lessons that match the dynamics of each new group. Counselors will also be aware that programming changes may expose them to areas of growth. They will be encouraged to explore their own discipleship and to pursue their own growth through reflection.

Bottom line: Campers live out the reality of the incarnation.

When responsibility is shared by all to develop meaningful relationships and to show respect for one another, the way will be paved for Jesus to live among the community and to inhabit each person.

AN ADDITIONAL CRITERION

One of the goals of most programs is helping campers take their experiences and newfound relationships with God home. Embracing faith in the midst of Christian community is easier than living it back home with peers at school and other activities.

Another student in the class, Rick Bauer, captured the importance of connecting a summer camp experience to life at home with this criterion:

Continued Interaction and Presence

The program will have some eschatological sensibility (theology concerned with death, judgment, and an afterlife) that takes into account the “now what” question. By offering ways for participants to continue to live into the spaces that they experienced as meaningful and to revisit their encounters with sacred reality, the forward vision of the Christian faith is given form. Structured reunions, Facebook groups, email lists, prayer cards, and phone calls can all help to keep the camp sense of community and accountability alive and well.

If you were creating (W)Holy Criteria for an away-camp or retreat for young people, what would you include? Thinking about and sharing criteria for faith-based camps can help us advocate for camp and retreat experiences for the young people in our lives and churches.

(W)Holy Criteria for Christian Camps
Reviews of four VBS resources

Digging for Treasure: Parables Revealed

MennoMedia
http://www.faithandlifeforesources.org/Curriculum/vbs/
Cost: $164.99

Digging for Treasure: Parables Revealed from MennoMedia explores the deep truths Jesus taught through parables. The program veers away from the more frenetic VBS resources that emphasize constant activity, emphasizing reflection and contemplation when appropriate.

The theological foundation for the curriculum comes from 1 John 4:7-9, “let us love one another, because love is from God.” Parables of the Sower, the Mustard Seed, and the Lost Sheep help children explore how God works in their lives, guiding them to understand more fully God’s love and care.

The starter kit includes a songbook and music CD, registration and volunteer forms, a director’s guide, and two sets of activity guides. Music is a collection of recognizable worship tunes, but performance on CD lacks enthusiasm. Materials are well organized, formatted, and easy to understand. Each leadership role includes a complete job description, which is useful in finding volunteers.

Multiple options are available for each activity area. Snack suggestions are healthy and fun, but most include gluten, dairy, and nuts.

Close-ended questions, which often stifle imagination, are occasionally used, as opposed to open questions that elicit wonder. At the same time, multiple options are available for each activity area, which gives volunteers and children more choices.

Materials and programming for the middle school age group, however, are incomplete.

While the biblical interpretation is sound and the activities age-appropriate, the basic materials reflect the low-key emphasis of the curriculum. You won’t find additional online resources or elaborate decorations. However, if you are looking for a quiet break from the fast-paced programs of other publishers, Digging for Treasure might be for you.

Sarah Bentley Allred is a student at Virginia Theological Seminary from the Diocese of North Carolina.

Hero Central: Discover Your Strength in God

Cokesbury
https://2017.cokesburyvbs.com
Cost: $159.99

Hero Central’s overall theme focuses on finding strength in God. The stories, which come from both the Old and New Testaments, reinforce character traits that God’s heroes have in common: heart, courage, wisdom, hope, and power.

The materials reflect a mainline, Methodist interpretation of scripture that emphasizes God’s deep love of humanity and the ability of people to be in relationship with God. Unlike many VBS programs that focus on the crucifixion or resurrection, Hero Central emphasizes God’s presence in everyday life and living in relationship with God. This VBS is centered on biblical narrative and includes a section on helping children make a commitment to Christ.

The materials are gender inclusive and include diverse cultures and race. While some of the stories obviously have male characters, these roles could easily be played by either gender. The mission suggestions are engaging with options that could be easily adapted to most faith communities.

Hero Central is an adaptable, well-rounded program that can operate with a large or minimal budget to fit your church focus. Access to online resources is available at no additional cost, including online registration forms that can be customized.

Craft and science rotations have clear instructions—many crafts use donated materials. Some craft suggestions, however, may not appeal to older students. Activities can be adapted for different learning styles, local VBS traditions, time limits and other considerations.

Music is easily adaptable; the leader book contains both sheet music and lyrics. While the music is reasonably good, it lacks the energy many have come to expect from VBS programs.

Cokesbury has produced a sound VBS program in Hero Central that will fit the needs of many churches.

Anne Shelton, Director of Children’s Ministries, Advent United Methodist Church, Simpsonville, South Carolina

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Rethinking Mission/Outreach Projects for VBS

O n the following pages are four programs that the Center for the Ministry of Teaching selected as Top Picks for Vacation Bible School 2017. They feature heroes, excursions to Rome and Peru, and buried treasure. 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

Our featured VBS programs weave sound pedagogical research in their programs with sensitivity toward children with disabilities and developmental needs of children of all ages. Most programming, thematically and from a design standpoint, is targeted to elementary-age children, although the Rome marketplace is designed for intergenerational participants.

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 the strongest part of your volunteer staff. Pair youth with adult mentors who respect their leadership skills and vision to create dynamic teams that build strong relationships with children and each other.

We believe VBS can be a powerful tool for evangelism. Look beyond a catchy theme to the way scripture is used and how messages, both explicit and implicit, are presented to participants. VBS directors and leaders may need to adapt a program to reflect their church’s teaching and beliefs.

Finally, Vacation Bible School should be fun and engaging for everyone involved. This is a time to celebrate God’s love and presence in the world!

Dorothy Listhicum

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Vacation Bible School Top Picks from the CMT

W hen reviewing Vacation Bible School programs, the Center for the Ministry of Teaching looks for mission or outreach projects that involve participants of all ages. Too often we find money-raising projects that rely on parents or other adults contributing cash. These projects are often related to a publishing house or denomination and may not even be related to the program theme.

VBS leaders tell us that there often isn’t adequate time for full-scale mission/outreach projects in typical one-week programs. Projects wind up being an afterthought or a check on a “things we should do” list. Helping young people and adult volunteers think outwardly about the needs of others is important. But maybe we need to rethink the way we do this.

The creators of the VBS program Super God! Super Me! Super Possibility! (Abingdon Press) have added a separate “Vacation/Follow-Up Leader” guide to help churches realign the program’s themes with projects and fold trips throughout the year. The guide includes five lessons with a selection of projects to fit different age groups. Each lesson provides:

1. Gathering activities
2. Review of the Bible lesson from the VBS program
3. Ideas and guidelines for projects
4. List of supplies needed

Activities take place at the church or Sunday school setting, the immediate neighborhood, or the wider community. Super God! centers mission projects on people and events featured during the VBS program, including Harriet Tubman of the Underground Railroad, Malala Yousafzai who promotes education for girls in Pakistan, and Mary Bowser, a Union spy who worked for Jefferson Davis.

Young people are encouraged, for example, to follow the steps of Marley Dias, an 11-year-old who collected over 1,000 books about black girls and women for schools in Jamaica. Younger learners are encouraged to join local book drives, while older youth are directed to partner with community organizations looking for teen mentors or providing reading/storytelling programs.

Any VBS program could expand its impact through mission and outreach initiatives that span the year. Use this opportunity to emphasize the biblical truths and teachings learned in the summer and apply them throughout the year. Make your faith come alive! DSL

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Elizabeth M. Avent

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Episcopal Teacher

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Passport to Peru
Group Publishing
https://www.group.com/vbs
Cost: $154.99, with digital access: $189.99
Passport to Peru brings the beauty and appreciation of another country and culture into Vacation Bible School for both children and adult volunteers. Themes help children enjoy God's gifts of comfort, patience, peace, love, and joy.

With age-appropriate stations, each daily theme is experienced via food, play, Bible verses, and other activities. Numerous choices are provided for each station, ranging from easily replicable with little advance work to harder-to-find props and more time-consuming preparation. All materials are respectful of different cultures and beliefs.

Passport to Peru provides an array of kid-friendly, attention-grabbing videos, songs, and activities. For each opening, videos of children who live in Peru connect their story to life in the daily theme. Quality multimedia resources provide many different ways for children to experience and learn about the gifts that God has given to each of them. Music selections in Passport to Peru include a good combination of familiar and new songs.

The program can be scaled for small, medium, or large groups. The beautiful, well-organized materials are easy to use with clear guides for volunteers. Activities are sensitive to different learning styles, and culture-specific games are interactive and interesting.

During day four, there is a heavy emphasis on atonement followed by a quick jump to resurrection. This runs counter to the theological approach in Episcopalian church that emphasizes the promises in the baptismal covenant in forming disciples. Passport to Peru provides a way for children and volunteers to learn about a place that many have never experienced. Group has consistently produced quality offerings in this series of VBS programs from around the world.

Sarah Stonesifer, CMT Digital Missioner

Reviews of four VBS resources

Encuentros con Jesús
Concordia Publishing House
http://vbs.cph.org/spanish
Precio: $59.99 (español/English)
1-800-325-3040

Encuentros con Jesús es un material diseñado haciendo énfasis en el amor de Dios y su poder transformador en todas las personas. Tanto niños como adultos sentirán la presencia y el cuidado de Dios en sus vidas a través de los personajes bíblicos que aparecen en cada lección.

El programa es coherente en su contenido, basado por completo en la palabra de Dios. Nos brinda la oportunidad de compartirla, sin importar el contexto cultural o religioso en que hayamos crecido. Además ofrece un método de aprendizaje amplio para que tanto niños, jóvenes y adultos lo encuentren atractivo y dinámico.

Este recurso en español es una maravillosa herramienta a usar en nuestras escuelas bíblicas de Vacaciones independientemente de la tradición religiosa, por lo que recomiendo su uso.

Niveles:
Grupo 1: de 3 a 6 años aproximadamente
Grupo 2: de 7 a 10 años aproximadamente
Grupo 3: de 11 a 14 años aproximadamente
Adultos

Incluye:
Paquete del Líder
Música en CD
Estudios bíblicos para adultos
Horario alternativo

Ventajas:
• Las historias bíblicas seleccionadas demuestran claramente que a través de Cristo se nos es dada la Salvación.
• La parte pedagógica esta diseñada para niños, jóvenes y adultos.
• Los materiales para las manualidades son de fácil adquisición y bajo costo.
• La interpretación y Aplicación del tema, están excelentemente en concordancia con el objetivo y base bíblica de cada lección.

Desventajas:
• Debe haber más dinámica de grupo en el desarrollo de las lecciones.
• En algunas lecciones debe elegirse otro verso bíblico a memorizar.
• Sugiero que haya más dinámicas al aire libre y juegos interactivos.
• Algunos himnos no son tan comunes a todas las culturas.

The Rev. Margarita Santana, Latino Missioner, The Diocese of Maryland

Otro español escuela bíblica de vacaciones (EBV)

Maker Fun Factory
Group Publishing
www.Group.com
Cost: $144.99, with digital access: $179.99
Go back in time to the days of the early Christian church in Rome through an immersive and intergenerational program called Rome: Paul and the Underground Church. This "marketplace" Vacation Bible School lets you create a multi-station space in which "Roman families" meet shopkeepers, Roman soldiers, and even Paul himself.

The heart of the content is learning about life for Christians in first century Rome, including persecution of the underground church. Each day has a Bible verse, but not a full Bible story. The Bible verses are from the book of Romans, and the theology reflects Paul's emphasis on grace, sin, forgiveness, sacrifice, salvation, and new life. A clear message of salvation and atonement is grounded in God's love and not overhearing.

This VBS is designed to be intergenerational (although it does not have to be), with parents and adults journeying along with children. The schedule differs from traditional VBS; be sure to grasp the overall concept before you make your selection.

The music CD includes a nice blend of original compositions and familiar worship songs that are well-performed and easy to learn. Diverse groups of children and adults perform songs on the DVD, which has very good production quality. The options for crafts and games relate well to the theme, but are limited in number.

A strong attempt has been made to capture the look and feel of ancient Rome. For example, the market and "family" names use Roman words and terms. The theme of underground church is compelling, allowing participants to consider the reality of religious persecution. However, the persecution theme — while well-done — may be too intense for young children.

You can depend on Group's marketplace programs to provide a rich VBS for your church.

Matthew Kozlowski, CMT staff and curator for Building Faith

¿Aguá? Currículo para la Escuela Bíblica (VBS) para Comunidades de Habla Hispana

Publicado por la organización presbiteriana Living Waters for the World, 2009
https://www.livingwatersfortheworld.org/pray
Para más información en español envíe un correo electrónico a lendall@LivingWatersForTheWorld.org
Precio: $42 (para comunidades de habla hispana)

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.
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