

Dear Friends:

**Welcome to the 2011 VBS Fair!** For those of you who can't visit our display in Alexandria, Virginia, we are offering this information on the web.



We would like to call your attention to our “**CMT Top Picks.**” These merit serious consideration based on the following criteria:

- **Theology:** the love of God is emphasized more than the sinfulness of humans
- **Unity:** a distinctive theme is supported by a cohesive program of stories and activities
- **Inclusiveness:** text and graphics represent all God's people with respect and stereotypes are avoided.

Many of our “**Perennial Picks**” are programs that have been “Top Picks” in previous years, and are still being published and available for purchase. If your parish has not yet used them, we recommend you consider them for VBS or other kinds of programs, such as summer and Lenten series.

We understand that there may be other criteria that are important in your parish and may lead you to choose a VBS program other than our “Top Picks” or “Perennial Picks.”

Attached is a copy of the VBS review list. For each curriculum in the Fair, the list gives a brief description, some strengths and weaknesses, and publisher/price information.

Thank you for visiting our website. We welcome your suggestions and feedback. Best wishes in planning your 2011 VBS!

Sincerely,

Lori Daniels  
Resource Room Coordinator  
Center for the Ministry of Teaching  
Virginia Theological Seminary  
3737 Seminary Road  
Alexandria, VA 22304

# **VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL FAIR FEBRUARY 2011**

## **LIST OF PUBLISHERS AND PROGRAM EVALUATIONS**

**LORI DANIELS**  
**703.461.1885**  
**[CMT@VTS.EDU](mailto:CMT@VTS.EDU)**

**DOROTHY LINTHICUM**  
**703.461.1888**  
**[DLINTHICUM@VTS.EDU](mailto:DLINTHICUM@VTS.EDU)**

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# **CMT TOP PICKS**

## ***Hometown Nazareth***

Group Publishing

800-447-1070

[www.group.com/vbs](http://www.group.com/vbs)

\$119.99

***Hometown Nazareth*** is an intergenerational VBS curriculum that can be used with Preschool thru High School ages, with adult leaders. Daily small group experiences incorporate a coordinating Scripture passage. Activities for each day include: a small group time, a trip to Mary's House for stories about Jesus as a child, fun and games, and finally Market Place shops for crafts, and food time. The groups rotate at their own pace, with daily schedule templates for the directors to fill in. Other items may be purchased to add to the kit, such as craft supplies, coins, t-shirt templates/decals, bags for the Operation Kid- to-Kid, and growth charts for small groups.

**Ages Levels:** Preschool, Middle School, High School, and Adults

### **Includes:**

<u>X</u>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<u>X</u>	Music Action Training DVD
<u>X</u>	Music CD	<u>X</u>	Director's DVD
—	Alternate schedules	<u>X</u>	Decorating space DVD

### **Strengths:**

- Jesus' childhood is topic that will engage most children.
- *Hometown Nazareth VBS* is user friendly, especially for first time directors.
- The VBS is interdenominational which maximizes participation in this program.
- The music is catchy, though not memorable.
- An authentic connection between the title/theme and the various activities distinguishes this from many VBS curricula.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Could be expensive if all of the suggested materials are purchased.
- No resources in Spanish, although the mission project is for Central America.
- The mission project lacks creativity; a local initiative would have more impact on the participants.

## ***Inside Out & Upside Down on Main Street***

Standard Publishing

800.543.1353

[www.vacationbibleschool.com](http://www.vacationbibleschool.com)

\$69.99

*Main Street* includes the components many churches look for when selecting a Vacation Bible School resource: lively music, colorful props, theme-related snacks, and a wide range of crafts, games and drama. The curriculum focuses on five parables to explore the attributes of gratitude, compassion, forgiveness, grace, and faithfulness. Daily sessions are lead by a trio of characters—Heidi Claire, super sleuth; Chef Pierre, and bus driver Justine Time—a model Standard Publishing has adopted for its annual VBS programs. Cooper, a dog featured for younger children, is also back. The use of parables allows participants to hear stories Jesus told about people in everyday life. Children are challenged to integrate the five theme areas into their own “everyday” lives. *Main Street* will keep everyone busy and moving, but there’s little or no focus on spirituality or time for reflection.

**Ages Levels:**   Preschool (separate schedule/director’s guide    Preteen  
                          Elementary ages    Teen

**Includes:**

<u>X</u>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<u>X</u>	Music Action Training DVD
<u>X</u>	Music CD/Reproducible	<u>X</u>	Skits/Drama CD
<u>X</u>	Alternate schedule	<u>X</u>	Planning DVD

**Strengths:**

- Decorating rooms and stations requires purchase of posters and costumes not provided in starter kits.
- The Director’s Guide is complete and comes with a CD with downloadable tools that can be reproduced, such as registration forms, job descriptions, supply lists and staff helps.
- Memorization of Bible passages is encouraged for both children and adult leaders.
- A supporting website offers free downloadable tools, including logos, graphics for websites, week-long craft and service projects.
- Follow-Up evaluations and events are available for participants and their families.
- Daily service project are suggested to tie in with the day’s theme, but may need to be supplemented, such as making scarves for the homeless in the summer.
- Brief descriptions of developmental characteristics by age group are included in the Director’s Guide CD. Tips for working with children with disabilities are also available.
- Snacks are varied and include suggestions for healthier options.
- Instruction for “leading kids to Christ” emphasizes listening before talking.

**Weaknesses:**

- Decorations purchased from the publisher range in cost from \$8 for three latex balloons to \$27 for the Main Street backdrop. This year a backdrop that children can color and decorate themselves is on sale.
- The add-ons for crafts, “gear,” costumes and publicity can be costly.
- Resources are aimed at larger groups; they would be difficult to modify for small church use.
- The music is typical VBS fare—it’s not bad, just not memorable.
- Materials for teens and preteens are weak and lack substance.

*D. Linthicum*

***Island Odyssey: To the Ends of the Earth with Jesus Christ***

Abingdon Press

800-672-1789

[www.cokesbury.com](http://www.cokesbury.com)

*Island Odyssey* links biblical island stories with the culture of popular island vacation spots: Cyprus/Jamaica, Crete/Barbados, Malta/Trinidad, Isle of Patmos/Robben Island South Africa, and The Isles/Fiji, teaching children to connect the Biblical world with the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Through Bible verse memorization, worship, storytelling, movement and folklore, children will experience the connections between hearing, seeing and believing. They will understand that a relationship with Jesus influences their decisions and that having a “welcoming spirit” glorifies God. They will also be encouraged to share the love of Jesus Christ all over the world. Translations of featured Bible stories are from the *Common English Bible*, a new translation available from Cokesbury. Although marketed as a Vacation Bible School curriculum for children, the material works well as an intergenerational program for an entire community. Outreach focus is collecting supplies and money for Haiti.

**Ages Levels:** Toddler/Twos download available on website  
PreSchool/Kindergarten  
Younger Elementary  
Older  
Teen and Adult material available.

**Includes:**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skits/Drama DVD
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alternate schedule	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Worship DVD

**Strengths:**

- Many options available for scheduling, including an intergenerational evening program with dinner (recipes provided).
- Abingdon website provides additional free resources, including e-newsletter.
- Thoughtful meditations and background material for leaders/teachers.
- Unused materials are returnable until Sept. 15, 2011.
- Clearly marketed to African American congregations. The subject, however, is appropriate for all children.

**Weaknesses:**

- Greater emphasis placed on history and culture of (mostly) Caribbean islands, rather than the Biblical island locations that also have rich traditions and histories. The early church, as shown through Paul’s journeys and destinations, seems shortchanged in the process.
- Crafts, though imaginative, seem to require lots of preparation on the part of adult leaders. Kits available at extra cost.
- Inclusion of other ethnicities would generate more interest.

*J. Walker*

***Taste & See: God is Good***

Mennonite Publishing Network

1-800-245-7894

[www.mpn.net/vbs](http://www.mpn.net/vbs)

\$129.99

*Taste & See* is a refreshingly concise VBS curriculum for grades 1-8, with a separate outline to use with 4-5 year olds. Daily Scripture texts (from Hebrew Scripture and New Testament) help children see a connection between food and faith, reinforced through worship and active response times. Daily themes: Seeds of Life, Bread from Heaven, A Hungry Woman Shares Food, A Meal to Remember, and The Great Dinner. After opening gathering and worship time, groups (either age-specific or multi-age) rotate through 30-minute response sessions: Bible, Creative, and Active. Other than a student book for each participant, no purchase of student “extras” is expected\*.

**Ages Levels:** Grades 1-8  
Pre School (ages 4-5)

**Includes:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Director’s DVD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alternate schedules		

**Strengths:**

- Daily themes are Biblically-based, simple and consistent.
- Music CD reveals a variety of songs, well-performed and fun to sing.
- Photocopy permission is on much of the material.
- Good supplemental book list provided.
- Snacks are generally nutritious, and may be prepared by learners.
- Includes a mission/outreach component.
- Worship experiences are at the forefront.

**Weaknesses:**

- Searching for supplemental materials can be time-consuming for volunteers.
- The single student book is likely too simple for older children.
- Games are not very creative or different. Older kids could be bored.
- \*Music CD is fairly expensive for suggested distribution to all participants (\$10.99).
- The Mennonite mission project in China may be of limited interest.

*J. Walker*

# Perennial Picks

## ***Aslan is on the Move!***

Leader Resources

800-941-2218

Downloadable at \$59.95

[www.leaderresources.org](http://www.leaderresources.org)

This creative intergenerational curriculum uses C.S. Lewis' beloved fantasy *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* to explore theology. A 5-day lesson plan makes it suitable for VBS.

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 in our real lives we are confronted with meanness and treachery.

Themes of the five days are:

Day 1: Discovery of Narnia: how ideas about reality 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 troop 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:**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skits/Drama DVD

### **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 many active games plus discussion questions.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Does not include the Bible or church history.
- Constructing props calls for creative use of materials and space.

## ***Clean Water for All God's Children***

Living Waters for the World 2006/Presbyterian Church USA

615-261-4008

info@livingwatersfortheworld.org

[www.livingwatersfortheworld.org](http://www.livingwatersfortheworld.org)

Starter Kit: \$34.00

A mission project of the Presbyterian Synod of Living Waters, *Clean Water for All God's Children* is designed to enable children to understand the importance of clean water for health, and to show them ways to share in the mission of taking clean water to all the children of the world. The material can simply raise awareness of the world's great need for clean water, or it may educate a church that is preparing to send a team on an international mission trip. Each of the five days includes an opening time (with skit or puppet show and water conservation emphasis), a Bible story, a mission focus, activities/crafts, recreation and snacks, music and drama, and a closing time. Designed as a low-cost, thoughtful curriculum, all material in the basic notebook may be duplicated for use in the congregation's VBS program. A separate outline is provided for a preschool section, though younger children may join others during music time.

Daily themes center on God's use of water:

1. *The Creation* - the goodness of water
2. *The Crossing of the Red Sea* - water for salvation
3. *The Healing of Naaman* - water for healing
4. *The Baptism of Jesus* - water as a sign of grace
5. *The Woman at the Well* - water for physical needs

**Ages Levels:** Preschool (separate program)

Grades K-5 (though ages are not specified)

### **Includes:**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skits/Drama DVD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alternate schedule		

### **Strengths:**

- One low-cost notebook contains all needed materials, including CDs.
- A single, mission-centered focus makes planning simpler.
- The daily reflection time allows just that: reflection, with time to slow down and listen to the children. It is an element rare in active summer programs.
- Music is simple, with several songs in both English and Spanish.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Requires somewhat more creativity on the part of volunteers (this might be a strength)
- Growing germs from student hands on blood agar culture plates might give some teachers pause.
- No recommendations on snacks are provided.
- Few photos or graphics provided; photos show only children from Latin American countries.

*J. Walker*

## ***Dare to be Different***

Leader Resources

800-941-2218

[www.leaderresources.org](http://www.leaderresources.org)

Cost: \$49.95 (electronic download only)

*A Wrinkle in Time* 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 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. Guides for the 5-day program include 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

**Ages Levels:** Ages 5-12. Children are divided into small groups by age as needed.

**Includes:**     \_\_\_   Clip Art/Reproducible CD     \_\_\_   Music Action Training DVD  
                  \_\_\_   Music CD                                 \_\_\_   Skits/Drama DVD  
                  \_\_\_   Alternate schedule

### **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.

*J. Walker*

## ***Festival of Faith***

Active Learning Assoc., Inc.

\$39.99

[www.alassociates.com/](http://www.alassociates.com/)

*Festival of Faith* invites children and adults to take part in the story of the Christian faith as it unfolds through the seasons of the Church Year. Each of the five days is devoted to a different season in the Church Year: Advent and Christmas; Epiphany; Lent and Easter; Pentecost; and Kingdomtide, also known as Ordinary Time or Late Pentecost. For each season there is a theme, scripture passage, and memory verse.

Children gain an understanding of the church as a global community through the activities in the lesson plans. Children are grouped according to “Embassies,” representing countries from the Americas, Africa, Europe and Asia. Through the daily crafts and snacks children learn the customs of different countries. In large group opening and closing sessions, children learn the day’s theme and Bible story. The format includes an optional Ethnic Festival and Open House final program.

**Age Levels:** Children are placed in cross-age groups.  
(The program is ungraded; appears suitable for grades Kindergarten – 6.)

### **Includes:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skits/Drama DVD

### **Strengths:**

- Children learn much about other countries as well as about the church year.
- Enticing range of crafts – from stained glass to boomerangs and decorated eggs.
- Bible stories are told interactively, as “echo stories.”
- Clear and complete instructions.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Considerable advance preparation of materials is required.

*L Daniels*

## ***Pilgrimage: Seeking the Kingdom of God***

Leader Resources

800-941-2218

Downloadable at \$79.95

[www.leaderresources.org](http://www.leaderresources.org)

*Pilgrimage* transports students into the Middle Ages to journey as pilgrims to sites where they learn from the lives of people of faith. The Middle Ages stand out as a time when Christians journeyed in faith 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. As such, they participate in activities that are linked to the theme for the day. Guilds of students then meet to discuss their experiences in the Street Fair. The day closes with community singing, prayer, and worship.

**Ages Levels:** Intergenerational, Kindergarten and up  
(Ages 4 and younger need their own preschool group and some adaptation of materials)

**Includes:**

___	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	___	Music Action Training DVD
___	Music CD	___	Skits/Drama DVD

**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.

*L. Daniels*

**ReNew: The Parable of the Sower**

Spark House (order from Augsburg Fortress, [www.augsburgfortress.org](http://www.augsburgfortress.org))

800-328-4648

[www.wearesparkhouse.org](http://www.wearesparkhouse.org)

\$49.99 (Downloadable)

**ReNew** is an environmentally-focused VBS program that inspires children and adults to grow in faith, have fun, and change the world as they practice stewardship of creation. Designed as a traditional, rotation-based Vacation Bible School, **ReNew** has modified and simplified the program to make it green. Using Jesus’ *Parable of the Sower*, participants look at the story from perspectives of Self, Community, and World.

Daily themes:

- Planting Seeds
- Taking Root
- Growing
- Facing Challenges
- Living Together

**ReNew** has made a deliberate effort to teach and to practice good stewardship of the earth throughout this program. The curriculum, from reproducible pages to music CD’s, is manufactured from recycled materials. Inks are soy-based and items often have more than one use, allowing for low-waste planning. Tips for caring for the earth are everywhere, drawing from the Bible as well as from the latest climate science. It is a fascinating and creative effort to “walk the talk” about taking care of God’s creation.

**Ages Levels:** Pre School  
Lower elementary (grades K – 2)  
Upper elementary (grades 3-6)

**Includes:**

- |                                     |                          |                                     |                           |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Clip Art/Reproducible CD | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Music Action Training DVD |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Music CD                 | <input type="checkbox"/>            | Skits/Drama DVD           |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Alternate schedule       | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Program DVD               |

**Strengths:**

- Teachers and other staff will learn right along with the children. There is much food for thought in the materials provided.
- Creative snacks reflect the daily themes.
- Consistent message that faith leads to action.
- Materials reflect ecological concerns and make Biblical links.
- Seeds (provided) when fully-grown, make toppings for a pizza!
- Offers an opportunity to involve a whole new group of church members in VBS, those concerned about ecology and the environment, gardeners, earth scientists, etc.
- Blog at [www.wearesparkhouse.org](http://www.wearesparkhouse.org) offers good ideas from earlier users.

**Weaknesses:**

- No specific mission project, although strong emphasis on serving community and world.
- Only one Bible story for the entire week

*J. Walker*

## ***Wild Willy's Candy Factory: a new look at the Prodigal Son***

Leader Resources

800-941-2218

Downloadable at \$49.95

[www.leaderresources.org](http://www.leaderresources.org)

This vacation Bible 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 age children.

### **Includes:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skits/Drama DVD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alternate schedules		

### **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.

A. Dyer

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

Leader Resources

800-941-2218

Downloadable at \$59.95

[www.leaderresources.org](http://www.leaderresources.org)

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 and 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*); also

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:**

\_\_\_ Clip Art/Reproducible CD    \_\_\_ Music Action Training DVD  
\_\_\_ Music CD    \_\_\_ Skits/Drama DVD

**Strengths:**

- Inclusion of resources with direct connection to the Harry Potter books, including a Hogwarts Acceptance Letter for each child, the Sorting Hat, Prof. McGonagall's 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.

*L. Daniels*

# Other Reviewed 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; available via 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 website that show the suffering and needs of people throughout the world

**Ages Levels:** Preschool to 12 years old

**Includes:**

<input type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Director's DVD
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Alternate schedules		

**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.

**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.

## ***Big Apple Adventure***

LifeWay

<http://www2.lifeway.com/vbs2011/yourvbs/?CID=RDR-VBS>

\$69.99 (Super Sampler: \$199.99)

***Big Apple Adventure*** is a VBS curriculum with a New York City theme for babies thru adults, with separate guide books for each age. Daily Scripture texts help all groups to see a connection between Bible study, crafts, music, and recreational activities reinforced through worship and active response times. Themes: Connect with Faith, Connect with Love, Connect with Trust, Connect with Others, and Connect with Life. The primary goal is for all children and adults to receive Christ as Lord and Savior, and to be able to evangelize others. The mission project is “Kits for Kids”, a school supply collection sponsored by Baptist Global Response, [www.baptistglobalresponse.com](http://www.baptistglobalresponse.com).

<b>Ages Levels:</b>	infant -2's	1-2 grades	Youth activity book
	3's – Pre-K	3-4 grades	Adult activity book
	Kindergarten	preteens (5&6)	

### **Includes:**

—	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<u>X</u>	Music Action Training DVD
<u>X</u>	Music CD	<u>X</u>	Director's DVD
<u>X</u>	Alternate schedules	<u>X</u>	Decorating space DVD

### **Strengths:**

- Detailed director's guide is provided, with additional online tools available.
- Good materials for youth and adults with special needs.
- Sign language instructions go with music. Some resources in Spanish are available.
- The safety instructions are helpful and clear.
- Age appropriate leader guides. Early arrival activities for younger children.
- Available in Spanish.

### **Weaknesses:**

- The New York City theme is a stretch, although the visuals are eye-catching.
- No connection between the music and a New York City theme.
- Snack suggestions depend on heavily processed, high-sugar foods.
- Additional resources add to the overall cost.
- The strong emphasis on sin, conversion and salvation might not appeal to some denominations.
- Have emphasis on evangelism using by teaching the ABCs of becoming a good Christian “Admit to God that you are a sinner. **B**elieve that Jesus Christ is God's Son. **C**onfess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.”

*J. Walker*

## ***Big Jungle Adventure: A Faith Journey with Jesus***

Concordia Publishing House

800-325-3040

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

\$119.99

The goal of the *Big Jungle Adventure* is to connect children with Jesus, and to support their faith journey. Although the jungle theme seems to be somewhat peripheral to a message of salvation through Christ, the lessons and decorating ideas are colorful and each day moves rapidly. While the writers recommend program planning 5-6 months in advance, ease of use and quick preparation time for summer volunteers is a feature that may appeal in many churches. The Mission project is the Lutheran Malaria Initiative in Africa.

**Age Levels:**   Preschool  
                  Elementary

### **Includes:**

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Clip Art//free from website	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Music Action Training DVD
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Music CD	<input type="checkbox"/>	Skits/Drama DVD
<input type="checkbox"/>	Alternate schedule		

### **Strengths:**

- Tips for adapting materials for large and small groups, publicity kits, suggested schedules, and access to a newsletter are on the website.
- Tips for involving youth include shared leadership and Bible study.
- Snacks are creative; alternative, healthy snack ideas and food for large groups are included.
- Powerpoint presentations for music and opening/closing sessions are included.
- A separate preschool director's guide outlines activities and schedules for younger children, includes a Leader's CD.
- Music Leader Guide includes words and accompaniments for all songs
- Most leader pages come with supplemental CD (audio tracks, music scores, resources, etc.)

### **Weaknesses:**

- *Big Jungle Adventure* music sounds similar to the other commercial VBS products: catchy, lively, with a good (same) beat, but not likely to last beyond the summer.
- Heavy emphasis on sin overshadows the message of God's love.
- Alternatives to the purchased craft kits are very limited, thus everyone's craft projects look the same.
- Publicity states that the curriculum is for all ages; the Starter Kit only includes resources for children, plus a small Bible study guide for youth that might be appropriate for young teens.
- Not much time for reflection. Every activity, game & snack has a "take home point" to be discussed.
- Music CD is not reproducible and must be individually purchased.

*L. Daniels & J. Walker*

## ***Jump! Put Faith in Motion!***

Orange

<http://whatisorange.org/summerxp/>

\$150

*Jump!* focuses on Paul's journeys and how his faith and understanding of Jesus grew. The program can be offered as a typical five-day VBS or as an eight-week series for Sunday mornings or other settings. Short small-group activities are mixed with longer large-group time to make the materials fit several scenarios. All of the materials for both elementary and preschool programs are on six CDs, including a director's guide, drama scripts, craft instructions and snacks. Using *Jump*, which the publishers clearly note is not a specific curriculum but a general guide, is cumbersome and time consuming. To really get a handle on all the pieces, the user should print out all the components. Even after downloading free software (found through Google), we were still unable to download art for decorating and other purposes. The difficulty of using *Jump* outweighs the value of its content.

**Ages Levels:** Preschool (separate schedule/CD)  
Elementary

**Includes:**

<u>X</u>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<u>X</u>	Alternate schedule
<u>X</u>	Music (download for fee)	<u>X</u>	Skits/Drama DVD

**Strengths:**

- Good introduction to Paul and his journeys; map graphics help children see where Paul's journeys take him.
- Dramas are lively and scripts allow users to create their own drama scenarios.
- Snacks include some healthy options and relate to the theme for the day
- Suggestions for working with volunteers are complete and helpful
- Music is engaging and a step above usual VBS offerings (only the main theme song in a full mix is available in the package)
- The love of God is emphasized along with encouragement to know Jesus better.

**Weaknesses:**

- Actors in drama DVDs teens; situations do not mirror the world of elementary students
- Music, including action training, is only available through downloads (coupons for eight free downloads are provided)
- Users have to secure permissions to use some suggested downloads
- The suggested mission project is basically fund-raising for a nonprofit that provides help to children through a one-on-one relationship between a child and a church organization. Sustaining the relationship beyond the program is problematic.
- The crafts are somewhat unimaginative; a primary source of materials is *orientaltrading.com*.
- Although *Jump* claims that limited volunteers are needed, the need for adult supervision of presentations, crafts, and other activities are not dissimilar from other VBS programs.
- Some references are already dated. For example, the first drama and activity center on the telephone, although young people use texts almost exclusively to communicate.

*D. Linthicum*

## ***Panda Mania- Where God is Wild About You!***

Group Publishing

800-447-1070

[www.group.com/vbs](http://www.group.com/vbs)

Described as *The Easy VBS*, ***PandaMania*** is based on verses from Psalm 139. Each day begins with a familiar Bible story that undergirds a Bible Point (e.g. God made you...God watches over you...God gives good gifts). Children are divided into multi-age crews of five, and several crews rotate together through activity stations. Opening exercise, snack time and closing time draw everyone together. The panda connection is a bit tenuous, although the illustrations and panda theme are likely to be appealing to children. The daily schedule includes showing part of a film, “The Mystery of the Missing Pandas”. The mission emphasis is on Central America, through *Biblica* (formerly the Int’l Bible Society).

**Ages Levels:** Preschool  
Elementary

### **Includes:**

<u>X</u>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<u>X</u>	Music Action Training DVD
<u>X</u>	Music CD	<u>X</u>	Director’s DVD
<u>X</u>	Alternate schedules	<u>X</u>	Decorating space DVD

### **Strengths:**

- An online tool, “VBS P.R.O.” is available to help organize the program. An enhanced online tool, “VBS P.R.O. Plus” (\$29.95 extra) is heavily promoted.
- The Director’s Guide is clear and easy to use, with a complete index to topics.
- The program looks fast-moving and fun for kids, especially in multi-age groups.
- Snacks are prepared by the children with adult help.
- Memorization of Bible verses is strongly encouraged.

### **Weaknesses:**

- It’s not easy to tell one song from another – similar beat, similar lyrics, nothing special.
- Decorating can be complicated and expensive if recommendations are followed. The publisher provides thirteen pages of decorating materials in its sale catalog.
- Small imported plastic materials are often marked as choking hazards.
- To raise mission awareness, children are to dye small poly-cotton (“made in China”) bags (\$1.50), to be sent to the publisher-chosen project in the Dominican Republic along with a donation for a Spanish-language New Testament. Using permanent dye with a group of kids could be problematic.
- Snacks are highly sweetened.

*J. Walker*

## ***Shake it Up Café: Where Kids Carry Out God’s Recipe***

Cokesbury

800-672-1789

[www.cokesburyvbs.com](http://www.cokesburyvbs.com)

\$79.99 (Smaller Church Starter Pak is \$49.99)

**Overview paragraph:** *Shake it Up Café: Where Kids Carry Out God’s Recipe* is an interactive, versatile Bible-based program that “gives children a recipe for living out God’s Word.” By focusing on Biblical (largely Old Testament) festivals, leaders strive to lead children into life-changing habits that will help their growth in faith. Each session focuses on a “secret ingredient”: *Be ready for God. Give happily to God. Believe fully in Jesus. Remember Jesus often. Celebrate God forever.* Across the board, the language is of cooking and kitchens and restaurants, although there isn’t any real cooking involved. Materials can be used in many types of programs: rotation-based, intergenerational, one-day VBS, morning or evening, short or long, etc. Sample schedules help leaders design the best program for their own church. Widespread congregational involvement is encouraged.

**Ages Levels:** Preschool through Older Elementary

Youth and Adult study materials are also available.

Toddler materials can be downloaded from the website above.

### **Includes:**

<u>    </u>	Clip Art/Reproducible CD	<u>  X  </u>	Music Action Training DVD
<u>  X  </u>	Music CD (take-home also)	<u>  X  </u>	Skits/Drama DVD
<u>  X  </u>	Alternate schedule		

### **Strengths:**

- Consistent language throughout.
- Illustrations and photographs are inclusive and multi-racial.
- A Starter Kit for small churches is offered.
- Menus for full meals are generally quite nutritious and appealing to kids.
- Missions activities all focus on anti-hunger projects, with inspiring stories.
- Sign language instructions are included.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Add-on resources, such as fancy stickers, stuffed animals, and extensive decorating props, add to the overall cost. Encouraging local creativity is often less costly.
- Natural tie-ins with the cooking theme are not made.
- Little emphasis on environmental concerns.
- Required supply lists are daunting.
- Connections with “recipe” language may be a hard sell with older children.

*J. Walker*

## **SunSurf Beach Bash VBS**

*Gospel Light*

800-446-7735

<http://www.gospellight.com/>

Using a beach theme, Gospel Light's goal is to help every child come to know the living Jesus. The Bible theme is John 14:6 – "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me." Daily New Testament texts provide the basis for response to these five questions: Who is Jesus? Why can I trust Jesus? Why do I need Jesus? How can Jesus help me when I mess up? What does Jesus want me to do?

**Ages Levels:** Preschool through elementary (two grades per division).  
Toddler, Teen and Adult materials also available.

### **Includes:**

<u>X</u>	Reproducible CD-Rom	<u>X</u>	Music Action Training DVD
<u>X</u>	Music CD's	<u>X</u>	Skits/Drama DVD
<u>X</u>	Opening assemblies		

### **Strengths:**

- Consistency of message throughout the colorful materials.
- Good planning directions on the Director's DVD.
- Online connections with others through [www.myvbsparty.com](http://www.myvbsparty.com)
- A complementary 13-week program (one Sunday School quarter) is available.
- All Director materials are on a single reproducible CD-ROM.

### **Weaknesses:**

- Heavy emphasis on salvation, receiving Christ as Savior and sole pathway to God.
- No focus on Mission. Catalog refers to [www.glww.org](http://www.glww.org) for mission ideas to make Bible materials available to children in foreign lands.
- Copious amounts of extras are promoted to reinforce the beach theme. Decorating "props" alone could add several hundred dollars to costs. Super Starter kit costs \$199.99.
- Some snack ideas are fun as well as nutritious, but more are heavy on sugar. A few recipes contain allergenic ingredients.

*J. Walker*