Dear Friends:

**Welcome to the 2007 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 “**Top Picks**.” These merit serious consideration based on the following criteria:

1) Theology: the love of God is emphasized more than the sinfulness of humans.
2) Unity: a distinctive theme supports a cohesive program of stories & activities.
3) Inclusiveness: text and graphics represent all God’s people with respect and stereotypes are avoided.

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.”

This year you’ll find a new category, “**Perennial Picks**”. These programs were among our “Top Picks” in previous years, and they are still in print and available for purchase. If your parish has not yet used them, we recommend you consider them for VBS or other kinds of programs.

The attached list of VBS curricula we reviewed gives a brief description, some strengths and weaknesses, and publisher/price information.

Thank you for visiting our website. We welcome your suggestions and feedback.

Sincerely yours,

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VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL FAIR
FEBRUARY 2007

LIST OF PUBLISHERS AND PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

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CMT TOP PICKS
Be Bold! God is with you

Mennonite Publishing Network
800.245.7894
Starter Kit: $129.99
www.mph.org/vbs

Be Bold! God is with you encourages children to trust in God in times of fear, danger, change and loss. This is accomplished through a rotation curriculum using the Bible stories of Jeremiah, Ruth, Mary & Joseph, and Peter & Ananias. Each day participants see a Bible story drama during worship. Then as members of small groups, they reflect on the story and rotate to two of the “Courage Connections” activity stations. Throughout the week children learn that it’s OK to have fears and that they have choices in how to respond to those fears.

Ages Levels:  Early Childhood (ages 4 through kindergarten)
Primary (grades 1 & 2)
Middler (grades 3-5)
Junior Youth (grades 6-8)

Includes:

___ Clip Art/Reproducible CD ___ Music Action Training DVD
X Music CD ___ Skits/Drama DVD
X Alternate schedule: Available in Directors Guide.

Strengths:

• Stresses God’s love for all people in all circumstances.
• Stays focused on the education of children – activities are appealing and enjoyable but without distracting gimmics nor unrelated themes.
• Activities focus on themes of facing fears and trusting God when afraid.
• Encourages children and youth to reflect upon daily Bible themes, ask questions, name their feelings, and talk about their experiences.
• Suggests giving each child a special blessing upon parting.
• Provides effective, straight-forward dramas of the daily Bible stories.
• Offers opening and closing worship service.
• Provides simple and lively songs.
• Offers a mission opportunity for children.
• Offers a separate preschool/kindergarten curriculum.
• Easy-to-use.

Weaknesses:

• Other denominations may feel the need to make modifications to the program, substituting some of their own mission sites for example, which would require additional effort.
• Daily snack ideas are not included
• Daily game ideas are not included
Bible Adventures: Sharing the Good News

The United Church of Canada
800.288.7365
Starter Kit: $49.95
www.united-church.ca/bibleadventures/

*Bible Adventures: Sharing the Good News* is a 5-session program that encourages all learners to be Adventurers, sailing the sometimes smooth and sometimes stormy seas of faith. This flexible program is designed to help children see that people of faith working together can add Good News of caring, peace, and justice-making to their world. The program shares this message through the examples of faithful people like Paul and the early Christians. This curriculum offers children the opportunity to explore biblical stories within a caring, respectful community.

**Ages Levels:** Multi-age (suggested for ages 5 – 12)

**Includes:**

- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- Alternate schedule: Available in Director’s Guide.

**Strengths:**

- Promotes a loving God.
- Good for small congregations.
- Is creative and theologically sound.
- Emphasizes a set of clearly defined “key principles” that are designed to create a community of caring and respect.
- Emphasizes that sharing the good news means serving others.
- Provides dramatic storytelling that brings alive stories of Paul and early Christians.
- Provides an open planning concept that prompts leaders to carefully consider which VBS format would be best for their church.
- Introduces learners to praying with movement and activities.
- Easy-to-make snacks partner well with each day’s theme.
- Provides simple and lively music.
- Includes all resources in starter pack, eliminating additional costs.

**Weaknesses:**

- No preschool program offered.
- Mission project is not included in the curriculum.
- Games and crafts may seem childish to older elementary learners.
- Is not gimmicky and glitzy, which may be perceived as uninteresting.
Galilee by-the sea immerses learners of all ages in the culture of Jesus’ time, helping participants to explore what it might have been like to live when Jesus did. For teachers familiar with the old Marketplace A.D. curricula, this will look familiar, as much of the material is drawn from it. In a rotational format, participants move through the day with their tribes, visiting the synagogue, the seaside playground and shops in the marketplace. All tribes come together for opening & closing Gatherings for singing, worship and emphasis of the day’s “Bible point.”

Ages Levels:  Intergenerational by design
Alternate plan for children’s ministry event is described
Alternate preschool plan is outlined

Includes:  ** Clip Art/Reproducible CD  ____ Music Action Training DVD
X  Music CD  ____ Skits/Drama DVD
___ Alternate schedule
* not in Starter Kit, hence nor reviewed

Strengths:
- Gives opportunity to learn much about our Jewish heritage, from the Shema, Torah scrolls and seder foods to yarmulkes and lighting an oil lamp with a blessing.
- An authentic connection between the title/theme and the various activities distinguishes this from most VBS curricula.
- Variety of Bible-times games, crafts, shops and worship & household customs makes this appealing for all ages. Participants have the opportunity to cast nets, carry baskets on their heads, practice stone carving, etc. Authentic crafts are of excellent quality.
- Includes experiential learning methods, such as shaking someone’s very muddy hand to understand how repulsed people in Jesus’ time were by leprosy.
- Excellent drama script is provided for each of the daily stories: Jesus choosing first disciples; Jesus teaching (sermon on the mount); Jesus healing; Jesus calming the storm; the Great Commission. Dramas are performed in the marketplace and make the events and characters seem real.
- Introduces the concept that Jesus was a very puzzling person to his contemporaries.
- Includes a live animal barnyard, which children would love.

Weaknesses:
- There is a lot of set-up and costuming to do for this VBS, though instructions are clear and thorough, and churches are encouraged to adapt and just do what they can do.
- Expensive if you purchase all the crafts, tribe bandannas, decorating resources, etc. which are offered.
- While some of the music is reminiscent of Jewish folk music, the lyrics are Christian. It is disappointing that some actual Jewish songs & dances were not included.
Take the Plunge! Make a Splash with Jesus!
Standard Publishing
1.800.543.1353
Starter Kit: $64.99
www.vacationbibleschool.com

Based on a water park theme, *Take the Plunge! Make a Splash with Jesus!* explores the teachings of Jesus that occurred in or around water. Each day participants will investigate new topics, including obedience, worship, courage, faith and service. The materials can be used in contained classrooms or in rotation, with stations operated by “Park Crews” who offer activities designed to meet the developmental needs of different age groups.

**Ages Levels:**
- Preschool
- Kindergarten
- Primary
- Middler (Grades 3-4)
- 5th/6th
- Teen

**Includes:**
- X Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- — Music Action Training DVD
- X Music CD
- — Skits/Drama DVD
- X Planning DVD
- — Games/Activities CD (reproducible)
- — Alternate schedule

**Strengths:**
- Included in the Director’s Guide is a section about how to include and invite children with special needs.
- Starter kit includes all materials for a basic program; the “Power Pack” ($199.99) adds a craft guide, clip art CD, decorating resources and a drama guide, DVD and puppet pack.
- Materials are colorful and appealing.
- Separate guides are provided for rotation stations (except the crafts guide, available only in the Power Pack), and include a wide range of activities for different age groups.
- Helpful supply lists are provided for different activities.
- Music CD includes both song and music tracks which can be reproduced; music is engaging and joyful. A songbook with words and music is part of the starter kit.
- Training resources in the Director’s Guide and Planning DVD are helpful and instructive.
- Offers open-ended questions without specific answers.

**Weaknesses:**
- Separate “how-to” instructions for salvation that emphasize sin over love are included in training materials.
- Mission and outreach component is somewhat weak.
- Student books could drive the cost up, but are not essential to the overall program.
- Teen guide relies too heavily on resources created for younger students which probably will not work for this age group.
- Ideas for using materials in alternative settings and seasons is not included.
From the publishers who brought us the baobab tree and hush arbor comes a new VBS program inspired by the ingenuity of African Americans who created poetry, music and art during the Harlem Renaissance (1918-1935). Through jazzy songs, rap, movement, art, crafts, foods and poetry children explore the meaning of John 1:1—“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” in their lives. *Word Up!* is not just for African Americans. It is a way for people from all races and cultures to study the Bible through the arts.

**Ages Levels:**  Preschool/Kindergarten  
Younger Elementary  
Older Elementary

**Includes:**  
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- Alternate schedule in Director’s Guide

**Strengths:**  
- Creative use of original music and the arts adds interest for both children and leaders.  
- Scripture background for daily sessions connects God’s love to children’s lives.  
- Outreach to others is emphasized.  
- Interesting background about African American leaders and artists is provided.  
- The format can be used with rotation/activity centers, traditional classrooms, or a combination of classroom and centers; suggested activities take developmental issues into consideration.  
- Music is uplifting, culturally sensitive and contemporary for today’s children; published words and music are available in the music guide.  
- “Heritage Recipes” provides snacks and food that complements each day’s theme.  
- Separate guides and student books for teens and adults are available, but must be purchased separately.  
- Materials are colorful and interesting.

**Weaknesses:**  
- Although the producers emphasize that *Word Up!* is suitable for all children regardless of race or culture, almost all of the pictures in resources (including student books) and people featured in the DVD are African American.  
- Recipes could include healthier choices; for example, adding 3 sticks of butter and 6 cups of Italian dressing to green beans results in an unnecessarily fat-laden vegetable.  
- Student books could drive the cost up, but are not essential to the overall program.
Aslan is on the Move!
Leader Resources
800.941.2218
Downloadable at $44.95 (CD available for additional $10.00)
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:**
- X Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- __ Music Action Training DVD
- __ Music CD
- __ Skits/Drama DVD
- X Alternate Schedule

**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.
Pilgrimage: Seeking the Kingdom of God

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 Campostela, 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 CD
- Alternate Schedule
- Music Action Training DVD
- 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.
Wizards and Wonders: A Hero’s Journey with Harry Potter

Leader Resources
800.941.2218
Downloadable at $44.95 (CD available for additional $10.00)
www.LeaderResources.org

This Vacation Bible Experience uses the popular Harry Potter 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 Harry Potter the Mugwump 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
   ___ Alternate Schedule

Strengths:
   • Inclusion of 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.
Other Reviewed Programs
Avalanche Ranch: A Wild Ride through God’s Word

Group Publishing
800.747.6600
Starter Kit: $129.99
www.groupvbs.com

Group’s Avalanche Ranch is a Bible-based rotation-style program that focuses on one key Bible point daily. Children form “Ranch Crews” which are small groups of mixed-age children that travel together and explore each day’s Bible point. The Bible point is reinforced through Bible stories, Bible verses, songs and hands-on activities that help children know more about God. Children spend the week learning that: God is real, God is with us, God is strong, God is awesome, and God is in charge.

Ages Levels:  Preschool
               Mixed Age Elementary

Includes:

- X  Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- X  Music Action Training DVD
- X  Music CD
- X  Skits/Drama DVD
- X  Alternate schedule – available in Directors Guide although somewhat limited.

Strengths:

- Promotes a loving God.
- Provides an opportunity for each “Ranch Crew” to be featured in a daily power point presentation – Spotlight Drama!
- Fantastic music with movement and hand motions.
- Utilizes a “Daily Challenge” feature which challenges children to show their faith to others. Some challenges include: Say a kind work to an angry person. Clean your room without being asked. Find a bug that shows you God’s creativity.
- Encourages Bible verse memorization made easy with short Bible verses and hand motions.
- Offers children the opportunity to perform special jobs, such as reader, ranch guide, materials manager, coach, or prayer person.
- Offers a separate preschool program.
- Provides an opportunity for children to prepare snacks for the entire VBS once during the week.
- Expanded starter pack limits additional required expenditures.

Weaknesses:

- The treatment of Jesus’ crucifixion, Rahab’s protection of the Israelite spies and other daily Bible story dramas are extreme in their portrayal of violence and may confuse or frighten some children.
- Significant increase in starter pack price could be cost prohibitive for some churches.
Festival of Faith invites children and their teachers 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:

- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- Alternate Schedule

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.
This rotational VBS curriculum uses a sports theme to teach kids how to be heroes. Participants learn that heroes obey (Mary and Joseph); do their best in everything (John the Baptist); follow God’s plan (Jesus’ passion, crucifixion & resurrection); put others first (disciples post-Pentecost), and tell others about Jesus (Priscilla and Aquila). Participants rotate among sites called Worship Rally Arena, Bible Study Locker Room, Music Pep Rally, Crafts Fan Zone, Snacks Concession Stand, Recreation Field House, and Missions Press Box.

**Ages Levels:**
- Preschool
- Kindergarten
- Younger children
- Middle children
- Preteen
- Youth
- Adult
- Special Ed (developmentally challenged adults)

**Includes:**

- **Clip Art/Reproducible CD**
- **Music Action Training DVD**
- **Music CD**
- **Skits/Drama DVD**
- **Alternate schedule:** various alternatives are described in the Administrative Guide for directors.

**Strengths:**

- Sports theme is appealing to all ages.
- Music has actions and the pep rally cheer is indeed peppy:
  - Run, run, run the race!
  - Keep, keep, keep the pace!
  - Run the race.
  - Keep the pace.
  - Keep your eyes on Jesus!
- Offering heroes/heroines is appropriate learning for all age levels.

**Weaknesses:**

- Sin rather than the love of God is stressed. Participants are taught the ABC’s of becoming a Christian: Admit you are a sinner; Believe in Jesus; Confess your faith (tell others).
- Witnessing is assumed to mean telling, rather than listening, asking questions, serving or modeling.
- Activities encourage children to evangelize their family and friends, which may make some children uncomfortable.

MJD
Graduate to Great...the Jesus Way!

UMI
800.860.8642
Starter Kit: $54.99
www.urbanministries.com

The foundation for this motivational VBS program is St. Paul’s statement in Philippians 3:14: “I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus (KJB).” The aim is to motivate children, youth and adults to exercise excellent behavior in the home, church, school and work environment, using their God-given gifts and equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit. The focus is on excellence in relationship with God through trust, faith, prayer, leadership, and determination; in addition, the 10-day program covers hope, discipline, obedience, hard work and excellence. Each day’s theme is grounded in a Bible story, and an appropriate proverb is memorized each day.

Ages Levels:
- Preschool
- Primary
- Junior
- Teens
- Adults (not included in Planning Kit)

Includes:
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- Alternate schedule: allows for 5 or 10 day programs, and for rotation or classroom schedules.

Strengths:
- Motivational and confidence-building for students who lack goals and have low self-esteem
- Imaginative snacks are suggested that match each day’s Bible story
- A Bible lesson and motivational discussions dominate each day, but the day is relieved by games, crafts and snacks.
- Includes a final “Graduation” event.

Weaknesses:
- The crafts involve making such things as crosses and star frames; students may enjoy taking them home but they do not allow for creative expression
- The same ten Bible passages are used for all ages. Some, such as the parable of the talents and Rahab, are not age-appropriate for the youngest.
- Illustrations are exclusively African-American, which may be good for the target market but makes it an inappropriate choice for other communities.
Great Bible Reef
Augsburg Fortress
800.328.4648
Starter Kit: $65.99
www.augsburgfortress.com

Great Bible Reef: Dive Deep into God’s Word is a VBS program designed to celebrate being God’s people through games, songs, stories, crafts, science experiments, and more in an underwater, coral-reef environment. Children experience the importance of discipleship and learn through the daily themes that: God’s people care, God’s people help, God’s people trust, God’s people believe, and God’s people listen.

Ages Levels:
- Preschool
- Kindergarten-Grade 1
- Grades 2-3
- Grades 4-6

Includes:
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Video DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- Alternate Schedule: Available in Directors Guide.

Strengths:
- Promotes a loving God.
- Emphasizes “showing others the love of God” through our actions.
- Provides a unique mission opportunity for learners.
- Take-home cards and Bible books offer ideas for family activities as well as access to additional games and activities on website.
- Provides short and easy-to-remember Bible verse memorization.
- Offers a separate preschool program.
- Offers multiple daily craft suggestions that are appropriate for each grade group.
- Encourages older youth participation.
- Offers creative ways of retelling the Bible stories.
- Bible book illustrations are creative and multi-cultural.
- Provides a Youth and Adult Study component.
- Offers age appropriate “transition tips” for movement from activity sites.

Weaknesses:
- Additional expenditures: Bible books, a music CD, and a DVD are required purchases but not included in the starter pack.
- Requires considerable effort and preparation by teachers because of the variety of grade level activities.
- Coral reef as a metaphor for the Kingdom of God is a stretch and becomes hokey. The focus on dolphins, sea horses, shells & such in games & crafts distracts attention from the discipleship theme. The use of star fish and jelly fish to tell Bible stories trivializes them.
- “Seawater Science” rotation gives no real information on the imperiled coral reefs, though it does say corals are alive and we should take care of our oceans.

LLD
**Lift Off! Soaring to New Heights with God**

Cokesbury
800.251.8591
Starter Kit: $64.99
www.cokesbury.com

*Lift Off! Soaring to New Heights With God* is a Bible-based VBS program that uses a hot air balloon theme to provide children a “sky high” view of God’s power and Jesus’ love. Each day children explore a story from the Bible and discover the five “Flight Plans” that will help them soar to new heights with God: I will follow, I will trust, I will listen, I will repent, and I will serve. Each day ends with “Reflection Time,” in which Sky Scout group leaders pull together everything children have experienced during the day.

**Ages Levels:** Preschool
Kindergarten
Young Elementary
Preteen

**Includes:**
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- Alternate schedule: Available in Directors Guide.

**Strengths:**
- Promotes a loving God.
- Offers a mission project.
- Offers both an interactive drama and storytelling option for retelling the Bible stories.
- Uses lively music with easy repeatable lyrics and easy-to-learn hand motions.
- Offers a science center where children will explore science and hot air ballooning.
- Uses sign language to assist in Bible verse memorization.
- Comes in a Smaller Church version, and a Spanish edition.
- Teaches a daily “Power Prayer” from the Psalms that supports that day’s Bible story.
- Offers a separate preschool program.
- Offers ideas for middle school youth participation.
- Is easy-to-use.

**Weaknesses:**
- Requires additional expenditures: DVD for Assembly Time, Flight Plan student books, and Skylar the Sky Squirrel puppet.
- Daily “Power Prayer” launch supports the mythology that heaven is “up there” and our prayers are being “launched” into the sky.
- Children may be uncomfortable exchanging prayer requests with others.
- Promotes a literal interpretation of the Bible stories by indicating to children that the events “really happened.”
The theme of this rotational curriculum is an archeological quest for the truth about Jesus. Actually, the curriculum teaches five Biblical stories (Jesus’ birth and baptism, healing of ten lepers, the empty tomb, and Pentecost) as “proof” that Jesus is the way, the truth and the light. This curriculum’s objective is to teach that Jesus is the sole way to God and salvation.

**Ages Levels:** Preschool (3-5 years)
Youth (teens)
6-12 years

**Includes:**

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<th>Music Action Training DVD</th>
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<td>Music CD</td>
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**Strengths:**

- A well-organized program with an effective learning schedule. All students begin each day at Base Camp and conclude it at the Truth Teller Rally. Both events stress the day’s Biblical text and theme. In-between, students rotate among five sites (story, games, memory challenge, crafts, & food) which reinforce the day’s theme and text.
- The music CD offers peppy, singable songs on the daily themes, as well as appropriate hymns.

**Weaknesses:**

- *Quest for Truth* is supposedly an archeological quest, but the archeological theme is not well executed. The program uses the written word of Scripture as evidence; in contrast, archeologists examine physical remains in their search for truth. It is curious that the DVD shows Dakota Joe looking for the truth about Jesus in the jungles of Costa Rica, though the selected Biblical events occurred in Bethlehem, Galilee and Jerusalem.
- The crafts are pre-packaged pinball machines, witness beads etc., which do not allow creative expression.
- Churches that want to prepare children for respectful relationships with people of other faiths will find the theology of this program unacceptable. Children are taught that Jesus is the ONLY way to heaven; the songs reinforce that NO ONE comes to the Father except through Jesus. The Bible is considered to be God’s infallible Word and the sole source for Christian doctrine.
SonForce Kids: Special Agents

Gospel Light  
800.446.7735  
Starter Kit: $69.99  
www.gospellightvbs.com/sonforce/

SonForce Kids: Special Agents is a theme based VBS program that invites children to imagine they are on a satellite orbiting high above earth. Children will have the opportunity to grow in their understanding of what it means to serve God with courage as they advance from Level 1 to Level 5 agents over the course of the week. Learning from Old Testament stories, Level 1 agents are invited to TRUST in God’s plan. Level 2 agents are encouraged to UNITE with God’s People, and level 3 agents learn to TRAIN for God’s service. Level 4 agents FOLLOW in God’s path and Level 5 agents get ready to LEAD others to God’s promises.

Ages Levels:  
Prekindergarten/Kindergarten (ages 3 to 6)  
Primary (ages 6 to 8)  
Middler (ages 8 to 10)  
Preteen (ages 10 to 12)

Includes:  
X Clip Art/Reproducible CD  
X Music Action Training DVD  
X Music CD  
X Skits/Drama DVD  
X Alternate schedule: Available in Directors Guide.

Strengths:  
• Promotes a loving God.  
• Includes complete Directors Guide on CD Rom that offers all forms in a customizable format.  
• Offers multiple class formats and various scheduling options.  
• Includes a special events section that contains ideas for expanding SonForce Kids outside congregation or beyond 5 days.  
• Music connects well with the Bible stories for each day.  
• Offers a separate preschool/kindergarten curriculum.  
• Relates the daily theme from an Old Testament story to the New Testament very well.  
• Offers a mission center option with several mission opportunities as well as a daily service project for every age level.

Weaknesses:  
• Teaches that choosing Jesus as personal savior is the only way to become a part of God’s family, even though the daily missions use the stories of Moses, Esther and other Old Testament characters to teach how to serve God.  
• Additional required expenditures: Activity books, Assemblies and Skit Production guide and DVD.
The Good Life Curriculum: 5 Lessons to Nurture Simplicity within Christian Communities

Alternatives for Simple Living
800.821.6153
Kit: $35.00
www.SimpleLiving.org

Based on the “Five Life Standards” of Living More with Less by Christine Battjes, this curriculum is designed to teach positive life lessons to counter cultural forces that erode Christian values. Learners are invited to gather and worship with lots of music and a dramatic Scripture presentation. They then move on to participate in indoor games, which are opportunities for learners to experience the lesson in body and soul as well as exploring the reflection questions at the end. Learners will then break into small groups and explore the theme for the day in a more concrete way. Sometimes a story is used, sometimes learners are asked to do a short project; whatever the form, the purpose is to teach the participants the five standards of living simply. Finally, participants are given a variety of options that provide a chance to put the lesson of the day into action. Collecting food, writing a letter for peace and justice, making a recycled sculpture, or creating a family or personal pledge are just a few of the choices available.

Age Levels: Intergenerational

Includes:

- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- Alternate Schedule

Strengths:
- Emphasizes a loving God.
- Is creative and theologically sound.
- Provides simple and lively music.
- Created for children or intergenerational gatherings.
- Designed to be used for Vacation Bible School, camps, midweek school, or confirmation supplement.
- Designed to teach positive life lessons based on five standards of living simply: 1. Do justice. 2. Cherish the natural order. 3. Learn from the world community. 4. Nurture people. 5. Nonconform freely.
- Upbeat and entertaining scripture drama is presented daily.

Weaknesses:
- Geared toward older elementary school aged children.
- Snack ideas are not included in the curriculum.
- Craft ideas are not included in the curriculum.
- Requires considerable preparation by teachers.
- Game ideas are not outdoor/active games.
This evangelical rotation program is set in the Wild West and is designed to lead children to accept Jesus as Savior. Children are “deputies” assigned to a “posse” by age level. Each day begins and ends with every posse gathered in The Barn for a skit of the day’s Bible story, singing, and prayer. Between those sessions all posses rotate among Cowpoke Crafts, Goldrush Games, Mustang Memory, and Rattlesnake Snacks.

**Ages Levels:**  Elementary  
Early Childhood

**Includes:**  

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| Alternate schedule: 2 sessions daily, 9:00 – 11:30 a.m. & 6:00 – 8:30 p.m. |

**Strengths:**

- Includes a mix of Old Testament and New Testament stories: Moses – Crossing the Red Sea; Jonah and the great fish; Paul testifying before King Agrippa; Jesus and Zacchaeus; and Jesus’ promise to prepare a place for us (John 14:1-6).
- “Goldrush Games” provides both energetic and slowpoke play opportunities, a number using refreshing water.
- “Rattlesnake Snacks” gives instructions for theme-based, interactive snacks which encourage children to play with their food! Example: using a pancake, whipped cream, berries and chocolate kisses, make a frown face for Saul; then change it to a smile face when he becomes Paul.

**Weaknesses:**

- The pressure to convert, to tell three friends about Jesus, and to invite friends to the VBS could be hard on some children and is not likely to foster a mature faith.
WaterWorks! Park
Cook Communications Ministries
1.800.323.7543
Starter Kit: $99.99
www.cookvbs.com

Waterworks! Park: Where Kids Ride the Wave of God’s Love uses biblical stories with water images to develop in children an understanding of the relationship God wants to have with them. Using the rotation model, five stations or “theme parks” explore five stories from the Old and New Testaments. Leading children to Jesus by helping them discover Jesus as their savior is emphasized in the adult leader materials, but is given less emphasis in the actual activities.

Ages Levels:
- Preschool
- Elementary (Grades 1 – 5)
- Teen and adult guides available as free downloads

Includes:
- X Clip Art/ Reproducible CD
- X Music Action Training DVD
- X Music CD
- ___ Skits/Drama DVD
- X Alternate schedules in Director’s Guide

Strengths:
- The materials in the kit include everything needed for any size VBS
- The resources are colorful and appealing, with active games and themes snack ideas.
- Ideas for other ways to use materials are provided in the Director’s Guide.
- Helpful supply lists are included in the guides for each day’s activities
- A separate preschool guide provides alternative activities and ideas for young children
- Music is upbeat and joyful and the CD includes both song and music tracks
- Music rotation guide includes written music with words to be used with the CD
- Includes a mission/outreach component

Weaknesses:
- Although the Director’s Guide includes a wide array of information from planning to training to implementing WaterWorks, it is not user friendly. The reader, for example, had to infer that a theme park was a rotation station.
- A sample of the booklet to be used in the outreach project to children in India uses a comic-book approach to the life of Christ that is simplistic and culturally insensitive to its target audience.
- The scripted skits that open each day and those in the drama rotation do not allow the children an opportunity to express their own understanding of the biblical story.
- Experience and knowledge of volunteers is not tapped; they work from scripts and a set of questions with answers that leave little room for their own input.
- Prayer suggestions in individual guides for a child might pressure him or her to make a premature declaration of faith.

DSL