Dear Friends:

Welcome to the 2008 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.” You’ll find them on display in the center of the exhibit area. 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.

“Perennial Picks” are programs that were “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.”

Each review provides a brief description, some strengths and weaknesses, and publisher/price information.

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

Sincerely,

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VACATION BIBLE SCHOOL FAIR
FEBRUARY 2008

LIST OF PUBLISHERS AND PROGRAM EVALUATIONS

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- Outrigger Island
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CMT TOP PICKS
Jerusalem Marketplace is an intergenerational program that immerses participants of all ages in the culture of Jesus’ time. Preschoolers through adults explore new traditions and discover new skills. Through-out the week participants step back into Jesus’ time by exploring authentic traditions, creating handmade projects and tasting and smelling exotic foods. Using a rotational format, participants move through the day with their tribes, visiting a synagogue school, the village playground and shops in the marketplace. All tribes come together for opening and closing gatherings for singing, worship and emphasis of the day’s “Bible point.”

Ages Levels: Intergenerational, preschool up.

Includes:

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

Strengths:

- Entertaining drama script is provided for each daily story: Jesus is King, Jesus sharing Passover with disciples, Jesus is arrested, Jesus is crucified, and Jesus rises from the dead. Dramas are performed in the marketplace, which make the events and characters seem real.
- An authentic connection between the title/theme and the various activities distinguishes this from most VBS curricula.
- Offers an abundance of information about daily life during Jesus’ time on earth.
- The Jerusalem Marketplace concept provides multi-sensory opportunities to experience traditional Jewish customs.
- Includes suggestions for creating a live animal barnyard, which children would love.

Weaknesses:

- Illustrations of Jewish community in published resources are caricatures.
- Personal opinions and biases of writers result in slanted interpretations of the biblical text.
- Ambitious undertaking involving marketplace set-up, costumes, drama team recruitment, and live animal barnyard.
- Potentially expensive, if you purchase the recommended tribal bandannas, banners, oil lamps, craft kits, etc.
Listen UP! Messages from God is a rotation-style curriculum that shares with children the stories of biblical prophets who brought messages from God to their people, sharing how much God loved and wanted a relationship with them. Through the stories of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jonah, Amos, and Daniel, children will learn that God’s message remains true today. They also discover how they can share God’s messages of hope, transformation, mercy, justice, and faithfulness to others through their words and actions. Children are introduced to the Bible story during daily worship then they break into small groups to reflect on the story. Afterward they rotate to two activity with hands-on activities.

**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
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- 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 without distracting gimmicks or unrelated themes.
- Activities focus directly on themes of hope, transformation, mercy, justice, and faithfulness.
- 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 services.
- Provides simple and lively songs.
- Offers a mission opportunity for children.
- Offers a separate preschool/kindergarten curriculum.
- Provides a variety of examples for multiple formats and settings.

**Weaknesses:**

- Other denominations may want to substitute their own mission sites for outreach activities.
- Daily snack ideas are not included.
- Daily game ideas are not included.
Rainforest Adventure: A Tree Top Bible Blast!
Augsburg Fortress
800.328.4648
Starter Kit: $69.99
www.thevbsplace.org

Rainforest Adventure: A Tree Top Bible Blast! is a God-centered rotation program that helps children experience the importance of stewardship, or “how we can live each and every day as we care for what God has so generously given us.” Kids are engaged in assembly worship, Bible stories, games, videos, crafts, dramatic activities, science experiments, songs and a mission project. Each day’s activities intentionally connect to a Bible story, Bible memory verse and stewardship theme:

1. Boaz Shares with Ruth (Ruth 2:1-17)—We Share
2. Elisha Gives Food to 100 People (2 Kings 4:42-44)—We Give
3. Parable of the Mustard Seed (Mark 4:30-32)—We Grow
4. Jesus the Vine (John 15:1-5,7-17)—We Love
5. Jesus Enters Jerusalem (Mark 11:1-10)—We Praise

Age levels:  
Preschool       Young Elementary
Kindergarten    Middle Elementary

Includes:  
___ Clip Art/Reproducible CD  ** Music Action Training DVD
___ Music CD (sampler only) ** Storytelling DVD
X Alternate schedule

** not included in starter pack; unable to review

Strengths:
- Promotes and encourages children to respond to God’s generosity and love.
- Encourages kids to explore their relationship with God with open-ended questions.
- Promotes a “Go Green” environmental message.
- Accurate rainforest facts are presented throughout the week.
- Presented from a global perspective.
- Crafts ideas are imaginative and encourage the use of natural and recycled materials.
- Guide provides detailed options for 35 crafts, 20 snacks, 25 science experiments and 35 games.
- Children actively involved in science experiments.
- Music is appealing and aids in memorizing the daily Bible verse.
- Extended previews and a message board are available online for questions.
- Perforated pages make for easy and permissible photocopying.

Weaknesses:
- Starter Kit comes only with a music preview.
- Variety of age-appropriate crafts require significant preparation.
- While intentionally diverse and representative of First century Palestine, the biblical scenes in the student books superimpose photographs on sketches creating a curious juxtaposition.

MLH
Walk it out: Together in the way of Jesus
Abingdon Publishing
800.672.1789
Starter Kit: $62
www.cokesbury.com

Walk it out: Together in the way of Jesus is an intergenerational and multicultural Christian education resource designed for Vacation Bible School, summer enrichment camp, Sunday school, mid-week class or other youth and children’s program. Participants experience the joy of using their minds and bodies for God through dancing, marching, singing, praying and shouting as well as listening to Bible lessons that apply to their daily lives. Children will learn about grace, power, persistence, and the joy of learning and walking together in the light of God through the lives of James Lawson, Ruby Sales, Bernice Johnson Reagon, Andrew Young and Delores Huerta, all heroes of the mid-20th century Freedom Movement. Walk it out encourages participants to “get to stepping,” by using their bodies for God, and to never stop trying.

Ages Levels:
- Preschool/Kindergarten
- Younger Elementary (grades 1-3)
- Older Elementary (grades 4-6)
- Teen

Includes:
- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- Alternate schedule

Strengths:
- Stresses God’s absolute love for all.
- Provides both original contemporary and traditional freedom music that all ages will enjoy; published words and music available in the music guide.
- Reinforces praying in every situation.
- Connects Biblical stories with significant events from the Freedom Movement.
- Offers daily outreach “action projects” that help participants and their congregations reaffirm daily themes throughout the year.
- Teaches about little-known African American leaders and tells the story of the civil rights movement.
- Offers alternate schedules for a variety of settings.
- “Heritage Recipes” provides snacks and food that complements each day’s theme.
- Children use movement and dance to connect with previous generations and to express their love of God.

Weaknesses:
- Even though Talk it out! is suitable for all children, the majority of the pictures in resources (including student books) and people featured in the DVD are African American.
- Recipes could include healthier choices.
- Student books could drive the cost up, but are not essential to the overall program.
Perennial Picks
Aslan is on the Move!
Leader Resources
800.941.2218
Downloadable at $59.95 (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 CD
- ___ Music Action Training DVD
- ___ 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.
**Bible Adventures: Sharing the Good News**
The United Church of Canada
800.288.7365
Starter Kit: $49.95

*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.
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

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.
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:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clip Art/Reproducible CD</td>
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<td>Music CD</td>
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<td>Music Action Training DVD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Skits/Drama DVD</td>
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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.
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
- 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 $59.95 (CD available for additional $10.00)
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 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

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.
Other Reviewed Programs
Beach Party: Surfin' Through the Scriptures
Cokesbury
800.672.1789
Starter Kit: $64.99
www.cokesburyvbs.com

*Beach Party: Surfin’ Through the* Scriptures introduces children to people from the Bible and teaches children to be followers of and believers in Jesus. Five daily Bible stories as well as “Beach Be-Attitudes” are introduced to the children each day at the “Surfs Up” opening assembly.

Day 1: Call of Gideon (Judges 6:14-15; 6:36-21) - Be Obedient
Day 2: David's Kindness to Mephibosheth (2 Samuel 9:1-11) - Be kind
Day 3: The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-33) - Be Forgiving
Day 4: A Woman Healed (Luke 8:40-48) - Be bold
Day 5: Jesus and Thomas (John 20:24-29) - Believe

Each day’s theme is reinforced as children rotate to five different stations where they experience a Biblical story, learn songs, create beach souvenirs, and science projects. Each day ends with “Reflection Time,” in which group leaders pull together everything children have experienced during the day.

Age levels:
- Preschool
- Kindergarten
- Young Elementary
- Middle Elementary
- Preteen

Includes:
- ** Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- ** Music Action Training DVD
- X Music CD with Power point
- ** Skits/Drama DVD
- X Alternate schedule
- X Bible Storyteller & Sound Effects CD

Strengths:
- Promotes ways to love God.
- Relates that even in times of unbelief (such as Thomas), Jesus will be with them.
- Offers a variety of easy-to-use models for both rotation and classroom settings with numerous scheduling formats.
- Offers a separate preschool program, ideas for middle school youth participation, Spanish language resources, intergenerational suggestions and a Smaller Church edition.
- Invites children to explore aspects of faith through simple science at a discovery center.
- Uses memorization of scripture.

Weaknesses:
- Requires additional expenditures: DVD for Assembly Time ($24.99), Student activity booklets ($2.50 each), & Flamé the Flamingo Puppet ($29.99.)
- Student activity booklets for Preschool and Kindergarten may not be age appropriate.
- The call to “Be Bold” and tell others about Jesus may make some children uncomfortable.
- Comparisons with the sea anemone/clownfish and baby sea turtles may prompt questions. For example, baby sea turtles remind us to “be bold in our faith” yet very few survive until adulthood.
- While the music is catchy, older children might find the lyrics dry and shallow.
- Focuses on how to love God overshadows God’s love.

MLH
The theme of *Chosen Champions for Jesus* is from 1 Peter 2:9: “You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God (NIV).” The aim is for children to “understand their potential in Jesus Christ to set spiritual, emotional, and physical goals that result in achieving success in their relationship with God and others.” The themes for the 10-day program are: Champions take care of God’s creation, pray for God’s help, take up justice for others, seek salvation through Jesus, worship God in spirit and truth, share the Good News, praise God, practice hospitality, and are faithful workers. Each day’s theme is grounded in a Bible story, and children are asked to memorize an appropriate Bible verse each day.

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

### Includes:
- X Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- X Music CD (theme song only)
- Skits/Drama DVD
- X Alternate schedule: allows for 5 or 10 day program, as well as classroom or rotation schedules.

### Strengths:
- A Bible lesson and motivational discussion dominate each day, but are relieved by games, crafts and snacks.
- Encourages Bible verse memorization using group activities.
- “Slam Dunk snacks” are imaginative and match each day’s theme.
- Opportunity for children to be introduced to a different African-American champion each day (not included in the starter pack).
- Includes a separate preschool program.

### Weaknesses:
- Salvation emphasis may be inappropriate for some parishes.
- Craft kits must be purchased separately and do not allow for the creative expression of either leaders or children.
- Although it has an optional rotational schedule, modifying the existing schedule would be challenging.
- Focusing on a different African-American champion each day is unique but requires an additional purchase and could be cost prohibitive to some parishes.
- Theme song CD is included in starter pack; complete music CD must be purchased separately.
Using a rotational format, *Cosmic City™: Explore the Awesome Wonder of God* takes children on a tour of a floating space city that is filled with music, Bible stories, science experiments and games. During the week children will learn that God is awesome and that they can worship him, count on him, believe in him, trust him, and tell others about Jesus. A new feature this year, included in the starter kit, is the *Cosmic City™: Outer Limits*, a separate section designed specifically for older children in fourth through sixth grade.

**Ages Levels:**  Preschool  
Elementary  
Upper Elementary

**Includes:**

- X Clip Art/Reproducible CD  
- ** Music Action Training DVD  
- X Music CD  
- ___ Skits/Drama DVD  
- X Alternate schedule  

**Strengths:**

- Promotes a loving God that children can trust and rely upon.  
- Science projects complement the daily Bible stories.  
- Offers a separate preschool program.  
- Offers a variety of examples for multiple formats and settings.  
- Uses puppets for skits and drama activities for younger children and more age appropriate drama activities for older children.  
- Introduces contemplative prayer practices to older children.  
- Daily take-home pages, available at additional cost, review theme for the day and offer family activity ideas.  
- The “Live-it” suggestions provide ways in which children can put their faith in action.  
- Provides lively music with hand motions.

**Weaknesses:**

- Although the Director’s Guide provides information from planning and training to implementing *Cosmic City*, it is not user friendly. It is unclear how the Elementary Program, which is included in the Director’s Guide, and the “new” Upper Elementary that comes separately are used together.  
- A sample of the booklet to be distributed to children in Brazil as an outreach project 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.
Custom Garage: Loving God, Serving Others
WordAction
800.877.0700
Starter Kit: 79.99
www.vbs2008.com

*Custom Garage* is a rotation-style program where children spend the week learning how to love God and serve others using the theme of a *Custom Garage* that designs and maintains custom-built cars. Each day children learn a different biblical truth that focuses on a daily “life point”: Love God, Be Ready, Stand Strong, Be Smart and Love Others. Children begin and end their day at the “Service Center” where they watch a skit of the day’s Bible story, and sing and pray. Between those sessions they rotate among “Tool Talk” where they hear Bible stories, “Road Map” where they learn Bible verses, “Custom Designs” to complete crafts and/or learn about community service projects, and “Filling Station” for snacks and object lessons.

**Ages Levels:** Early Childhood
Elementary

**Includes:**

- Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- Music Action Training DVD
- Music CD
- Skits/Drama DVD
- Alternate schedule
- Morning and evening sessions only

**Strengths:**

- Emphasizes God’s love for all and how we should all love one another.
- Includes a clear statement of theology and education principles.
- The craft/community service rotation offers either a daily craft about the theme or a community service project idea.
- Stresses the importance of Bible verse memorization.
- Daily opening and closing DVD dramas are upbeat and entertaining and are included in the starter kit.
- Snacks partner well with the daily theme and allow for creativity. For example, on day three children build a “custom garage” out of graham crackers, cake frosting, and candy.
- Music is upbeat and lively and includes hand motions; the starter kit includes a reproducible CD.
- Offers a separate preschool program.

**Weaknesses:**

- Sharing the “plan of salvation” and the “ABC’s of salvation” with children may make some children uncomfortable.
- The pressure to bring friends to VBS and to share God’s love with a neighbor could be difficult for some children.
DinoDetectives: Digging for God’s Truth

DinoDetectives: Digging for God’s Truth is a traditional classroom-style VBS program designed to celebrate God’s creation with children through Bible lessons, skits, games, and crafts. Children are guided on daily digs learning about dinosaurs and focusing on important life questions: Who am I? Why am I here? How did I get here? and Who makes the rules? Based on the theology of Creationism, the stories and activities come from a very literal interpretation of the Bible. Each day children are taught that God gave us the Bible to teach them how to become a part of God’s family through Jesus Christ.

Ages Levels: 2’s & 3’s
Pre-Primary
Primary
Middler
Junior
Youth

Includes:

** ClipArt & Resources
** Music CD
** Music Action Training DVD
__ Skits/Drama DVD
__ Alternate schedule

**must be purchased separately and not reviewed

Strengths:

▪ Teaches that each child is unique and specially designed by God.
▪ Uses interactive Bible stores to encourage participation by children.
▪ Offer’s an adult study for parents.
▪ Encourages positive reinforcement of good behavior.
▪ Offers a mission opportunity for children.

Weaknesses:

▪ Sin, rather than the love of God is emphasized.
▪ Activities encourage children to evangelize their family and friends, which may make some children uncomfortable.
▪ Witnessing is assumed to be telling, rather than listening, asking questions, serving or modeling.
▪ Teaches that choosing Jesus as their personal savior is the only way to become a part of God’s family. This goes against the Episcopal beliefs around baptism and may hinder children in developing relationships with those of other faiths.
▪ Portrayal of the way that Satan “tricks” children into sinning may frighten some children.
▪ Indicates that classroom-style program can be adapted to any situation, but does not give examples.

LLD
Friendship Trek: Jesus our Forever Friend
Concordia
800.325.3040
Starter Kit: $74.99
http://vbs.cph.org/2008/

*Friendship Trek: Jesus our Forever Friend* is a Christ-centered Bible learning experience where children explore a different Bible story each day to learn how Jesus, our friend, reaches out, loves, gives gifts, cares, and shares. Children begin the day at the “Trailhead Opening” where they meet in “Friendship Circles” with their “Circle Guides” (small groups and leaders). They sing, pray, and start the day with an opening skit that focuses on the daily Bible story. Then kids move on to five rotation sites where they “unpack” the story and explore the friendship Jesus offers. At the end of the day, everyone gathers at “Friendship Summit Closing” to sing, pray, and participate in a closing skit.

**Ages Levels:** Preschool
Elementary
Youth

**Includes:**

- ** Clip Art/Reproducible CD
- ** Music Action Training DVD
- X Music CD
- ** Skits/Drama DVD
- X Alternate schedule

** must be purchased separately and not reviewed

**Strengths:**

- Reinforces Bible verse memorization with recorded rhythm and hand motions.
- Offers a separate Preschool program.

**Weaknesses:**

- Heavy emphasis on sin overwhelms the Jesus as our friend theme.
- Encourages evangelizing friends that may make some children uncomfortable.
- Parallel between “Buddy and his forest friends” and Bible stories are a stretch. Day 1, for example, features “Raya Raccoon” reaching out to do tasks or get food just like Jesus reaches out to make friends.
- Additional expenditures: Storytelling Leader Pack, Circle Guide Book, Trek Guides, Opening and Closing Leader Pack are all essential parts of the program but are not included in the starter pack.
- Recorded narrations of Bible stories may not appeal to children.
God’s Big Back Yard
Standard Publishing
800.543.1353
$69.99
http://www.standardpub.com/VBS/

Standard’s God’s Big Back Yard is a Bible-based rotation program that teaches one biblical theme or concept each day. Children are placed into small groups that travel together to various stations and explore the key Bible story of the day. The Bible story is reinforced through exploration of the Bible verse, songs, videos, skits, and a variety of hands-on activities. The five-day program focuses on serving family, friends, neighbors, community, and Jesus.

Ages Levels:  Preschool
Elementary
Preteen

Includes:

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Clip Art/Reproducible CD</th>
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<th>Music Action Training DVD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Music CD</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>Puppet scripts CD</td>
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<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Alternate schedule</td>
<td>**</td>
<td>Community Corner DVD</td>
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</tbody>
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** not included in starter pack; unable to review

Strengths:

- Promotes the love of God.
- Uses lively music with easy-to-learn hand motions (written instructions provided in starter pack).
- Provides an opportunity for children to prepare their own snacks that reinforce the daily Bible story.
- Offers a separate preschool, elementary, and preteen program.
- Utilizes a daily challenge feature called “It’s Your Serve” that allows children to serve Jesus by serving others. Some challenges include: Take out the trash. Give food to a homeless shelter. Share your toys. Say “hi” to new kids at church and school.
- Offers a mission opportunity for children.
- Elementary & preteen participants spend time at 6 different stations throughout the day.

Weaknesses:

- Children will learn only one Bible verse during the entire five days.
- The starter kit is lacking essentials for some stations such as the puppet pack & community corner DVD.
- Discretion is needed based on children's income status if offerings are collected at the morning gathering.
Outrigger Island: Living God’s Unshakeable Truth is a rotation curriculum that teaches students to know, speak, and live God's truth. Based on a tropical adventure theme, each day “wave riders” of all ages learn the five “waves” of God’s “Unshakeable Truths,” that God is real, Jesus is God’s Son, Jesus is the only way, the Bible is God’s Word, and our actions show what we believe. The truths focus on five key concepts: God, Jesus, salvation, the Bible and self. Children learn through Bible stories and verses, songs and hands-on activities.

**Ages Levels:** Early Childhood/Pre-School (infants through 4 years)  
Kindergarten  Preteen  
Younger Children  Youth  
Middle Children  Adult  
Special Education (developmentally challenged children and adults)

**Includes:**
- [X] Clip Art/Reproducible CD  
- [X] Music Action Training DVD  
- [X] Music CD  
- [ ] Skits/Drama DVD  
- [X] Alternate schedule

**Strengths:**
- Separate guides available for younger children offering appropriate activities and ideas.  
- Easy to make snack suggestions.  
- Includes a section for special needs children in Leader’s guide.  
- Included in the Director’s guide are alternate schedules to best fit the needs of your church.  
- Music training DVD helps children learn songs with on-screen lyrics and motions.  
- Music rotation guide includes written music with words to be used with the DVD.  
- Includes a mission/outreach component.  
- Spanish edition available.

**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.)  
- Activities encourage children to evangelize their family and friends, which may make some children uncomfortable.
A Veggie Tale’s *The Pirates Who Don’t Do Anything* is a Bible-based rotation program that focuses on one biblical hero and is based on the theme verse "I can do all things through Christ because he gives me strength." Philippians 4:13. Children form “crews” or small groups of the same aged or mixed-aged children, who travel together to various stations and explore the stories of Bible Heros. The Bible stories are reinforced through scripture, songs, videos, skits, and a variety of hands-on activities. Themes for the five-day program are: heroes know God is with them, God can make every kid a hero, heroes do the right thing, heroes reach out to Jesus, and heroes share God’s love.

**Ages Levels:** Preschool  
Elementary

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

**Strengths:**
- Great interactive music with hand motions.  
- Many children will already know the pirate theme, which is based on earlier Veggi Tale movie.  
- Provides an opportunity for children to prepare their own snacks that reinforce the daily Bible story.  
- Offers a separate preschool program.  
- Memorization is easy with short Bible verses and hand motions.  
- Offers a mission opportunity for children.  
- Introduces children to Biblical heroes, such as Moses, Gideon, Shadrach, Meshach, Abendego, and more.

**Weaknesses:**
- The high-priced starter pack may be cost prohibitive for some churches.  
- On the final day, children are strongly encouraged to be “saved” from their sins by simply praying with the adult sponsor.  
- The pressure to witness to others about Jesus could be difficult for some children.  
- Although this VBS is based on the film *The Pirates Who Don’t Do Anything*, the movie clips add very little support to the overall Biblical theme of the day.
Group’s Power Lab is a science-themed rotation program that teaches one biblical concept each day. “Lab Crews” or small groups of mixed-aged children travel together to various scientific lab stations to explore a key Bible verse each day. The biblical theme is reinforced through scripture, songs, videos, skits, and a variety of hands-on activities. The five-day program focuses on how Jesus gives us the power to be thankful, help others, be brave, live forever, and tell others about God.

**Ages Levels:**  Preschool  
Mixed Age Elementary

**Includes:**

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

- Alternate schedule

**Strengths:**

- Promotes the love of God.
- Great interactive music videos and power point.
- Provides an opportunity for children to prepare their own snacks that reinforce the daily Bible verse.
- Offers a separate preschool program.
- Utilizes a “Daily Challenge” feature that allows children to show their faith to others, such as making a thank you card, clearing the table after dinner, or helping someone feel happy by saying something kind.
- Memorization is made easy with short Bible verses and hand motions.
- Students spend approximately 20 minutes in 7 different stations throughout the day.

**Weaknesses:**

- The high-priced starter pack along with many optional extras may be too costly for some churches.
- No alternate schedule provided.
SonWorld Adventure Park is a rotation program that invites children to imagine they are spending the week at an amusement park discovering that “choosing” Jesus is the ticket to the best ride of their lives. Based on the Bible verse “Choose this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15), SonWorld Adventure Park teaches children how to choose to follow Jesus. Each day children focus on a biblical character in the New Testament whose life was changed by Jesus. Through stories and activities they discover how they can choose to believe, act, forgive, obey and most importantly follow Jesus.

Ages Levels:  Prekindergarten/Kindergarten
Primary
Middler
Preteen

Includes:

** Clip Art/Reproducible CD  ** Music Action Training DVD
X Music CD  ** Skits/Drama DVD
X Alternate schedule

** not included in starter pack; unable to review

Strengths:
- Includes entire Directors Guide on CD Rom that includes all forms in a customizable format.
- Offers multiple class formats and various scheduling options.
- Offers “fun days” and “bonus theme ideas” with additional theme-related activities to help promote and enhance your VBS program.
- Includes an optional mission center option to help promote a mission project.
- Includes a special events section that contains ideas for expanding the program into the community or beyond 5 days.

Weaknesses:
- Emphasis on sin overshadows the message that Jesus loves and cares for us.
- Teaches that choosing Jesus as personal savior is the only way to become a part of God’s family.
- Salvation emphasis may be inappropriate for some parishes.