



Summer 2013

Ideas for Children and Youth Ministry

How do you say thank you?

Thanking your Teachers and Children & Youth Ministry Volunteers – what do you do? Many of these people are dedicated and have given countless hours to the care and ministry of our children and youth – how does your church thank them? Here are some ideas:



- Have them come up front during a Sunday morning service for a prayer.
- Have a special party for them (where they don't have to clean up or watch the children).
- Give them a gift or gift card
 - Gift cards to a bookstore or local restaurant
 - A plaque or certificate to hang on their wall
 - Flowers (cut or planted)
 - A cross or pin from a religious store

Whatever you do, make sure you show them the appreciation that you feel. Remember that a handwritten thank you card goes a long way! And don't forget to put a commissioning service on the calendar in the fall to bless and welcome the new teachers.

What are you doing this summer?

What do you do with your children and youth in the summer? When I worked in a parish I actually had someone call and ask when church was starting again – I honestly don't think that the man knew that we had church all year long. And it's funny, because when new families are "church shopping" they often do so in the summer, preparing to start at the beginning of the school year. Vacation Bible School (VBS) is the traditional summer activity, and it's a wonderful thing for many churches, but it's not the only option. *So what you do in the summer can truly impact the life of your community, both the parish community and the community of people who live around your church?*

(Photo courtesy of Bob Brown – St. Andrew's, Grand Rapids)



What kind of time and energy do the members of your parish have to put into this?

What ideas would you like the children who attend to come away with?

Who is this for (the children of the parish, or the children of the community)?

Is the main purpose education, evangelism, outreach, or a combination?

Vacation Bible School

If you are thinking about doing a VBS in your parish, there are so many things to think about. Here's a wonderful article on planning for your VBS:

<http://www.buildfaith.org/2013/02/20/choosing-a-vbs-for-2013/>

Here's the link to Virginia Theological Seminary's Center for the Ministry of Teaching's review of this year's popular VBS curricula:

<http://www.vts.edu/ftpimages/95/download/VBS%20reviews%202012,%20web.pdf>

Vacation BIBLE School

I know of some churches that have done an annotated Godly Play setting. It's a great way to get the children (and parents) interested and excited about the program. And please remember that we have a Diocesan License for [Weaving God's Promises](#), so you can use that curriculum free of charge. If you aren't signed up to be able to log in, please contact Gennie Callard and let her know that you'd like to be able to use it.

VBS is generally one week during the summer sometime during the work day. But there are some other ways to do this...

- A one night a week program – with a simple meal (hotdogs or subs)
If you have this on the same night every week, and even though you don't require regular attendance people will get used to going. With a meal, parents will know that there's one day a week they won't have to cook dinner. If your church is in a neighborhood, you can put out an invitation to the children and then invite the parents along also. I would suggest doing what you can to not have to charge for this, either put it in the budget or ask for donations from the parish community. It can be a gift to the parents and families that attend.
- A Saturday or weekend overnight – either once or perhaps once a month. You wouldn't be able to build the community that you would having something more regular, but you could do some fun education pieces with whichever of the children show up. It would be a nice thing for parents and families to have something for their children to do during the week. For younger grade school kids, the overnight could be exciting, yet safe for parents.

Sunday Mornings

If the children in your church regularly have a traditional Sunday School program during part of the Sunday morning service during the school year, the summer is an opportunity to worship as a full community. It's also an opportunity to introduce both the children and the adults to fully intergenerational worship. The two books, [Children at Worship](#), [Congregations in Bloom](#) by Caroline Fairless and [Liturgy for the Whole Church](#) by Susan Bock, are wonderful for multigenerational resources and including children.

Here are some pointers given by these two books:

- Reassure adults and children that all people are welcome in worship.
- Children learn by what they see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. Sensory learning is integral to the spiritual development of children. The goal is to provide a rich sensory experience for the educational context.
- Bring children to sit in the front, where they can see and hear liturgical actions and not just the backs of people's bodies.



- Provide children with writing and drawing materials. They hear and see a great deal while using these things.
- And most important (says Susan Bock) *let children see you worshiping joyfully and eagerly.* Don't project your boredom onto them! If worship is boring to you, help your leaders to change it.

Bulletins, colored pencils and books – what do you have for your children to take to their seats? Some churches have bags that the children can pick up and take with their to their seats, some have a location where they can find a book or a basket for colored pencils. The same way some people knit in meetings or others doodles when on the phone, children can do something with their hands and pay attention at the same time (and some pay attention better when their hands are busy). Here are some ideas for the children

- Coloring mandalas and colored pencils (you can find the images many places, but here are some copyright free that you can download and print):
http://edwm.org/christian_education_mandalas.pdf
- Bulletins – you can make up your own for children or you can use some of the resources out there
 - <http://www.the-sunday-paper.com/> (Episcopal and lectionary based – you can get a full year subscription for under \$100)
 - <http://www.sermons4kids.com/>
- Books – there are many children's Christian books out there, and some of them are even good. Before you give one to your children, make sure the images and words represent what you want children to know (are the people diverse, how is God represented, what are the morals the author is teaching?). Here are some that I recommend
 - Children of God Storybook Bible by Archbishop Tutu
 - Jesus Storybook Bible by Sally Lloyd-Jones
 - God Created by Mark Bozzuti-Jones (actually, anything by him would be good!)
 - What is My Song? By Dennis, Sheila Fabricant and Matthew Linn

Some churches still prefer to have a lesson for the children during the sermon time for the adults. This is a great time to tell a story, or read one out of the children's bibles, or do a craft or activity.

Keeping in touch with families when they're not at church



We know that many families “take the summer off”. This is a reality that we just can't change, so how can we live into this and offer support and ministry to those families?

Stay Connected electronically – a **facebook** “group” or “page” where they'll get notifications in their “feed”; **e-mails** sent directly to the parents, or starting a simple “**blog**” are all tools you can use to help your families stay connected with you, the church, and even with each other. You could also put out a paper calendar (and mail it to the families the first week after Memorial Day) with ideas for the week.

- Facebook – if you don't have a facebook page for your church, you need one! And you can also start a separate “group” or “page” just for children and youth ministries.
- At this point only about 1/3 of the people who receive e-mails from an organization actually open them. But that's still reaching 1/3 of the people with very little effort and no cost. <http://mailchimp.com/> is a free service (up to a certain number of people) that you can use to create mass e-mails

- Blogs are still catching on with some people. My favorite feature is that you can have a place where people can sign up to receive an e-mail of each new posting. That way I don't have to keep going on it to see what's new, but I can still go to the blog for more information, and past information. Google's blogger (www.blogger.com) and Wordpress (<http://wordpress.org/>) are both free and very simple to use. This blog (<http://fromthesheepfold.blogspot.com/>) is a neat one to look at. It's from a parish director of Christian education and has some wonderful ideas that I think any parish could copy.

What types of things might you want to give to people?

Vibrant Faith @ Home (<http://www.vibrantfaithathome.org/>) is a WONDERFUL website with tons of FREE resources for families, singles, and includes people of all ages. You can get practices and ideas for sharing your faith with your family, and living out your faith in your daily life.



Building Faith (<http://www.buildfaith.org/>) calls itself "an online Christian Ed community" and is really meant for Christian educators. Yet it still has some wonderful articles about the faith of children and youth – articles that might inspire your families or begin some good discussions.

Pinterest (<http://pinterest.com/>) is a great online "community" that shares ideas and resources. I'm sure you can find some things there to share with your families. You could even create a parish page and invite parishioners to join so they can see what you share.



Church Publishing (<https://www.churchpublishing.org/>) is our denominational publishing house. They have books that you could suggest to families.

Candle Press (<http://www.candlepress.com/>) and Creative Communications for the Parish (<http://www.creativecommunications.com/denomPicker.php>) are both filled with inexpensive items that you can purchase for families.

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