

COME
TO THE
TABLE!

DIG IN



BIBLE STUDY
LEADER GUIDE



DIG IN LEADER GUIDE

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Get Connected!



Pinterest: GrowingUpCatholic

<https://www.pinterest.com/GrowingUpCatholic/come-to-the-table>

"Come to the Table" board



WELCOME TO COME TO THE TABLE!

Come to the Table is a one-week Vacation Bible School (VBS) curriculum that explores five stories about Jesus from the Gospels of Luke and John. These stories show Jesus eating with unexpected people, providing food for a crowd, demonstrating humility, and extending welcome and forgiveness. When you eat with Jesus, anything can happen!

The curriculum begins with Jesus' parable of the great feast and invites children to journey alongside Jesus as he feeds 5,000 people, befriends a tax collector, washes his disciple's feet, and both forgives and challenges his friend, Peter. Through these stories of Jesus, children learn that everyone is welcome at God's table where there is always enough. *Come to the Table* invites children to see that God loves and welcomes all people and challenges them to share that same love and hospitality in their everyday lives.

Each day begins with the invitation to **COME**. Children will participate in relationship-building activities, songs, prayer, Bible memory, and a dramatic presentation of the Bible story. Then children will **TASTE** by rotating through three activity stations and eating a snack. In closing worship, children will be challenged to **SHARE** the love of God with everyone they meet.

COME (35 min) Children start in small groups and then gather for worship.	TASTE (90 min + snack) Small groups rotate between three activity stations and have a snack.	SHARE (10 min) The large group gathers for worship and dismissal.
Set the Table (10 min) (small groups) Gather (10 min) (large group, Call to Worship, songs, offering) The Main Course (15 min) (large group, Bible memory, drama, Table Talk questions, prayer)	Create & Discover (30 min) (art and science projects) Dig In (30 min) (Bible study) Sprout (30 min) (active games) Snack Time (15 min)	Songs Family Diner Cards Blessing Dismissal

Items you will need:

- Dig In Leader Guide*
- Dig In* supplements
- Dig In* Area Poster
- Sample copy of *Dig In* student booklet (You will also need one *Dig In* student booklet for each child.)

The **supplements** include teaching aids to accompany the leader's guide. Each *Dig In* Leader should be given access to them to print pages for the chosen activities. They include the following:

- Days 1–5 Bible Memory Mini Poster
- Day 1 “Great Feast” Bingo Boards
- Day 2 Loaves and Fish
- Day 3 Bible Story Cards
- Day 3 Charades Cards
- Day 5 Bible Memory Strips
- Day 5 Fish Cards

Media Connections are included in each session and posted on the ***Growing Up Catholic Pinterest*** page for ease of use. Locate the “Come to the Table” board. The items are organized by day. Additional crafts, decorating and snack ideas, and videos are also included on Pinterest.

WELCOME TO DIG IN!

Dig In is one of three **TASTE** Activity Stations following **COME** (opening worship). Each Dig In session includes four parts: Connect, Encounter, Explore, Bless.

CONNECT

Each session begins by helping children connect with each other through “get to know you” activities, connect to God through prayer, and connect to the Bible through memorization of a Bible passage.

Adults often ask children to pray with their eyes closed and heads bowed. During *Come to the Table*, children will experience a variety of interactive ways to pray. If you have personal prayer practices you find meaningful and are child-friendly, feel free to add or substitute those. The goal is to expand children’s understanding of prayer.

The Bible memory passage is John 6:35 in the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV). *If you prefer, feel free to use a different translation.* The passage is introduced during **COME** (opening worship) and reviewed during Dig In.

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

ENCOUNTER

Choose an option for telling the Bible story that works best for your group based on the age, interests, and attention span of the children. Following the story, Dig In and Live It questions will help children engage in the story and see the ways it relates to their own lives. Children will then complete activities in the *Dig In* student booklet. Be sure to have one booklet for each child.

It is common for adults in a church setting to use theological words or Bible terms without explaining them to children. Throughout the week, be mindful of the words you are using and explain some as needed. Each Encounter section includes a **Word(s) of the Day**, which is explained in a teaching tip. Talk about these words before sharing the Bible story so children can have a fuller understanding of the story.

EXPLORE

Choose from among three Explore activities and a list of Media Connections as time allows.

BLESS

Send the children to the next activity station with a prayer of blessing.

Each session plan also includes a **Bible background essay** to read in preparation for leading, and an **At-a-Glance Chart** to aid in planning.

SETTING UP

It will be helpful to have two main spaces in the Dig In area—one section with table and chairs so that children can complete student booklet pages and other activities, and another section with an open area where children can sit on the floor or have room to move. If possible, have a small book corner where you can place recommended books every day. Read the daily plans carefully so that you know the space that is needed for activities and plan accordingly.

The first two days have party and picnic themes. You could choose one of these themes to decorate the Dig In room for the whole week. See specific ideas on each theme in the *Director Guide*. Coordinate with other TASTE Leaders and the Director to decide if you are decorating with a cohesive theme in each room.

PLANNING AND LEADING A SESSION

Use the 30-minute time frame in this basic way, modifying as needed:

- **Connect:** 5–7 minutes
- **Encounter:** 10–12 minutes
- **Explore:** 10 minutes
- **Bless:** 2–3 minutes

To give you options and flexibility, the session plans include more activities than can be completed in 30 minutes. You may want to use a highlighter and mark the portions of the session you will definitely use, and star items you will do if there is additional time.

Explore activities can be done as a large group or can be set up as separate activity stations for children to rotate through. It's recommended to have more than one Explore activity ready. A group may move through an activity quickly due to excitement or abilities and it will be useful to have something else to do. Keep children aware of the time, giving reminders about how much time is left for Explore.

CREATING A SAFE, WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

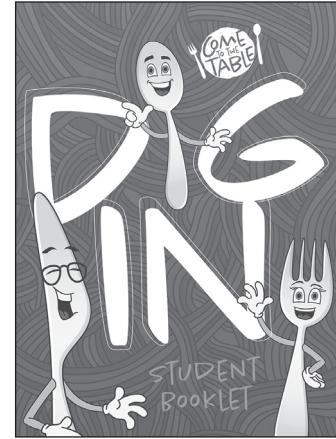
Many behavior problems can be prevented by thorough planning, approaching children as individuals, and teaching according to developmental, emotional, and educational abilities.

- **Establish rules.** It is important to set rules, such as “Be respectful,” “Be kind,” and “Be safe.” Rules need to be simple and number no more than three. This lets children know what is and is not acceptable. Be consistent in making sure children follow the rules and determine ahead of time how you will handle misbehavior.
- **Speak calmly and respectfully.** Your tone of voice and choice of words is important when giving instructions, redirecting behavior, and communicating with individual children. This sets an example of how you want the children to interact with each other. Use children's names when speaking to them. This shows that you know and respect them as individuals.
- **Have fun!** When you show enthusiasm for the Bible story and accompanying activities, children will be drawn into your excitement. This creates a joyful, worshipful atmosphere.

USING DIG IN STUDENT BOOKLETS

The *Dig In* student booklet is an essential part of the Encounter portion of the session. Each day includes a simple retelling of the story and related activities. One activity page is geared toward younger children and one for older children, although activities can be completed by everyone.

Each student booklet contains Family Diner Cards that are sent home on Days 1–4. These cards contain activities to encourage children and their families to further explore the concepts introduced during VBS. The cards will be distributed at closing worship each day, so remove all the cards from the middle of each book, cut them apart, and organize them by day.



USING MEDIA CONNECTIONS

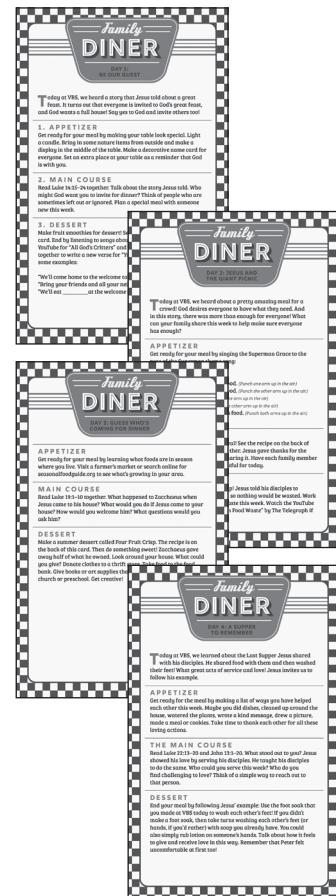
Each session plan suggests a variety of books, videos, and website links to extend children's understanding of the Bible story. These can be used in a variety of ways:

- Set up a book corner for children to read books independently.
- Set up a media center with a laptop or tablet that has pre-selected videos or websites bookmarked. Monitor this area to be sure children use only the chosen materials.
- Show a video or read a book to the entire group.

Be sure to preview both books and videos to make sure they will work for the children in your group. Cue videos to avoid having children watch ads.

A comprehensive book list is included in the supplements. Ask a volunteer to go to the library and gather books for the entire week. The local librarian would likely be able to recommend other books that would relate to daily topics.

Media Connections are posted on the ***Growing Up Catholic Pinterest page*** for ease of use. Locate the “Come to the Table” board. The items are organized by day.



GENERAL SUPPLIES

Have these general supplies on hand for use throughout the week:

- Bible(s)
- Dig In* student booklets (one per child)
- Pencils, pens, crayons
- Paper
- Laptop or tablet with Internet connection (to watch videos)
- Music player (to listen to songs)

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DAY 1

BE OUR GUEST

Scripture Text:

Luke 14:15–24

Food for Thought:

Everyone is welcome at God's table.

"There is room for everyone in the church and, whenever there is not, then, please, we must make room, including for those who make mistakes, who fall or struggle.... The Lord is clear. The sick, the elderly, the young, old, ugly, beautiful, good and bad... Everyone, everyone, everyone!"

Pope Francis
August 3, 2023

Bible Essay:

Who is welcome at God's table? The answer might surprise you!

The parable of the great feast is the focus of today's session, but the preceding verses offer important background for understanding the parable and the theme of this session. Jesus is having dinner at the home of a prominent Pharisee (a "religiously serious" leader). It is the Sabbath, but that doesn't stop Jesus from breaking Jewish law to heal a man who is sick. Jesus notices that the guests are vying for the important seats at the dinner table. He then teaches the guests that at God's table, the humble are exalted, the stranger is invited, and all are welcome. Social status, wealth, and power don't matter here; come as you are! This is God's table, where the poor, ignored, and excluded receive the extravagant and warm hospitality of God. It's a reminder for us that we should invite and welcome all to our eucharistic celebrations. Jesus doesn't want us to exclude anyone!

Jesus doesn't stop with just a lesson about where to sit and how to treat guests. He tells the dinner guests a parable of a great feast to reveal who God is and what God cares about. This is the focus for children today. This story, like so many of Jesus' parables, stretches and challenges the listener. The host invites many friends, who initially agree to come, but then some back out on the day of the feast. They have more pressing things to do—visiting a purchased field, trying out some new oxen, enjoying the early days of a marriage.

The host doesn't have patience for these excuses and sends his servant to invite people until his house is full. He specifically tells the servant to look in the streets and alleys to find people who are poor, people who can't walk, and those who can't see. Even after doing this, there is still room. So the servant goes far and wide inviting people until the house is full.

Jesus closes the story by restating the sad reality that not everyone is interested in this alternate way of being in community; some want to carry on with life as usual. It can be hard to embrace a world where the last are first and the least are the greatest, especially if you have been living in a position of privilege.

The good news is that God (the host of the feast) offers an invitation to all people. No one is left out! Everyone is welcome to come to God's table. Those who come do so in response to God's generous hospitality. May all the children in your group experience welcome and hospitality this week!



DAY 1 AT-A-GLANCE

Advance Preparation

- Read Luke 14:1–24 and the Bible essay for Day 1 on page 6 of this guide.
- Pray for the children and adults who will participate in VBS today.
- Read through the *Dig In* session plan and decide which activities you will use.
Be sure to have one *Dig In* student booklet for each child.
- Communicate with volunteers about their roles and tasks.

	SUPPLIES	TO DO
Connect	<input type="checkbox"/> Bible <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Dig In</i> Area Poster <input type="checkbox"/> Days 1–5 Bible Memory Mini Poster (supplements) <input type="checkbox"/> Beanbag <input type="checkbox"/> Paper <input type="checkbox"/> Crayons, markers or colored pencils	Hang up the <i>Dig In</i> Area Poster. Print and post the Days 1–5 Bible Memory Mini Poster (supplements).
Encounter	<input type="checkbox"/> <i>Dig In</i> student booklets <input type="checkbox"/> Supplies for chosen storytelling option	Choose one of the options for retelling the Bible story and gather needed supplies. Practice telling the Bible story.
Explore & Bless	<input type="checkbox"/> Supplies for chosen activities	Preview and select Media Connections. Choose Explore activities based on the age and interests of children, the amount of time you have, and available supplies. Check books out of the library as needed.



SESSION PLAN

CONNECT

to Each Other

Welcome children and gather in a circle. Toss a beanbag to someone across the circle from you and say, “**My name is _____.** **What’s your name?**” Continue this around the circle until everyone has been introduced. Then, start another round and invite children to say their name again and a favorite food.

to God

Teach children a simple breath prayer: “Fill me with peace.” Say:

There are lots of different ways to pray. What are some different ways you have prayed? (Pause for responses, such as silently, out loud, outside, or with a song.) Today we will learn a simple breath prayer. A breath prayer is a very short prayer that you think in your mind as you breathe slowly. Let’s take three long, slow breaths. (Do this.) Let’s keep breathing in this way as I say the words of the prayer out loud: “Fill me with peace.” (Say it several times slowly and quietly.) Now we will just think the words of the prayer as we take three more breaths. (Do this.) This is an easy prayer for any time and any place. No one else will even know that you are praying! And you could change the words. Maybe you need love or joy or courage instead of peace. “Fill me with love. Fill me with joy. Fill me with courage.”

Teaching Tips

Children know what it feels like to be left out. They may have experienced this at school or at home. Maybe they didn’t get to participate in something because they were too young, or maybe they just were not invited. That is what makes today’s story especially joyous—everyone is invited. Make sure that all children are included in today’s discussions and activities.

Today, the children will illustrate the first portion of the Bible memory passage. For younger children and pre-readers, you may want to type and print out the passage ahead of time and glue it to the paper so they can focus on drawing.

to the Bible

Read the Bible memory passage from the Days 1–5 Bible Memory Mini Poster (supplements) or a Bible. Explain that this passage is found in the Gospel of John, which is full of stories of Jesus’ life.

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

—John 6:35 (NRSV)

Give each child a piece of paper and crayons, markers, or colored pencils. Have the children write “I am the bread of life” on the paper and then illustrate it. As they color, invite them to wonder what Jesus meant when he said this.

ENCOUNTER

Bible Storytelling Option 1

Supplies

- Dig In* student booklets
- Bible-times costumes (optional)

Reenact the story using the Readers Theater on page 3 of the *Dig In* student booklets. There are seven parts: Narrator, Jesus, Servant, Host, Invited Guest 1, Invited Guest 2, Invited Guest 3. If you have fewer than seven people, combine roles. Jesus and the Narrator could each read one of the Invited Guest parts. Read the script through once so children get used to their parts. Then have children act it out, moving around the room to show the events of the story. Encourage them to ad lib as desired.

Bible Storytelling Option 2

Supplies

- Day 1 “Great Feast” Bingo Boards (supplements)
- Day 1 Bible Story (p. 36)
- Beads or other small objects to mark spaces on the bingo board

Pass out a Day 1 “Great Feast” Bingo Board (supplements) to each child. Each child will also need 12 beads or other small objects to mark the squares. Tell children that you will be reading the story and they should listen for the words printed on the bingo board. Review each word on the board for children who may be early readers, or pair pre-readers with an older child who can offer assistance. When children hear one of those words, they place a bead on the square. When the story is over, they should have a bead on every square. Read the Bible story from page 36 of this guide.

Word of the Day: Pharisee [FAIR-ruh-see]

Jesus was a Jew and so were many of the people who followed him. Pharisees were Jewish leaders who were very serious about their faith. Jesus often taught serious religious leaders like the Pharisees to not miss out on the big picture of God's love because they were so focused on following all the laws.

ENCOUNTER

Dig In

Ask several wondering questions about the Bible story. Allow time between each question for children to think and respond.

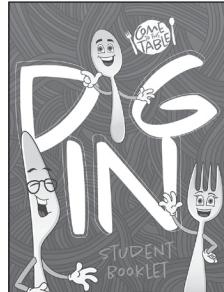
- I wonder how the host felt when the invited guests said, “I can’t come.”
- I wonder why the host wanted the whole house to be full of people.
- I wonder what the man’s house looked like and sounded like when it was filled with guests.
- I wonder how the people who didn’t expect to be invited felt when they got an invitation.

Live It

Connect the Bible story to children’s lives by asking some or all of these questions. Allow time between each question for children to think and respond.

- I wonder what it’s like to have people you don’t know come for dinner.
- Imagine hearing that none of your friends were coming to the party you planned.
- Have you ever been invited to a big meal? How did you feel when you were invited? Were there people at the meal who you didn’t expect?
- Think of someone at your school, church, or in your neighborhood who gets left out. How could you welcome and include that person?
- Who can you invite into your home? Who could you invite to come to Mass with you?

Dig In Student Booklets



On page 4 of *Dig In*, children can complete the word puzzle. Be sure to fill in the mystery word using the numbered key.

Solution: roads, people, house, filled, INVITATION

On page 5, match the picture of each feast food with the country where it is often eaten. Read about the different kinds of food eaten during feasts around the world. Encourage children to talk about the foods that they eat to celebrate various occasions, such as birthdays or holidays.

Solution: 1) Canada and United States, 2) North Korea and South Korea, 3) India, 4) Nigeria

EXPLORE

Play

Many times when we play games, somebody gets left out. Celebrate that everyone is on God's guest list by playing a game of "everybody's in." Start with several toy hoops on the floor. (Large pieces of cloth or paper can be used in place of toy hoops.) Play music while children dance. Use included songs ("Lead Us to Your Table," "Table of Life"), or other upbeat, joyful music you have. Periodically stop the music. When the music stops, everyone stands inside the toy hoops. Take one hoop away each time and play the music again. The object is to keep "Everybody in!"

For smaller groups: Use one piece of cloth or paper for this game. Fold it in half each time so the children have to squeeze onto a smaller space.

Supplies

- Toy hoops, large cloth, or large paper
- Songs
- Music player

Draw

Have children work in pairs to slowly retell the parable Jesus told. As one child retells the main events that he or she remembers from the parable, have the other child sketch what he or she hears. The sketcher can use symbols, stick figures, and word bubbles. Then have the children switch roles. Remind children that it's okay if they don't remember every detail of the story. Often, we remember best the parts of the story that we think are most important, and that's not the same for everyone! An alternative is to have children tell and draw a modern-day story that is similar to the one Jesus told. Who would be invited? What excuses would people give?

Supplies

- Paper
- Pencils, crayons, or markers

At God's Table

Sing or listen to a version of "You've Got a Place" (sometimes called "Welcome Table"). Lyrics are on page 37 of this guide. There are many versions on YouTube with varying lyrics. Have the children work in small groups to write an additional verse to the song. When everyone is finished, collect the verses that were written and sing them together.

Supplies

- "You've Got a Place/Welcome Table" song lyrics (p. 37)
- Laptop or tablet with Internet connection
- Pencils
- Paper

Media Connections

- *The Beastly Feast* by Bruce Goldstone
- *Bee-Bim Bop!* by Linda Sue Park
- *No Dogs Allowed!* by Linda Ashman
- *Horace and Morris, But Mostly Delores* by James Howe
- *Room for Three* by Amy Worden
- "You've Got a Place/The Welcome Table," African- American spiritual (YouTube)
- *The Poor Invited to the Feast* artwork by Vie de Jesus MAFA (Internet)

- "Sharing Thanksgiving with You" by Nazareth Village (shows what a banquet might have been like in Jesus' time) (YouTube)
- Parable Video - The Great Feast (Luke 14.15-24) by CCOYOUTH
- "I Cannot Come to the Banquet" by Medical Mission Sisters (YouTube)
- Stone Soup (Animated Stories for Kids) by August House/Story Cove

BLESS

Gather children and repeat the breath prayer from the beginning of the session. Ask everyone to take several slow breaths, and then pray, "Fill me with peace." Repeat this several times and close by saying "Amen."