



COME TO THE TABLE

DIRECTOR GUIDE



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Catch the Vision

Overview & Goals	3
Children's Faith Formation/Whole Family Faith Formation.....	4
Bible Outline	5
Bible Memory	5
Bible Background Essays.....	6–10
Daily Schedule.....	11
A Day in <i>Come to the Table</i>	12–13
Early Childhood Overview	14
Offering Project.....	15

Get Ready

Ordering Information	16
Electronic Files	17
Director's Checklist	18–19
Staff Overview	20
Leader Assignment Cards.....	21–23
Volunteer Needs	24
Orientation for Staff and Volunteers	25
Publicity and Outreach	26
VBS Dedication.....	27
Registration	27
Decorating	28
Setting Up	29

During VBS and Beyond

Tips for the First Day	30
Record Keeping	30
Making VBS a Safe Place	31
General Discipline Tips	32
Planning Snack Time	33–35
Invite Children to Grow in Faith	36
Invite Families to Grow in Faith	37
<i>Come to the Table</i> Closing Program	37
After VBS	38
Adaptations for a Midweek Program.....	39
Adaptations for a Weekend Retreat.....	40

Eucharistic Revival

Connecting VBS to the National Movement	41
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CATCH THE VISION



OVERVIEW OF 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, shares his Body and Blood, and both forgives and challenges his friend, Peter. What better way to teach children about the power of the Eucharist than to teach them stories that demonstrate everyone is welcome at God's table where there is always enough? *Come to the Table* highlights God's love and welcome of all people and challenges children 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.

This VBS theme can particularly support the goals of the National Eucharistic Revival in the United States. We encourage you to make it part of a broader parish/school effort to engage people of all ages within your community (see page 41).

GOALS OF COME TO THE TABLE

- Convey that in the Eucharist all people are welcome at God's table
- Invite children to love God and follow in the way of Jesus
- Offer a vision of a world where everyone's needs are met
- Encourage children to joyfully receive and share the good things that God provides

This curriculum provides everything you need to implement a successful VBS program, no matter what the location, size, or budget is. This guide gives an overview of all aspects of the curriculum. Refer to the individual leader guides and supplemental electronic files for detailed information about each area. Choose activities and make any necessary adaptations that will work best for the children in your program.

VBS is a wonderful way to inspire children and families to love and follow Jesus. We're so glad you've joined us!



CHILDREN'S FAITH FORMATION

We believe that faith formation is a lifelong process of developing a relationship with God. This relationship is nurtured within family and faith communities. Intentional faith formation experiences, such as VBS, help children grow in their understanding of God's love for them. This curriculum recognizes that the faith of children often grows quietly, in ways that are not readily seen, as children take in and ponder the meaning of biblical stories.

Key elements of faith formation found in *Come to the Table*:

- **Relationship building:** As children arrive at VBS each day, Small Group Leaders guide children in activities designed to build community and create a feeling of belonging.
- **Gathered worship:** Children of all ages gather to sing, pray, give an offering, and watch a dramatic presentation of the Bible story.
- **Spiritual practices:** Spiritual practices—such as music, Bible memorization, and different ways of praying—are included each day.
- **Centrality of the Bible story:** The Bible story is shared and explored in multiple ways each day—through drama, scripture memorization, hands-on activities, music, full-body movement, writing, art, and reflection.
- **Wondering questions:** Children are invited to reflect on the Bible stories using open-ended wondering questions. These questions show a respect for children's interpretations and their ideas.
- **Discovery-based learning:** Activities in the **TASTE** Activity Stations promote creative, discovery-based learning.
- **Child-centered approach:** Activities are child-centered and attend to individual learning styles. The curriculum materials anticipate the diversity of needs that children have.
- **Invitation to grow in faith:** Children are challenged to love God, follow Jesus, and take action that demonstrates care for others and for the world. See page 36 for more information.

WHOLE FAMILY FAITH FORMATION

We strongly encourage you to incorporate parents into the VBS experience as much as possible. They are the primary catechists of their own children! This could take many forms:

- **Make it a whole family event:** Instead of using a drop-off model, design the experience for parents and children to attend, side-by-side. It makes your job as leaders easier and families love it. You may need to schedule it for the evening or weekend. We have spoken to a number of parishes who have made the switch with their VBSs, and they all say they would never go back to a drop-off model.
- **Plan a parallel parent/adult track:** Another option is to schedule an adult faith formation experience for some or all of the VBS time. This could incorporate approaches like our *Christ Present in the Eucharist* resource, time for eucharistic adoration, or parent faith sharing (like our *Growing Up Catholic Parent Conversations*). Contact us if you need help brainstorming.
- **Invite them in incrementally:** Consider how you can reach out to parents in smaller ways. Utilize the send-home letters and Family Diner Cards. Invite parents to stay for the beginning or end of each session. Plan closing events when parents can enter into the experience.



OUTLINE

Day 1: Be Our Guest

Text:

Luke 14:15–24

Food for Thought:

Everyone is welcome at God's table.

Summary: Jesus is invited to a meal at the home of an important Pharisee. Jesus tells a parable about a great feast. The host of the dinner sends out his servant to tell the invited guests that everything is ready. The invited guests make excuses about why they can't come. So the host invites people from the streets and countryside instead—people who can't walk or see, people who are hungry, and people who are often forgotten or excluded. More and more people come until the entire house is full.

Day 2: Jesus and the Giant Picnic

Text:

John 6:1–14

Food for Thought:

There is more than enough at God's table.

Summary: A large crowd follows Jesus up on a mountain. "Where shall we buy bread for everyone?" Jesus asks his disciples. A young boy shares five loaves of bread and two fish with Jesus. He blesses the food and has the disciples distribute it among the people. All eat and are satisfied. Twelve baskets of leftover food are collected so that none will go to waste.

Day 3: Guess Who's Coming for Dinner

Text:

Luke 19:1–10

Food for Thought:

Jesus' welcome changes everything.

Summary: Zacchaeus, a chief tax collector, climbs a sycamore tree to see above the crowd as Jesus passes through Jericho. Jesus sees Zacchaeus and asks him to climb down and then invites himself to Zacchaeus' home. The crowd grumbles against Jesus' choice to be a guest of a tax collector. Zacchaeus tells Jesus he will give half his possessions to the poor and return four times the amount he earns from cheating others. Jesus considers Zacchaeus right with God.

Day 4: A Supper to Remember

Text:

Luke 22:13–20; John 13:1–20

Food for Thought:

Jesus shows us what love looks like.

Summary: Jesus shares Passover with his disciples. At the meal, the origin of the Eucharist, Jesus shares bread and wine with his disciples. He asks the disciples to remember him whenever they come together to do this. Then Jesus takes a basin and towel and washes the disciples' feet. Peter does not want Jesus to wash his feet, but Jesus says he is doing it to set an example. By washing one another's feet, they are serving God.

Day 5: Breakfast on the Beach

Text:

John 21:1–17

Food for Thought:

We can love like Jesus.

Summary: Jesus' disciples are fishing and do not catch anything all night long. Toward morning, a voice from shore tells them to cast their net on the other side of the boat. Their net fills with fish! Realizing that it is Jesus on the shore, Peter jumps out of the boat and hurries to meet him. Jesus prepares a breakfast of bread and fish. After they have eaten, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him. When Peter answers, "You know that I love you," Jesus tells him, "Feed my sheep."

BIBLE MEMORY

The Bible memory passage for grades K–5 is introduced in interactive ways during **COME** (opening worship) using PowerPoint slides. It is then reinforced during the Dig In activities. Preschool children will learn the passage during their group worship time. *If you prefer, feel free to use a different translation than the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV).*

Grades K–5:

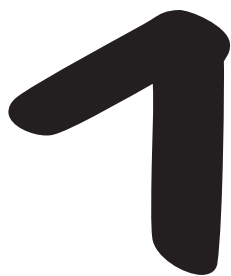
Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."

—John 6:35 (NRSV)

Early Childhood:

Then Jesus said to them, "I am the bread of life."

—John 6:35a (NRSV)



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 2

JESUS AND THE GIANT PICNIC



Scripture Text:

John 6:1–14

Food for Thought:

There is more than enough at God's table.

Bible Essay:

If everyone is welcome at God's table, we may question, "Will there be enough food?" In today's story, we discover that God provides not just enough, but an abundance of food at the table. Or in this case, on the picnic blanket!

News of Jesus' healing power spreads throughout the region, and great crowds of people follow Jesus wherever he goes. In this case there are "about five thousand" in the crowd, which means that there are likely many more people than that since women and children are typically not counted in Bible times.

Seeing a chance to pour out his generous hospitality on these people, Jesus asks his disciples, "Where are we to buy bread for these people to eat?" With this question, Jesus invites the disciples to have faith in God's abundant provision. But Philip's response focuses on scarcity—even six months' wages will not feed such a crowd. Andrew tells Jesus about the small lunch of five loaves and two fish but finishes by adding that this is nothing in light of the "problem" of the crowd.

Jesus also invites his disciples to participate in the preparation ("Make the people sit down.") and the cleanup ("Gather up the fragments left over . . .") Jesus, as the primary host of this spontaneous picnic, is the one who serves the meal to all the people. Interestingly, this part is stated quite plainly as if nothing out of the ordinary is happening. Jesus blesses the bread and fish and then "distributed them to those who were seated" as if he is just passing the potato salad around the table at the family picnic! We almost miss the fact that a miracle has happened.

While this is an exciting and dramatic story, we are faced with a difficult reality today. Many people in our world do not have food to eat. And yet those who *do* have food and other necessities may resist sharing with others. "I better make sure I have what I need!" It is easy to think of our personal needs first, rather than the good of all.

This picnic miracle is a good reminder that Jesus did not expect the disciples to serve the whole meal for 5,000 people. However, he did seek out their faith and invite their help in sharing God's abundance with the world. There *is* enough for everyone! May we seek a world where everyone has what they need.

"We are in front of a global scandal of around... one billion people who still suffer from hunger today. We cannot look the other way and pretend this does not exist. The food available in the world is enough to feed everyone. The parable of the multiplication of the loaves and fish teaches us exactly this: that if there is the will, what we have never ends. On the contrary, it abounds and does not get wasted."

**Pope Francis
December 9, 2013**

3

DAY 3

GUESS WHO'S COMING FOR DINNER

Scripture Text:

Luke 19:1–10

Food for Thought:

Jesus' welcome changes everything.

"[Zacchaeus'] encounter with Jesus changed his life, just as it has changed, and can daily still change, each of our lives.... Jesus extends the same invitation to you: 'I must stay at your house today'. ..He wants to enter your homes, to dwell in your daily lives: in your studies, your first years of work, your friendships and affections, your hopes and dreams."

**Pope Francis
July 31, 2016**

Bible Essay:

Zacchaeus is a Jew and a wealthy chief tax collector working for the Romans to collect taxes from his fellow Jews. This is a position of power in the community, and Zacchaeus takes full advantage of it. He collects what Rome demands, but then pockets some money for himself. In response, his community seemingly hates him.

When Zacchaeus hears that Jesus is coming to Jericho, he is eager to see him! Maybe Zacchaeus has heard that Jesus has eaten with Levi and other tax collectors (Luke 5:27–32). Perhaps he is tired of being left out. Maybe he is simply curious about this healer that everyone is talking about. Whatever his reasons, Zacchaeus runs ahead of the crowds and climbs a tree, both actions a man of his status would not normally take.

Jesus spots Zacchaeus up in the tree and calls him by name, essentially inviting himself to Zacchaeus' home! Jesus likely could have stayed with anyone in Jericho; many would have welcomed him. But Jesus chooses to stay with someone who has cheated others and who cares more about his own wealth than about the needs of his community.

The crowd does not respond well to Jesus' choice. They call Zacchaeus a sinner, not worthy of Jesus' time or attention. Why would someone like Zacchaeus be on Jesus' guest list? Upon hearing their comments, Zacchaeus makes a radical declaration: he will give away half of his pos-

sessions to the poor and pay back four times the amount he has stolen from people!

Jesus' call to Zacchaeus comes *before* Zacchaeus makes any life changes. Jesus welcomes him exactly as he is. Jesus does not condemn him, point out his sins, or try to convince him to get right with God. Jesus simply says, "I see you. I know you by name. I want to be with you." With this unconditional welcome, Jesus opens the door for Zacchaeus to restore relationships with his community. Zacchaeus chooses to walk through it by giving away his wealth and making things right.

Children may not understand governments and taxes, but they can certainly understand how people hurt each other and break relationships within the community. Think about class bullies who ruin potential friendships or start fights with friends that result in broken trust. The story of Zacchaeus is a reminder that even when we hurt others, make mistakes, or feel as if we are alone, Jesus offers a place where we belong. That changes everything!

DAY 4

A SUPPER TO REMEMBER

4

Scripture Text:

Luke 22:13–20; John 13:1–20

Food for Thought:

Jesus shows us what love looks like.

Bible Essay:

The setting for today's events is an upstairs room where Jesus and his disciples celebrate Passover, the feast at which Jewish people remember and celebrate God freeing their people from slavery in Egypt. This meal is bittersweet for Jesus as he knows this is the last time he will eat the Passover meal with his friends. Now we know this story as The Last Supper, when Jesus introduced the Eucharist.

Jesus and his disciples are all Jews, descendants of Abraham and part of God's covenant community. Just as God covenanted with the people who were saved from oppression and slavery in Egypt, Jesus (God with us) creates a new covenant with his disciples at this Passover meal. Covenant in Hebrew scripture is twofold: receiving God's steadfast love as well as God's expectations for how to live and be in relationship with God and others.

This is a "new covenant" community that Jesus is creating with his disciples. They receive God's steadfast love from Jesus as he serves bread and wine (which he tells them is his Body and Blood given for them) and washes their feet. Jesus then commands them to live out the love of God that he has shown them: to wash each other's feet. In Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, the covenant will be made complete.

Jesus relentlessly reminds his followers and the world that greatness in God's kingdom looks *different* than in the kingdoms of the world. In God's kingdom, the greatest is the one who serves others. This pattern of receiving love from God and then actively responding to that love can be seen repeatedly in Scripture, such as with Zacchaeus' response to the loving welcome that he receives from Jesus in the Day 3 story.

Jesus shows his disciples what love looks like, and Jesus' love *compels* them to love in the same way (see 2 Corinthians 5:14–15). Being compelled by God's love means that we are no longer driven by our own fear. Jesus' perfect love casts out fear and invites us into God's covenant community to live as God's children.

At God's table, Jesus shares bread and drink and invites us to be a part of the new covenant community. When we eat the Body of Christ, we become the Body of Christ! At God's table, we are filled with God's love, and that love is then poured out through us to others. As we open ourselves to receive God's love, we become new "creations," compelled to share God's love with each other and the world.

"Jesus... himself is the living bread that gives life to the world. His Body is the true food in the form of bread; his Blood is the true drink in the form of wine.... The Eucharist communicates the Lord's love for us: a love so great that it nourishes us with Himself; a freely given love, always available to every person who hungers and needs to regenerate his own strength."

**Pope Francis
June 19, 2014**

5

DAY 5

BREAKFAST ON THE BEACH

Scripture Text:

John 21:1-17

Food for Thought:

We can love like Jesus.

“While [the disciples] are fishing, [Jesus] waits for them on the shore, where he has already prepared bread and fish for them.... Jesus, then, prepares for us and asks us to be prepared.”... The Eucharist is simple food, like bread, yet it is the only food that satisfies, for there is no greater love. There we encounter Jesus really; we share his life and we feel his love.... Dear brothers and sisters, let us choose this food of life! Let us make Mass our priority! Let us rediscover Eucharistic adoration in our communities!”

**Pope Francis
June 3, 2018**

Bible Essay:

After the Last Supper with his disciples, Jesus is betrayed, denied, and abandoned by his disciples. He is put on trial, crucified, and raised back to life by the power of God. By the time we arrive at John 21, Jesus has already revealed himself to Mary Magdalene in the garden and to a group of disciples in a locked room.

Today’s story takes place at the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus first called Peter, Andrew, James, and John to follow him. Jesus finds the disciples frustrated. Despite their best efforts, they have not caught any fish during a night-long fishing trip. After Jesus tells them to cast the net on the other side of the boat, they have a net full of 153 fish! Jesus then “sets the table” and serves them breakfast on the beach. Perhaps this meal of bread and fish reminds them of the feeding of the 5,000. In the breaking of bread, perhaps they think of Jesus’ words at the Last Supper to “do this in remembrance of me.”

After breakfast, Jesus talks with Peter. At the time of Jesus’ trial, Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times. While Jesus does not bring this up, Jesus asks Peter the same question three times: “Peter, do you love me?” Each time Peter affirms that he loves Jesus, and Jesus tells him, “Feed my lambs,” “Take care of my sheep,” and “Feed my sheep.” In other words, he states, “If you love me as you say you do, take good care of the ones I care about.” Earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus uses the image of a vine and branches to teach the disciples about abiding in him. Essentially, he says, “Remain in me and value what I value, see the world the way I see it, and take up the work that I set before you.”

As he also did so many times before his death and resurrection, Jesus connects with people by showing up, setting the table, and serving a meal. In this way, Jesus provides a model for us. Do we love Jesus? Then let’s reach out and welcome everyone to God’s table. Let’s make sure that the abundance God provides is accessible to all people. Let’s make things right when we hurt others. Let’s remember Jesus in the breaking of bread and the washing of feet. Let’s love wholeheartedly.

DAILY SCHEDULE

Each day of *Come to the Table* has three main sections: **COME** (opening worship), **TASTE** (activity stations), and **SHARE** (closing worship). Each day is designed for **2½ hours** but could easily be adapted for a longer or shorter time frame. Factor in the amount of time it will take children to move from location to location.

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

Plan Your Daily Schedule

Write down the starting and ending times for each part of VBS. Consider the amount of time it will take children to move from one location or activity to another.

Total length of VBS: _____

Arrival & Registration: _____

COME (gathering in small groups): _____

COME (large group worship): _____

TASTE rotation 1: _____

TASTE rotation 2: _____

TASTE rotation 3: _____

Snack: _____

SHARE (closing worship): _____

Dismissal: _____



Modified Schedules

2 HOURS:

COME: 25 minutes

TASTE: 25 minutes per activity station + 10 minutes for snack

SHARE: 10 minutes

1 ½ HOURS:

COME: 20 minutes

TASTE: 20 minutes per activity station

SHARE: 10 minutes

1 HOUR:

COME: 15 minutes

TASTE: 15 minutes per activity station

A DAY IN COME TO THE TABLE

Each child is assigned to a small group of five to ten children, depending on the number of Small Group Leaders you have. Children can be grouped by grade or the groups could be multi-age.

Overview of COME

Before children arrive each day, clearly designate and mark a space for each small group using a different fruit emblem. These emblems can be printed from the supplemental files.

Set the Table

As children arrive each day, they will begin the day in small groups led by an adult Small Group Leader in the worship space. This is an important time for leaders to connect with children in their assigned group, for children to build friendships with each other, to introduce the day's theme, and to set the tone for the day. A printable summary of the "Set the Table" Instructions is in the supplements and on page 53 of the *Worship & Drama Leader Guide*. Group leaders should plan to arrive 10 minutes early so that they are seated in their group location before the children begin to come into the worship space.

Gather

All small groups gather for worship. There is a Worship PowerPoint for each day. It includes slides for all aspects of worship, including the Call to Worship, offering, Bible memory, and Table Talk questions. There are also videos, MP3 files, song motions, and chord charts. The songs are as follows:

- "Lead Us to Your Table"
- "Table of Life"
- "We Live to Love"
- "Where Shall We Go?"
- "Many Voices, One Song"
- "The House That Love is Building"
- "Eucharistic People"

Offering

The offering project is meant to support an organization that is providing food for people who are hungry. The electronic files include an Offering Project Resources list with ideas for a visual display to track your progress, as well as video and book suggestions. Many of these media connections are pinned on the Growing Up Catholic *Come to the Table* Pinterest board for ease of use.

The Main Course

Children practice learning the Bible memory passages, watch a drama of a Bible story, and discuss the story in their small groups using Table Talk questions. The questions and Bible memory content are on the Worship PowerPoint for each day.

Overview of TASTE

Each day during **TASTE**, children rotate with their Small Group Leader through three activity stations: Create & Discover, Dig In, and Sprout. At each activity station, children will participate in activities that help them extend and experience the Bible story presented during **COME** (opening worship). Assign an order for how groups should rotate through the three activity stations. Several small groups will be together at the Create & Discover Activity Station, several will be at the Dig In Activity Station, and several will be at the Sprout Activity Station. If you will have more than 50 children, you will likely want to have two Create & Discover Activity Stations, two Dig In Activity Stations, and two Sprout Activity Stations running simultaneously so they aren't crowded. Refer to pages 33–35 of this guide for how to incorporate a 15-minute snack time during **TASTE**.

Create & Discover Activity Station

Children will explore the themes of the Bible story through open-ended art projects and hands-on science explorations. Each activity includes “Talk About It” prompts to help children connect the activity with the Bible story and their own experiences. A variety of templates and other materials for the activities are available in the electronic files.

Dig In Activity Station

Children will dig in to the Bible story through the review and retelling of the story. Two storytelling options are provided to allow for different learning environments, abilities, and ages. Wondering and discussion questions follow the story, as well as activities from the *Dig In* student booklets, and a Bible memory activity. Three Explore activities and a list of Media Connections (books and online resources) are intended to help children deepen their understanding of the Bible story and themes. There are a variety of printable documents for Dig In in the supplemental files.

Sprout Activity Station

Children will get outside and play active games related to the Bible story. (Games can also be played inside as needed.) Each game includes “Talk About It” prompts to help children connect the game with the Bible story and their own experiences. There are a variety of printable documents for Sprout in the supplemental files. The At-a-Glance Chart indicates the type of game or activity it is, and the amount of preparation and number of supplies required.

Overview of SHARE

At the end of the **TASTE** time, children return to the worship area to sing, pray, and receive a Family Diner Card from the *Dig In* student booklet to take home. Each card contains activities for children to do at home with their families. (Reproducible Spanish language Family Diner Cards are provided in the electronic files.)

OVERVIEW OF EARLY CHILDHOOD

The Early Childhood portion of VBS is designed to meet the developmental needs, interests, and pacing of children ages 4–5. It is intended to be self-contained, though you may choose to include the Early Childhood group in the opening worship time for children in grades K–5. This would allow them to see the dramatic presentation of the Bible story.

The Early Childhood session is structured in the same manner as for the older children, with the time divided into **COME, TASTE, and SHARE**.

COME

Each session begins with a welcome song, “get to know you” conversation prompt, several songs, and the offering project. Children will hear an interactive retelling of the Bible story, respond to wondering questions, learn a Bible memory passage, do activities from the *A Scoop of Stories* student booklet, and have a snack. The amount of time spent as a large group for **COME** can vary significantly, depending on the needs of your group.

TASTE

There are three types of activities:

- **Creation Activity Station:** There are three arts and crafts activities provided for each day, along with “Talk About It” prompts.
- **Sprout Activity Station:** There are three active games provided for each day, along with “Talk About It” prompts. These are designed to be done outside if you have adequate space and supervision but could be adapted for smaller indoor spaces.
- **Discovery Activity Station:** There are two science activities provided for each day along with “Talk About It” prompts.

If you have several leaders/assistants, activities can be done as rotations. This would mean setting up activities in different areas and having children rotate between them. A leader would need to be at each area to coordinate and supervise each activity. Alternatively, keep the whole group together and move from one activity to the next. Depending on their length of time, sessions may include a rest period.

SHARE

Each session concludes with a song and prayer. The Family Diner Cards from *A Scoop of Stories* student booklets are sent home, along with any artwork from the day. (Reproducible Spanish language Family Diner Cards are provided in the electronic files.)



OFFERING PROJECT

Though the world has plenty of food, people still go hungry every day. People from children to seniors all over the world experience food insecurity, malnutrition, and even starvation because of financial hardship, natural and human-made disasters, and lack of access. This week, children will hear stories of Jesus caring for others, providing food to the hungry, and calling us to do the same. Many church and other humanitarian organizations are responding to this call. Choose one of the organizations listed below or another group that is addressing issues of hunger in your community or around the world.

Catholic Charities “was founded over a century ago by men and women who believed that the collective efforts of the church to faithfully serve people in need could change the course of poverty in our nation. Catholic Charities helps people, regardless of their faith, who are struggling with poverty and other complex issues. Advocacy and disaster relief programs—and the support of member agencies in their network—are making tangible progress toward providing help and hope to our neighbors across the country.”

- **For information about your local chapter and to make your donation:**
www.catholiccharitiesusa.org/find-help/

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) “carries out the commitment of the Bishops of the United States to assist the poor and vulnerable overseas. We are motivated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ to cherish, preserve and uphold the sacredness and dignity of all human life, foster charity and justice, and embody Catholic social and moral teaching.”

- **For information about Agriculture projects:**
www.crs.org/our-work-overseas/program-areas/agriculture
- **To make your donation:** www.crs.org/ways-to-give

Heifer International “work[s] with farmers to improve productivity, diversify their businesses and increase incomes. With a living income they can provide quality food for themselves and their families.”

- **For information about the Food Security and Nutrition Project:** www.heifer.org/our-work/work-areas/food-security-and-nutrition.html
- **To make your donation:** www.heifer.org/give

Meals on Wheels provides meals and opportunities for connection to seniors at risk of hunger and social isolation.

- **To find your local Meals on Wheels program and make your donation:**
www.mealsonwheelsamerica.org

Local food bank or backpack program: Many communities have local food banks that collect and distribute food to people in need. Many schools have backpack programs that send food in backpacks home with students who experience food insecurity at home. Research a local food bank or backpack program in your area to support with your offerings.

Media Connections

Consider showing videos or reading books that are about hunger during opening worship each day. The Offering Project Resources file in the supplements contains lists of books and videos that may work, depending on your setting. For instance, Feeding America has a series of “Real Stories of Hunger” videos on YouTube that may work.

Offering Display

Create a visual offering display that will keep children up to date of your progress throughout the week. The Offering Project Resources file (supplements) has ideas, samples, and templates that can be used for the display.

GET READY

ORDERING INFORMATION

You can order add-on items for *Come to the Table* at <https://pastoral.center/come-to-the-table-vbs>. Use the following checklist for purchasing materials:

Posters

- ☐ Two **invitation posters** are included in the VBS Physical Kit. Order extra posters as needed for promotional purposes or print them yourself.
- ☐ The **Activity Area Poster Pack** contains five decorative posters for the Worship, Dig In, Sprout, Create & Discover, and Early Childhood areas. Purchase additional sets if you have more than one of each area or print yourself.
- ☐ One **Bible memory verse poster** is included in the VBS Physical Kit. Order extra posters as needed or print yourself.

Booklets

- ☐ **Dig In** is a student booklet for children in grades K–5 and will be used each day during the Dig In Bible activity station. It also contains daily Family Diner Cards to send home. These cards contain activities for families to do together. It is a must for each child and Dig In Leader. Have extra copies available for children who join VBS after the first day.
- ☐ **A Scoop of Stories** is a student booklet for children ages 4–5. It contains illustrated Bible stories, activities, and family activities. It also contains daily Family Diner Cards to send home. These cards contain activities for families to do together. You will need one for each child and Early Childhood Leader. Have extra copies available for children who join VBS after the first day.

Music

The seven main VBS songs may be played in any format during the VBS and used by your leaders in preparation. However, they may not be given to participants or otherwise used outside the VBS experience.

- ☐ **Student Music CDs and MP3 Download cards** are available for purchase in bulk quantities so children can take home the music from the week to share with their families. These CDs and downloads cannot be shared/duplicated.
- ☐ **Sing-along video DVDs** are available for parishes who cannot otherwise play the videos. However, we highly recommend streaming the videos or playing the video files saved from the USB files or download page, as the video quality is much higher than possible with a DVD.



ELECTRONIC FILES

The **download page** and **USB drive** (physical starter kit) contain the same essential materials to make your VBS a success. Included are a section/folder for the Director, Worship & Drama, music, and each activity station. Email the relevant content to each leader. The chart below shows all the resources for quick reference.

Director	Publicity & Outreach	Other
Offering Project Resources Supplies and Donations List Compiled Booklist Staff Orientation PowerPoint Leader Assignment Cards Orientation Letter to Families Registration Form and Waivers Attendance Record Nametags	Customizable Bulletin Insert Save the Date Flyer (English & Spanish) Invitation Letter (English & Spanish) Invitation Postcard Social media graphics	Logos Posters Booklet samples Spanish language Family Diner Cards
Create & Discover (Art & Science)	Dig In (Bible Response)	Sprout (Active Games)
Days 1–5 Staple Foods Day 1 "Party Popper" Invitations Day 1 Feast Placemat Verse Day 2 "Chalk Talk" Headlines Day 2 "Foil Fish" Template and Photograph Day 3 Zacchaeus Figures Day 4 Kindness Catchers and Instructions Day 4 Foot Treatment Cards Day 5 Beaded Fish Instructions	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	Day 1 Bites Bingo Card Day 3 Hearts and Coins Day 4 "Order's Up" List Day 4 Picture Orders Day 4 "Love Overflows" Cards
Worship & Drama	Music	Early Childhood
Five Worship Powerpoints (one per day) "Set the Table" Instructions Offering Project Resources Drama Scripts (in leader guide) Day 1 Audience Member Script Day 2 Picnic Pictures Day 2 Loaves and Fish Fruit Emblems <i>The Technology Coordinator will need access these files.</i>	Sing-along videos MP3 audio files Lyric handout Lyrics Powerpoint Song motions Chord charts	Days 1–5 Bible Memory Game Days 1, 4, 5 Storytelling Figures Day 2 Bread and Fish Day 2 Miracle Squares Day 3 Zacchaeus Figures Day 5 Fish Template Day 5 Storytelling Props

DIRECTOR'S CHECKLIST

4–5 months before

- ☐ Choose an Assistant Director to work with you to coordinate and lead VBS planning.
- ☐ Read through the *Come to the Table* curriculum.
- ☐ Discuss with your parish staff how the VBS can be part of a broader effort for Eucharistic Revival in your community (page 41).
- ☐ Read the timeline for Publicity and Outreach on page 26 of this guide and determine how you will promote your VBS.
- ☐ Select the date and time for VBS and reserve space.
- ☐ Estimate the number of leaders needed (page 20).
- ☐ Choose an offering project from page 15 or learn about another local or denominational organization that works at addressing hunger.

3 months before

- ☐ Choose Small Group Leaders, Worship & Drama Leaders, TASTE Leaders, Early Childhood Leaders, and other volunteers.
- ☐ Determine meeting spaces and create a map showing locations.
- ☐ Order extra leader guides as needed.
- ☐ Put the Bulletin Insert in your bulletin. Contact all volunteers who sign up on the insert.
- ☐ Distribute Invitation Letters to your parish families. Encourage your families to spread the word to neighbors, friends, family members, and others they know.

6–8 weeks before

- ☐ Place invitation posters in your church and in a public community location. Order more as needed.
- ☐ Open preregistration.
- ☐ Distribute registration information and orientation letters to families.
- ☐ Divide students into groups as registrations are received.
- ☐ Create student lists and write names on the Attendance Cards.
- ☐ Set the date and time for staff orientation.
- ☐ Give the Early Childhood Leader the *Early Childhood Leader Guide* and access to all related music and teaching aids material (electronic files).
- ☐ Give the *Worship & Drama Leader Guide* to relevant staff. Give the Worship Leader access to the daily Worship PowerPoint so that it can be customized as needed. Give the leader access to all music-related electronic files (songs, chord charts, song motions). Give the Drama Leader access to dramas.
- ☐ Distribute leader guides to TASTE staff (Create & Discover, Dig In, Sprout). Give leaders access to all relevant teaching aid material from the electronic files.
- ☐ Visit the “Come to the Table” board on the *Growing Up Catholic* Pinterest page for additional resources. Share links with leaders and volunteers.
- ☐ Review the Supplies and Donations List and contact people who may want to contribute in that way.

4 weeks before

- ☐ Order *A Scoop of Stories* student booklets for Early Childhood and *Dig In* student booklets for grades K–5 children.
- ☐ Plan a VBS dedication and/or VBS announcement during a Mass with the priest or liturgy committee (pages 26–27).
- ☐ Plan a *Come to the Table* Closing Program (page 37).
- ☐ Print and distribute the Leader Assignment Cards to all leaders and volunteers.
- ☐ Hold a staff orientation. See page 25 and the Staff Orientation PowerPoint.
- ☐ Finalize volunteers for all VBS responsibilities (page 24).
- ☐ Schedule a time with a custodian or other helpers to move furniture before and after VBS.
- ☐ Share estimated attendance numbers with the Early Childhood Leader and Snack Coordinator so snacks can be planned.
- ☐ Create an offering project visual.
- ☐ Conduct rehearsals for the drama.

2 weeks before

- ☐ Copy the “Set the Table” Instructions sheet for each Small Group Leader.
- ☐ Create a Fruit Emblem for each group of children (electronic files).
- ☐ Make nametags or print from the electronic files.
- ☐ Remove and cut apart the Family Diner Cards from each student booklet (and print any Spanish from the electronic files) and organize the cards by day.
- ☐ Check books out of the library for use in the various **TASTE** areas. See the Compiled Booklist.
- ☐ Conduct rehearsals for the drama.

Week of VBS

- ☐ Hold a VBS dedication during Mass (page 27).
- ☐ Hang up decorative area posters to designate each area.
- ☐ Set up the stage for dramas.
- ☐ Set up the offering display.
- ☐ Set up small-group areas for **COME**. Set out a fruit emblem and nametags for each group as well as the instructions and supplies for Day 1 of Set the Table.
- ☐ Set up the three **TASTE** Activity Stations: Create & Discover, Dig In, Sprout (page 29).
- ☐ Decorate the worship area, Early Childhood room(s), and all **TASTE** Activity Stations (page 28).
- ☐ Check in with all leaders to see what needs they have.
- ☐ Be sure all technology needs are addressed.
- ☐ Prepare snacks (pages 33–35).



During VBS

- ☐ Plan and organize drop-off and registration procedures for each day.
- ☐ Meet with staff 30 minutes before VBS begins each day to pray together, go over last-minute details, and answer questions.
- ☐ Count the offering and update the offering display daily.
- ☐ Keep records as described on page 30.
- ☐ Meet briefly with staff after Day 1.
- ☐ Offer encouragement to volunteers each day.
- ☐ Post daily announcements in a prominent place.
- ☐ Prepare for staff recognition and Certificates of Appreciation.
- ☐ Prepare Student Participation Certificates.
- ☐ Prepare for the *Come to the Table* Closing Program (page 37) and publicize it to families.

After VBS

- ☐ Collect leader guides.
- ☐ Clean up spaces used and let teachers know where to return extra supplies.
- ☐ Arrange to return furniture to its original location.
- ☐ Send Certificates of Appreciation and thank you notes to each leader and volunteer or plan another way to acknowledge leaders (page 38).

STAFF OVERVIEW

Director and Assistant Director

The Director and Assistant Director coordinate and organize VBS and provide support to volunteers during VBS week. This team will be familiar with the entire curriculum and will be responsible for decisions related to leaders, orientation, content, facilities, publicity and promotion, registration, and supplies.

Leaders for COME and SHARE (Opening and Closing Worship)

The following leaders are needed for opening and closing worship:

Small Group Leaders

Leaders are needed for each small group of children. Their primary role is to greet children as they arrive at Bible school, lead small group discussions, and accompany their group during **COME** (opening worship). Small Group Leaders also travel with their designated group to each **TASTE** Activity Station and provide support to the **TASTE** Leaders as needed. They will accompany their group during **SHARE** (closing worship) and help dismiss children at the end of the day.

Worship & Drama Leaders

The following leaders will take part in leading worship and drama during **COME** and **SHARE**:

- **Worship Leader** welcomes children to worship, introduces the daily theme and Bible memory, explains “Table Talk” questions following the drama, dismisses children to **TASTE** Activity Stations, distributes Family Diner Cards to Small Group Leaders during **SHARE** (*closing worship*), introduces and explains activities on the cards, and dismisses children.
- **Music Leader** works with the Worship Leader to choose songs, finds musicians, and coordinates the music team (if applicable), and leads singing.
- **Drama Leader** finds actors, gathers and coordinates props, plans and leads rehearsals before VBS, and coordinates the drama.
- **Technology Coordinator** prepares projection equipment and coordinates and manages technology resources to be used during worship.

Leaders for TASTE

The following leaders are needed for the **TASTE** Activity Stations:

- **Two Create & Discover Leaders** prepare and lead a 30-minute art activity station for each day, with activities related to the daily theme. The second leader serves as a co-leader or assistant.
- **Two Dig In Leaders** prepare and lead a 30-minute session each day that includes retelling the Bible story, Bible memory activities, and extension activities in a student booklet. The second leader serves as a co-leader or assistant.
- **Two Sprout Leaders** prepare and lead active outdoor games and activities related to the daily theme. The second leader serves as a co-leader or assistant.

Leaders for Early Childhood

Two or more leaders are needed to organize, plan, and lead a self-contained Early Childhood group. These leaders will function as guides and spiritual mentors for the four- and five-year-old children. They will set up the Early Childhood areas, lead age-appropriate music and worship, and plan and lead activities for this age group as outlined in the *Early Childhood Leader Guide*.