



## EDOW Formation Toolkit COVID-Conscious Vacation Bible School - Summer 2021

Vacation Bible School is a mainstay of formation offering for many congregations. Last summer congregations beautifully adapted to account for lockdown. But how about this coming summer? With restrictions lifting in many locations, schoolchildren gathering for in-person instruction, and a growing number of people vaccinated, what options are available? Here, the Rev. Shivaun Wilkinson and the Rev. Jenifer Gamber offer recommendations from how to plan your Vacation Bible School (VBS) to where to find resources, with a dash of helpful tips in between.

**Start with your “Why.”** Knowing your “Why” will help you clarify the shape, content, and delivery of your VBS as well as . Why is VBS important in your parish? VBS is best viewed within the overall formation goals and ministries of your congregation. If the “why” of your VBS is grounded in the ministry of child-care to your community, take note of the needs of your surrounding community. If the “why” is rooted in the ministry to children within your congregation, be sure to ask the appropriate families about their current comfort levels. If your parish values this time as an intergenerational interaction, pay attention to whether your diverse age-spread is feeling ready to re-gather. Depending on your VBS and parish leadership teams’ answers to these priorities, your options will become more apparent.

Some families will welcome remote options such as VBS in a box for screenless, at-home faith formation activities. Other families will welcome digital media options at home. Still others will welcome in-person gatherings. Be sure to survey your expected participants and leadership team, asking open-ended questions. Reframe your expectations to include more flexibility and an assumption that households will adapt your offerings to work for their current realities and risk-assessment. Poll your community, and choose options that meet their needs and your congregation’s budget and staffing capacity.

Whatever your eventual plans, follow your congregation’s regathering plans approved by the bishop, including provisions for cleaning, capacity, and safety practices.

### **Looking for guidance on COVID-Conscious best practices?**

- Consider attending Province 3’s [Formation Deep Dive at 12 noon on April 26th](#) for a conversation moderated by the Claggett Center’s Rita Yoe about Covid-Safe Event Planning.

### **Looking for VBS programs?**

- Register to [watch this panel of publishers](#) present their VBS offerings.
- [VTS's BuildFaith](#) is a rich source of information about VBS.
- [Episcopal Relief and Development](#) will be rolling out a free virtual VBS.
- Illustrated Ministry's [Compassion Camp](#) is designed for in-person, virtual, or hybrid.
- Edible Theology's [Bake with the Bible](#) can be a resource for developing a VBS.

### **Designing your own program?**

- Why not try out an intergenerational VBS? Watch [VBS for the Whole Parish](#) by the Rev. Shivaun Wilkinson to learn the why, and a model for developing your own intergenerational VBS where children and adults learn from one another.
- Join the [Forma Facebook page](#) to connect with other formation leaders for ideas and support.
- Think sustainability. Since sharing of supplies and spaces can be problematic with COVID concerns, plan thoughtfully around creating and crafting. With so many inexpensive craft options, we can default to crafts rather than activities that are more motion or action-oriented that teach the story or lesson more effectively.
- Consider what is attainable in a day or week at home. At-home VBS can be an extremely effective way to keep the formation aspects of summer church, while also empowering households to steer the learning. However what is possible with a team of volunteers, pre-planning, set-up and clean-up help, is not possible in most households. Generally speaking, assuming a household can do an appropriate family worship/prayer time and one activity a day, and no more than five activities slated for the week, is a good rule of thumb.
- Tie in the sermons. Connect the whole parish to the VBS program, regardless of your target age category, with sermons that relate back to topics and themes. If your VBS is one week, bookend sermons can be an effective way to bring the whole congregation into the VBS learning journey. If you are exploring a take-home VBS option, for a week, month, or even whole summer, consider a sermon series helping to move the whole congregation along the scriptures or themes.

### **Looking for ways to make safety fun?**

- *Wear wrist-bands.* Buy three color silicone wristbands, in red, yellow or green, to help participants and volunteers non-verbally indicate their level of covid safety-concerns. Red indicates "happy to be here, but keeping my space." Yellow indicates "I'm comfortable talking but not touching." and Green indicates "handshakes, fistbumps and sidehugs are fine." Especially with VBS programs where parents aren't present, make sure the parents have the final say in indicating covid-related comfort levels.
- *Consider bubbles.* One of the joys of VBS tends to be the mixing of people. However, during a covid-tide reality, it may be necessary to reframe our joy from breadth into depth of relationships. Let the joy this year be in creating "household units" of some form, where the groups stay consistently bubbled the whole camp in an attempt to mitigate possible covid exposures and spreads.

- *Rethink your food.* Accept pre-packaged, individually wrapped snack items rather than typical, more-cost effective large quantity purchases. If your VBS includes meals or an ending party, consider a BYOPicnic option, to keep households on their own blankets and to uphold diocesan covid food requirements.
- *Move outside.* Over the past 12 months,, children have spent more time sitting inside and staring at screens than ever before. Outside is a safer option to reduce the spread of viruses and a refreshing change in activity-level and learning style. Scavenger hunt, hike, run, and enjoy the outdoors. Encourage participants to dress for weather. Sometimes a rainy day in boots, raincoat and umbrella can be more fun, or at least novel, than a sunny summer day.

Want to talk through ideas? Contact [the Rev. Shivaun Wilkinson](#) or [the Rev. Jenifer Gamber](#).