



## Director Guide

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SAMPLE - DO NOT REPRODUCE

# Neighbors are more than the people who live next door.

Neighbors are more than the people in our families or communities. Through five carefully chosen Bible stories, *Who Is My Neighbor?* VBS leads children on a journey to discover more about God's great love. From looking at how to be a neighbor to diving into what it means to live out our faith, this interactive VBS series will lead children deeply into Bible stories focused on God's care and compassion for neighbors close at hand and around the world. Join us as we discover neighbors near and far!

# About VBS

*Who Is My Neighbor?* is a Bible- and activity-based learning experience. There are several components to the curriculum.

- Early Childhood is designed for ages 4–5. The *Early Childhood Leader Guide*, along with *My Book of Stories*, the student booklet, includes everything needed to lead this component of vacation Bible school. It includes crafts, games, snack ideas, and other activities that will help young children learn about their neighbors. Younger children may participate with the older children during Worship time, or have their own worship experience in their VBS space.
- The *Director Guide*, *Worship and Drama Guide*, *Active Response Guide*, *Bible Response Guide*, *Creative Response Guide*, and *Guide Book* are materials for grades K–5. The children will meet as one group for the Worship time, where they will see the Bible stories come to life through a drama. The children will be divided into smaller groups to rotate among the three Response times, allowing children to discover more about how to be peacemakers.
- A separate guide includes supplemental ideas for use with children in grades 6–8 during the Bible Response time. The Worship time and the Active and Creative Response time materials in the guides are appropriate for this age group.

Each session plan includes the day's Scripture, Bible background, purpose statement, and Bible memory passage. Read over these sections so that you are familiar with the focus of each day. All VBS leader guides include this information so that the activities and discussions will reflect the day's themes.

*Who Is My Neighbor?* is written as a five-day vacation Bible school program, usually completed over the course of one week. See page 6 for a daily session schedule chart that will help you plan. The suggested time frames can be modified depending on the time available for your Bible school.

If a five-day vacation Bible school does not suit your needs, there are other ways to use *Who Is My Neighbor?* On pages 27-28 there are schedules for the following:

- Midweek club or program for a 10-week period
- Weekend retreat

# VBS overview

Session	Bible text and story summary	Purpose statement	Bible memory	Fratelli Tutti
<b>1</b> Love God and Your Neighbor	<b>Mark 12:28-34</b> Jesus speaks of the importance of loving God and loving neighbors.	To discover Jesus' instructions to love God and neighbor	Mark 12:28b-29	#56-86
<b>2</b> Who Is My Neighbor?	<b>Luke 10:25-37</b> Jesus tells the story of a traveler who is wounded by robbers. The one who stops to help, who shows mercy, is the one we are to imitate.	To recognize what it means to be a good neighbor	Mark 12:30	#56-86, 101-105, 165-166
<b>3</b> Live Peacefully	<b>Genesis 26:12-33</b> Isaac's neighbors become jealous of his prosperity. Isaac moves to a new location so that he will not be in conflict with his neighbors. The king recognizes that God is with Isaac.	To think about living peacefully with neighbors	Mark 12:31	#225-254
<b>4</b> Everyone Is Invited!	<b>Luke 14:15-24</b> Jesus tells a story about a banquet to which those who are invited do not attend. Instead, the servants go out on the streets and invite those who had originally been excluded.	To understand that everyone is included as neighbors and invited to God's table	Mark 12:28b-31	#61-62, 87-100
<b>5</b> Share with Others	<b>Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37</b> The early church worships and prays together. They eat together and share material goods with those who need help, making sure that everyone's needs are met.	To see an example of sharing God's gifts with church communities and neighbors	Mark 12:28b-31	#61-62, 118-120, 271-280

## Bible memory

### Grades K–5; 6–8 will learn Mark 12:28b-31.

- **Day 1:** “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one.’” —Mark 12:28b-29
- **Day 2:** “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’” —Mark 12:30
- **Day 3:** “The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” —Mark 12:31
- **Days 4 & 5:** “Which commandment is the first of all?” Jesus answered, “The first is, ‘Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these.” —Mark 12:28b-31

### Early childhood Bible memory:

Love the Lord your God. Love your neighbor as yourself. —Mark 12:30, 31, adapted

# Format and daily schedule

The K–5 and 6–8 components of *Who Is My Neighbor?* are designed for children to have both large- and small-group experiences. Small groups may be determined by the age of the children, or children may be placed in multiage groups. Most VBS programs will want to have three small groups so that children can easily rotate among the three Response times. However, if your Bible school has more than 50 children, you may want to divide into more than three groups. Instead of one Active, one Bible, and one Creative Response segment, you may want to have two of each running simultaneously so that all the groups can rotate through the three Response times.

Several meeting times are included in each day: Gather, Worship, Respond, and Send. The schedule for a 2-hour-and-15-minute Bible school session is as follows:

## 1. Gather

(10 minutes)

Children gather in small groups with their Group leader to begin the day. The Group leader will take attendance, answer questions, and make sure everyone is ready for VBS. The Group leader will accompany the children to the various VBS segments.

## 2. Worship

(25 minutes)

All the groups will gather in one area for Worship time. This large-group experience includes a call to worship, music, offering, and a drama to present the day's Bible story.

## 3. Respond

(30 minutes each)

Small groups will rotate among three Response stations each day. Activities focus on the Bible story themes; the Creative Response time includes a snack.

- **Active Response** (games and activities)
- **Bible Response** (Bible story discussion, student book activities)
- **Creative Response** (crafts and snack)

## 4. Send

(10 minutes)

Children will meet in their small groups for a sending blessing and to be dismissed.

## Modified schedule

If your VBS program allows for less time, here are scheduling options:

### If you have 2 hours:

**Gather**—5 to 10 minutes

**Worship**—25 minutes

**Respond**—75 minutes

- Active—25 minutes
- Bible—25 minutes
- Creative—25 minutes

**Send**—5 to 10 minutes

### If you have 1½ hours:

**Gather**—5 minutes

**Worship**—20 minutes

**Respond**—60 minutes

- Active—20 minutes
- Bible—20 minutes
- Creative—20 minutes

**Send**—5 minutes

### If you have 1 hour:

**Worship**—15 minutes

**Respond**—45 minutes

- Active—15 minutes
- Bible—15 minutes
- Creative—15 minutes

# Materials for a successful VBS

The *Who Is My Neighbor?* starter kit includes guides and resources you will need to plan and run a successful VBS program. You will need to order more copies of some of the resources. You can order online at [GrowingUpCatholicVBS.com](http://GrowingUpCatholicVBS.com).

- ❑ **Electronic files/USB drive:** All files for the VBS can be found both on the VBS download page and on the USB drive provided in the physical starter kit. They include:
  - All leader guides
  - Promotional materials: print invitation posters, and use the blurbs and announcements in bulletins and electronic media
  - Logo: use with announcements, or print a large banner to place outside your church to advertise to the community
  - Letters to families
  - Name tags
  - Leader certificate of appreciation
  - VBS overview
  - Bible memory passage slide shows: use during the Worship and Bible Response times; pause the slides as needed so that children can read and memorize the words
- ❑ **Music files** will help you lead singing and motions, whether you have musicians or simply want to use the music videos or audio files.
  - Songbook, with lyrics, body movement descriptions, and lead sheets with melody lines and chords.
  - MP3 audio files for each song.
  - Lyric slide shows.
  - Sing-along music videos demonstrating the movements.
- ❑ **My Book of Stories** is for children ages 4–5. It includes illustrated Bible stories and activities. It is a must for each child and Early Childhood leader. Have extra copies on hand for other leaders and visiting children.
- ❑ **Guide Book** is the student book that will be used each day during the Bible Response time. It is a must for each child and Bible Response leader. Have extra copies available for other leaders and visiting children.
- ❑ **Active Response, Bible Response, and Creative Response Guides** direct the respective leaders in discussion and activities.
- ❑ **The Bible memory poster** is used during the Worship and Bible Response times. Be sure to have several on hand, and hang them in various places around the VBS location.
- ❑ **The invitation poster and postcard** are used to spread the word about VBS. You may order additional posters, or print your own using the electronic files.
- ❑ **Student participation certificates** are given to each child on the last day of VBS.

# VBS publicity

Make a plan to let your parish and community know about VBS.

- **Put invitation posters** in visible areas of your church and community. Mail out invitation postcards and ask members to hand them out. Use the electronic files to print your own posters and postcards.
- **Create anticipation** by placing announcements in your parish bulletin and community newspaper, and on social media platforms. The electronic files include announcements, and you may tailor them to fit your VBS program.
- **Use the VBS logo** from the electronic files alongside announcements or other publicity items.
- **Create a large banner** to place outside your church to advertise to the community. You have our permission to take any electronic files including the VBS logo to a local print shop for printing.
- **Several weeks before VBS**, play the Bible memory slide show before Mass as people arrive for worship. This is a good way to remind people about VBS and to encourage them to be involved.

## Volunteers

### Finding volunteers

Planning VBS is a big task, but it's also fun and rewarding. Gather volunteers to help you plan and facilitate the program. Here are some tips:

1. **Prayerfully consider who can help.** Ask God to show you people who can assist with VBS.
2. **Figure out how many volunteers are needed.** Become familiar with the curriculum, read the *Director Guide*, and look at the VBS location to help you determine the number of people you will need.
3. **Assure potential volunteers** that VBS is fun not only for children, but also for adults. Emphasize that there are a variety of ways to be involved, that involvement is only for the duration of VBS (not a long-term commitment), and that it's a great way to connect with children and adults in the community.
4. **Let potential volunteers know that it's easy to help.** They can help with one thing, such as preparing a snack one day, or they can help on an ongoing basis, such as leading a small group of children. There is something for everyone.
5. **Don't forget to ask youth to volunteer!** They can prepare games, crafts, and snacks; set up any electronic equipment that is needed; and accompany VBS leaders and children from one segment to another.
6. **Remind everyone that there is something they can do—pray!** Request prayers as you plan, and request prayers during VBS.
7. **Plan an orientation time** so that volunteers can learn about the VBS curriculum. See page 9 for things to cover during orientation.
8. **Take care of the volunteers during VBS.** Send notes of encouragement and small treats for their efforts.
9. **Be sure to thank all the volunteers after VBS.** Host a meal to say thanks, and give them certificates of appreciation. These can be printed from the electronic files.



## Volunteer tasks

How can people volunteer?

- **Serve as VBS staff:** Program Coordinating Team member; Group leader; Worship leader; Active, Creative, or Bible Response time leader; or Early Childhood leader or helper
- **Serve as prayer partners** for the program
- **Organize publicity** for VBS (p. 8)
- **Help with registration** on the first day of VBS
- **Serve as assistants** to session leaders
- **Help with snack preparations** and cleanup

## Program coordinating team

This team is familiar with the entire curriculum and organizational structure. They are responsible for making decisions about leaders, content, facilities, publicity, promotion, leadership training, registration, and supplies.

## Volunteer orientation

Meet with volunteers for an orientation before VBS to be sure that everyone understands their role and receives the supplies they need. The following should be covered:

- **Introduce volunteers** and clarify roles.
- **Review** overall schedule.
- **Give an overview** of the stories in *Who Is My Neighbor?* (p. 5). You may want to print the overview from the electronic files and hand one to each volunteer.
- **Assign rooms and spaces** for each of the segments: Gather, Worship, Respond (Active, Bible, and Creative Response), and Send.
- **Assign rooms and spaces** for the Early Childhood component.
- **Distribute and explain the schedule**, a map locating all areas and activities, group lists, and record-keeping supplies.
- **Walk from one area to another** so that volunteers become acquainted with the space and the curriculum.
- **Give guides to the appropriate leaders:** *Worship and Drama Guide*, *Active Response Guide*, *Bible Response Guide*, *Creative Response Guide*, and *Early Childhood Leader Guide*.
- **Give copies of *Guide Book***, one per child, to the Bible Response leader.
- **Give copies of *My Book of Stories***, one per child, to the Early Childhood leader.
- **Share a first aid policy** that tells leaders what to do with both minor cuts and greater emergencies.
- **Give additional supplies** to Group leaders.
- **Outline plans** for the VBS dedication in the parish, if one is planned.
- **Describe closing celebration plans** (pp. 15), if one is planned.

## Leaders

Leaders perform various roles depending on their assignment for the VBS sessions. Copy and fill in the leader assignment sheets (pp. 11-12) and hand them out to appropriate leaders and volunteers.

### Gather

Group leaders are needed for each of the small groups. They will greet children as they arrive, and go with their small groups to the Worship time and three Response times.

### Worship

The following leaders are needed for the Worship time:

- **Worship leader**—welcomes children to the Worship time and facilitates worship
- **Music leader**—chooses songs and gathers a music team
- **Drama leader**—casts actors and coordinates the drama, including props
- **Bible memory leader**—guides children in learning the Bible memory passage

### Respond

The following leaders are needed for the three Response times:

- **Active Response leader**—chooses and leads games and other activities
- **Bible Response leader**—leads discussion of the Bible story and *Who Is My Neighbor?* activities
- **Creative Response leader**—chooses and leads crafts and snack

### Send

Group leaders dismiss the children at the end of the day.

## Early Childhood Leaders

The Early Childhood portion of vacation Bible school is designed to meet the needs and developmental abilities of children ages 4–5. The *Early Childhood Leader Guide* contains all the information needed to lead this portion of VBS.

# Leader assignment sheets

## Group leader

### Responsibilities

- Function as a guide and spiritual mentor for a group of children.
- Be aware of individual needs of group members as well as group dynamics.
- Greet children as they arrive at Bible school; take attendance.
- Accompany your group to the Worship time and the Active, Bible, and Creative Response times.
- Dismiss children at the end of the Bible school session.
- Attend staff orientation on \_\_\_ (day) at \_\_\_ (time).



### Gather

- Welcome each child to Bible school and to your group. Learn one another's names.
- Take attendance.
- Briefly explain the daily schedule.

### Worship and Response times

- Accompany your group to each of the activities.
- Assist other leaders as needed.

### Send

- Remind children of the offering project and distribute any Bible school information that needs to go home. Encourage them to invite their friends and neighbors to Bible school.
- Offer a sending blessing. You may choose words from the Bible memory passage or choose your own: "As you go, remember that the most important thing is to love God. The second most important thing is to love your neighbor as yourself."

## Worship leader

### Responsibilities

- Lead five Worship times and coordinate those involved in worship. Use plans provided in the *Worship and Drama Guide*.
- Read the dramas in the *Worship and Drama Guide* to see how they coordinate with worship plans.
- Work with the Drama leader and musicians to plan worship.
- Work with the Bible memory leader to lead children in learning the Bible memory passage.
- Attend staff orientation on \_\_\_ (day) at \_\_\_ (time).



## Drama leader

### Responsibilities

- Coordinate rehearsals and direct the five dramas. Scripts are provided in the *Worship and Drama Guide*.
- Read the *Worship and Drama Guide* to see how the dramas fit into the worship service.
- Work closely with the Worship leader to plan worship.
- Find drama participants; copy and distribute scripts.
- Locate costumes and props for the dramas.
- Attend staff orientation on \_\_\_ (day) at \_\_\_ (time).



## Response leaders (Active, Bible, Creative)

### Responsibilities

- Prepare and supervise daily Response times. Use the plans found in the *Active Response Guide*, *Bible Response Guide*, or *Creative Response Guide*. Choose activities that work best for your groups.
- Coordinate adult and youth volunteer helpers to assist with the activities.
- Gather supplies for the activities.
- Save copies of receipts and give them to \_\_\_ for reimbursement.
- Attend staff orientation on \_\_\_ (day) at \_\_\_ (time).



## Early Childhood leader

### Responsibilities

- Function as a guide and spiritual mentor for a group of children.
- Be aware of individual needs of group members as well as group dynamics.
- Greet children as they arrive at Bible school and take attendance.
- Lead the daily sessions as outlined in the *Early Childhood Leader Guide*.
- Coordinate adult and youth volunteer helpers to assist with the activities.
- Attend staff orientation on \_\_\_ (day) at \_\_\_ (time).



# VBS dedication

Coordinate with your pastor and/or liturgy committee to plan a dedication service during Mass prior to the first day of VBS. Here are some ideas of what to include:

- **Print the VBS logo**, from the electronic files, in the church bulletin. Introduce *Who Is My Neighbor?* using materials from the electronic files.
- **Use the VBS overview** to introduce the Bible stories that will be covered.
- **Use the Bible memory slide show** to introduce the Bible memory verses.
- **Print a list of volunteers** in the parish bulletin, and invite the congregation to pray for them as they prepare for VBS. Remind the parish to pray for them during VBS, too.
- **Invite the children** who will be participating in VBS to stand or raise a hand. Say a prayer of blessing for them. Encourage parishioners to pray for them throughout the week.
- **Pray that caring relationships** and connections will be created during VBS.
- **Introduce the offering project.** Invite the parish to donate.
- **Sing one or more of the VBS songs.** Use the accompanying PowerPoint song lyric slideshows.

## Offering project

Contact your diocese, Catholic Relief Services, local Catholic Charities, or other agency to find out about projects your VBS program can support. Choose one that suits the needs and interests of your church, and ask the agency for information and stories about the project that can be shared with the children.

### Offering visuals

Plan a visual way to recognize the amount of money contributed during VBS. Be sure to update the visual each day and point out the progress that is made. Be sure to thank children for their generosity!

Here are some ideas for an offering visual:

- **Draw stick figures** (neighbors) on a poster board, each figure representing a certain amount of money.
- **Cut out footprints** and make them “walk” around the room, each print representing a certain amount of money. The footprints symbolize walking to our neighbors.
- **Cut out handprints** and post them around the room, each hand representing a certain amount of money. The handprints symbolize reaching out to neighbors.
- **Fill in a chart or graph** according to how much money is contributed.
- **Create a paper chain**, each link representing a certain amount of money.

# Planning chart

## 5 months before VBS

- Become familiar with the *Who Is My Neighbor?* curriculum. Look over all the materials.
- Select date and time for VBS.
- Contact parish leaders responsible for adult formation to request that they coordinate events to teach parents and other adult parishioners about *Fratelli Tutti* around the time of the VBS.

## 4 months before VBS

- Estimate the number of volunteers needed for your Bible school (p. 8).
- Choose an offering project (p. 13).

## 3 months before VBS

- Choose Group leaders and contact volunteers (p. 8).
- Post VBS dates in local newspapers and online.
- Announce VBS dates, times, and themes in church bulletins.
- Determine meeting spaces and mark the locations on a map.
- Look at the electronic files and visit the download page for additional resources.
- Read through leader guides.
- Order extra copies of posters and other materials as needed.
- Follow up with parish adult formation leaders..

## 2 months before VBS

- Finalize assignments for all VBS responsibilities.
- Post invitation posters in public places.
- Give copies of the *Worship and Drama Guide* to the Worship and Drama leaders.
- Distribute leader guides to staff.
- Photocopy registration form (p. 16) and letter to families (p. 18).

## 1 month before VBS

- Plan VBS dedication with pastor or liturgy committee (p. 13).
- Plan closing celebration (p. 15).
- Send out letters to families (p. 18).
- Hold preregistration.
- Divide children into groups based on registration numbers.
- Make group lists.
- Student books *Guide Book* (K–5, 6–8) and *My Book of Stories* (Early Childhood) are strongly recommended. Order them now (one per child).
- Hold volunteer orientation (p. 9).
- Schedule custodian or helpers to move furniture before and after VBS.
- Share attendance expectations with Creative Response leader so snacks can be planned.
- Locate a few extra Bibles for each group.

## During VBS

- Gather with volunteers every day for prayer prior to the start of VBS.
- Meet briefly with volunteers after Day 1 to talk about logistics and changes that may need to be made.
- Offer volunteers encouragement each day.
- Post daily announcements in a prominent place.
- Count offering.
- Record attendance.
- Prepare for volunteer recognition.
- Prepare student participation certificates.
- Prepare for closing celebration (p. 15).

# Record keeping

Copy an attendance record (p. 17) for each Group leader. During Bible school, record daily attendance, average attendance, daily offering amount, and total offering amount. Prepare student participation certificates and have them available for Group leaders to sign on Day 4.

# Decorating your space

Decorating is an important part of your VBS! Decorations set the tone and generate excitement. Decorations don't need to be expensive or elaborate. The suggestions provided can be adapted and changed to fit the needs of your setting. Invite volunteers who are artistically gifted to coordinate, create, and set up the decorations.

Check out the “Who Is My Neighbor?” board on the *Growing Up Catholic* Pinterest page for more ideas and samples (<https://pinterest.com/GrowingUpCatholic/who-is-my-neighbor-vbs>).

- Use **hearts** and repurpose standard Valentine's Day decorations to emphasize the “love” part of the “Love God and love your neighbor” aspect of the VBS theme.
- Decorate with **houses** or **paper dolls** to emphasize the neighbor aspect of the theme.
- To raise awareness that our neighbors are near and far, **post a sign with arrows** pointing to different places where our neighbors are found. Include nearby neighborhoods, cities across the country, and international cities.

# Tips for the first day

- **Post signs** so that people will know where the registration table and other places are.
- **Have greeters** on hand in the parking lot and in the building to greet those who are not familiar with your church and its space.
- **Post group lists** for children at the entrance to the building. Print the lists with large letters, so they are easily read by young children. Provide names of the Group leaders and the locations.
- **Prepare for late registrants.** Have a table where several helpers are available to place children in groups. Write the child's name and name of the Group leader on a sticky note, which the children can use to find their group and leader. The leader will add the names to the attendance record. Give new class lists to the Group leaders later in the day.
- **Have parents or guardians** of late registrants complete the registration form on page 16. If the children arrive without an adult, be sure to send the registration form home to be completed and returned the next day.
- **Ask Early Childhood leaders** to meet their children at the building entrance. They should gather the entire group before going to their meeting space.

# Closing celebration

- **Plan a closing program** for family and friends. Acknowledge the work of leaders, volunteers, planners, and helpers. Distribute student participation certificates.
- **Introduce the dramas** and characters to family and friends.
- **Invite family and friends** to visit the Response spaces.
- **Invite family and friends** to contribute to the offering project.
- **Take VBS to the entire congregation** the following Sunday. Use worship and drama materials from the *Worship and Drama Guide* and offer a snack to celebrate Bible school, perhaps one used during the Creative Response time.

# Registration Form



## Registration Form

Please complete this form and return it by \_\_\_\_\_

Name of child \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate \_\_\_\_\_ Last school grade completed \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Medical concerns/allergies \_\_\_\_\_

Name of parent/primary caregiver \_\_\_\_\_

Primary phone \_\_\_\_\_ Secondary phone \_\_\_\_\_

Home /  Work /  Cell

Home /  Work /  Cell

Emergency contact \_\_\_\_\_ Emergency phone \_\_\_\_\_

Home /  Work /  Cell

Church affiliation (*optional*) \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



## Registration Form

Please complete this form and return it by \_\_\_\_\_

Name of child \_\_\_\_\_

Birthdate \_\_\_\_\_ Last school grade completed \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Medical concerns/allergies \_\_\_\_\_

Name of parent/primary caregiver \_\_\_\_\_

Primary phone \_\_\_\_\_ Secondary phone \_\_\_\_\_

Home /  Work /  Cell

Home /  Work /  Cell

Emergency contact \_\_\_\_\_ Emergency phone \_\_\_\_\_

Home /  Work /  Cell

Church affiliation (*optional*) \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/guardian signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



# Attendance record

**“Who is My Neighbor” attendance record.**

Group \_\_\_\_\_ Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Day: 1 2 3 4 5

1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

**“Who is My Neighbor” attendance record.**

Group \_\_\_\_\_ Leader \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Day: 1 2 3 4 5

1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					
7					
8					
9					
10					

## Letter to Families



**It's time for vacation Bible school!**

**Place:**

**Date:**

**Time:**

Your children are invited to vacation Bible school! Through a fun-filled time of learning and experiences, children will discover that neighbors are more than the people who live next door. This interactive VBS series will lead children deeply into five Bible stories focused on God's care and compassion for neighbors close at hand and around the world.

*Who Is My Neighbor?* will take children on a journey as they discover more about God's great love and what it means to be a neighbor and to live out our faith.

Join us as we discover neighbors near and far!

—The vacation Bible school committee

# Bible Backgrounds

## Day 1

# Love God and Your Neighbor

### Mark 12:28-34

Today's Scripture from Mark and its parallels in other Gospels raise questions that have dogged readers for 20 centuries: What does it look like to love God with every fiber of our being? Who is my neighbor? Who is it that we are to love and tend as faithfully as we feed and groom our own bodies? These are questions that every generation needs to revisit.

Mark's version of the dialogue about the greatest commandment moves slowly and has a contemplative feel to it. Earlier in chapter 12, hostility underlies the verbal sparring between Jesus and the religious authorities, but here, the questioner seems sincere. Perhaps he intends to make peace by focusing everyone's attention on what matters most. At any rate, a sense of awe descends as we tiptoe through this passage, wondering what it means to love God with all our strength, heart, and mind.

In some ways, Jesus' answer is conventional: even the smallest Jewish children would have known the command to love God with all your heart, and they would have seen it written on doorframes, as is described in Deuteronomy 6:4-8. However, the command to "love your neighbor as yourself" occurs only once in the Hebrew Bible (Leviticus 19:18). It comes from a rather obscure passage about not taking revenge. Jesus binds love of God and love of neighbor together in a fresh way that reshapes our understanding of both kinds of love.

In Luke's version of this conversation, the emphasis shifts to loving our neighbors, and Jesus is pushed to define what he means by that. His out-of-the-box reply features a compassionate Samaritan acting as neighbor to the victim of a crime, which we will explore in Day 2 of VBS.

Learning to love God and others is a lifelong pursuit. Children can show their love for God through peaceful and loving relationships with others. They can show their love for others through simple actions that help make the world a good place for themselves and others to enjoy. Throwing away trash, watering

a garden, and caring for pets are practical ways for children to nurture God's world and thereby show love for God and others. They can imagine that God longs for a life-giving, beautiful earth to be enjoyed by children for many years in the future.

Use this session to help the children think about concrete ways to show love to others. Make sure that the children feel loved, too.

### Fratelli Tutti Connections

In earlier Jewish traditions, the imperative to love and care for others appears to have been limited to relationships between members of the same nation. The ancient commandment to "love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev 19:18) was usually understood as referring to one's fellow citizens, yet the boundaries gradually expanded, especially in the Judaism that developed outside of the land of Israel. We encounter the command not to do to others what you would not want them to do to you (cf. Tob 4:15). In the first century before Christ, Rabbi Hillel stated: "This is the entire Torah. Everything else is commentary". The desire to imitate God's own way of acting gradually replaced the tendency to think only of those nearest us: "The compassion of man is for his neighbour, but the compassion of the Lord is for all living beings" (Sir 18:13).

In the New Testament, Hillel's precept was expressed in positive terms: "In everything, do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets" (Mt 7:12). This command is universal in scope, embracing everyone on the basis of our shared humanity, since the heavenly Father "makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good" (Mt 5:45). Hence the summons to "be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:36).

—*Fratelli Tutti*, #59-60

## Day 2

# Who Is My Neighbor?

### Luke 10:25-37

The story of the good Samaritan is probably the best-known parable in the Bible; however, it is rarely read in context. Just prior to this passage, a Samaritan village rejects Jesus and his messengers as they begin their journey to Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the hero of this parable turns out to be a Samaritan who is also on a journey. As is often the case in Jesus' teaching in Luke, it is outsiders who model authentic discipleship.

The 3,000 ft / 900 m descent on the deserted stretch of road from Jerusalem to Jericho was a fitting locale for this mugging. This journey was dangerous for lone travelers because of robbers who took advantage of the rocks and caves that lined the road. The victim does not have any identifying attributes, reducing his plight to that of human need.

We are not told why the priest and Levite fail to take action. What we do know is that the Samaritan takes action because he is moved with compassion. He pauses on his journey, tends to the injured man, and leaves enough money to provide care for several weeks.

It was not uncommon to illustrate a point by having an ordinary Jewish person surpass the priesthood by acting in exemplary fashion. Jesus, however, uses the example of a despised Samaritan as the one who embodies compassion.

Instead of asking, "Who is my neighbor?"—based upon race, religion, or nationality—Jesus asks which one acts like a neighbor. The lawyer with whom he is speaking may not be able to bring himself to speak of the hero's race in his answer, so he responds universally: "The one who showed mercy." This may have been Jesus' intention all along. To this is Jesus' rejoinder: "Go and do likewise."

When children have heard the word *Samaritan* before, it was likely in the context of this story, in which the Samaritan is the hero, or in reference to a current-day news story in which someone helps another person and is called a "good Samaritan." From a child's perspective, helping is what Samaritans do! So when children hear this familiar story again, challenge them to listen for something new.

When have they helped others? When have they have felt like looking the other way? When have they been helped?

Pay attention to children who may themselves be wounded, and extend to them the healing presence of Jesus by showing extra kindness.

### Fratelli Tutti Connections

Only one person stopped, approached the man and cared for him personally, even spending his own money to provide for his needs. He also gave him something that in our frenetic world we cling to tightly: he gave him his time. Certainly, he had his own plans for that day, his own needs, commitments and desires. Yet he was able to put all that aside when confronted with someone in need. Without even knowing the injured man, he saw him as deserving of his time and attention.

Which of these persons do you identify with? This question, blunt as it is, is direct and incisive. Which of these characters do you resemble? We need to acknowledge that we are constantly tempted to ignore others, especially the weak. Let us admit that, for all the progress we have made, we are still "illiterate" when it comes to accompanying, caring for and supporting the most frail and vulnerable members of our developed societies. We have become accustomed to looking the other way, passing by, ignoring situations until they affect us directly....

By his actions, the Good Samaritan showed that "the existence of each and every individual is deeply tied to that of others: life is not simply time that passes; life is a time for interactions"....

The parable eloquently presents the basic decision we need to make in order to rebuild our wounded world. In the face of so much pain and suffering, our only course is to imitate the Good Samaritan.

—*Fratelli Tutti*, #63-64, 66-67

## Day 3

# Live Peacefully

### Genesis 26:12-33

The confrontation between King Abimelech and Isaac lifts up Isaac's power. Isaac is the one who inherits everything from his father, Abraham, including treasure, livestock, servants, slaves, and trained warriors. Isaac becomes a powerful clan chieftain with considerable wealth and power at his command. This image is strengthened when we realize that Abimelech is intimidated by Isaac. "You are more powerful than we are," he says. He urges Isaac to settle somewhere else.

After Isaac moves away from Abimelech's territory, he digs again the wells Abraham had dug. Isaac knows his father's wells are good, but he also knows he will have to dig them for himself. They are old wells, but filled with fresh water.

On the first two occasions, the rights to the wells dug by Isaac's men are challenged by his neighbors. Isaac has rights to those wells and the power to enforce his rights, but his response is simply to move away. Isaac relinquishes his power so that he might live peacefully with his neighbors. It is hard to understand why the side with the rights and the power would choose to walk away.

One wonders why the Israelites preserved this story about Isaac. What significance did Isaac's willingness to lay aside his power have for later generations?

The end of the passage contains the establishment of Beersheba. At Beersheba, King Abimelech comes to Isaac again. This time he does not ask Isaac to move away. His men do not take away Isaac's wells. Instead, Abimelech asks to make a pact of peace with Isaac so they can live in friendship as neighbors.

One strategy for neighborly peacemaking that Isaac demonstrates is walking away from a conflict. Children can intensify a conflict by continuing to argue. Feelings can get quite high. Walking away can offer time to breathe, reflect, and get perspective. While this should not be the only response to difficult situations, there are times when it is safest and best to remove oneself from a situation for a time. Emphasize to children that a strong person learns when to walk away.

The idea of walking away from conflict, however, may not sit well with all of the children. In some families (and many friend groups), people are expected to fight back if they are treated unfairly. Be aware of differences in culture and religious background that may make this topic more difficult for some in your group to affirm.

### Fratelli Tutti Connections

Social peace demands hard work, craftsmanship.... What is important is to create processes of encounter, processes that build a people that can accept differences. Let us arm our children with the weapons of dialogue! Let us teach them to fight the good fight of the culture of encounter!

Jesus never promoted violence or intolerance. He openly condemned the use of force to gain power over others....

We are called to love everyone, without exception; at the same time, loving an oppressor does not mean allowing him to keep oppressing us, or letting him think that what he does is acceptable. On the contrary, true love for an oppressor means seeking ways to make him cease his oppression; it means stripping him of a power that he does not know how to use, and that diminishes his own humanity and that of others.....

The important thing is not to fuel anger, which is unhealthy for our own soul and the soul of our people, or to become obsessed with taking revenge and destroying the other. No one achieves inner peace or returns to a normal life in that way.... Nothing is gained this way and, in the end, everything is lost.

—*Fratelli Tutti*, #217, 238, 241

## Day 4

# Everyone Is Invited!

### Luke 14:15-24

Luke's gospel pays attention to food: Jesus feeds thousands, feasts with tax collectors, reflects on fruit trees, and invites himself to dinner. Jesus did much of his teaching over meals, where people often let down their guard and were ready to listen. The meals had many "teachable moments"—as children will find in today's text.

In ancient times, people welcomed an invitation to a banquet. Meats and sweets were luxury foods enjoyed with others at celebrations. They were not common fare for a meal. For the host, a banquet was a major undertaking that took days to prepare. It was important to know how many guests to expect because leftover food wouldn't keep and needed to be thrown out.

In a way, Jesus' story of the great dinner is humorous. Who would think of going into the streets to fill the banquet hall? How happy the street people must be to share in such a feast, hosted by an important person! The story also has an element of sadness. The people who are expected to attend the banquet are absent because they choose not to go, making weak excuses. How shocked they would be to know they would never receive another invitation from this host!

The kingdom of God is like the great dinner, Jesus says. God invites everyone—regardless of race, class, age, or abilities—to share in the feast at God's table. Some will accept God's invitation and others will reject it. The choice belongs to the person invited.

This story illustrates that neighbors can be found in unexpected places. Those who are outside of our usual social circles can be the ones with whom we develop relationships; they can meet our needs in new and unexpected ways. When following Jesus, people do unexpected things, like inviting people who are not friends to a party, or refusing to make excuses to avoid certain people. Can we help children imagine a world where everyone has enough food and friends?

Children know what it is 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.

### **Fratelli Tutti Connections**

Significantly, many small communities living in desert areas developed a remarkable system of welcoming pilgrims as an exercise of the sacred duty of hospitality. The medieval monastic communities did likewise, as we see from the Rule of Saint Benedict. While acknowledging that it might detract from the discipline and silence of monasteries, Benedict nonetheless insisted that "the poor and pilgrims be treated with the utmost care and attention". Hospitality was one specific way of rising to the challenge and the gift present in an encounter with those outside one's own circle. The monks realized that the values they sought to cultivate had to be accompanied by a readiness to move beyond themselves in openness to others....

Love also impels us towards universal communion. No one can mature or find fulfillment by withdrawing from others. By its very nature, love calls for growth in openness and the ability to accept others as part of a continuing adventure that makes every periphery converge in a greater sense of mutual belonging. As Jesus told us: "You are all brothers" (Mt 23:8).

It has to do with our daily efforts to expand our circle of friends, to reach those who, even though they are close to me, I do not naturally consider a part of my circle of interests. Every brother or sister in need, when abandoned or ignored by the society in which I live, becomes an existential foreigner, even though born in the same country.

—*Fratelli Tutti*, #90, 95, 97

## Day 5

# Share with Others

### Acts 2:42-47; 4:32-37

Today's story gives a glimpse of the life of the early church and how they followed Jesus, related with one another, and shared the good news of Jesus with their neighbors.

This community was generous and full of joy. Sharing all things in common gave them freedom. Their needs were met, they had enough to share with others, and they were happy.

This community was both pious and powerful. They feared the Lord—which is something of a biblical stock phrase for devotion—and the apostles performed signs and wonders. The liberty and healing of Jesus' ministry continued.

This community was missional. Their life together was not an end unto itself but pointed beyond themselves to the goodness of God, the redemption of Jesus, and the filling of the Spirit. Both the communal life and the living reality must have been contagious. "Day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:47).

We live in a skeptical age and tend to regard the descriptions in Acts with some suspicion. It becomes easy to write off these texts as being impossible. Evidence shows, however, that early followers of Jesus made a significant improvement in the living conditions in their societies. We must take this seriously. Sharing goods and services in common made for a healthier community. It meant that needs were noticed and taken care of before they became gaping and complex.

Most notably, early Christians lived nonviolently, which made for more stable and happier communities. There is little doubt that—even if the picture Luke paints here seems idealistic—the happiness and health of the early Christian communities transformed their environments and drew people to them.

Children may wonder whether people sold their homes to give away and were then left homeless. This could be troubling for children. The overall intent of Acts 2 and Acts 4 seems to point toward everyone having enough because people shared. Did some people have more than one house? Excess fields? Were some people like the rich young ruler,

but rather than turning away, they turned toward the radical abundance of God's love?

Reflect the joy of the early followers of Jesus today. Share food, praise God joyfully, and let the children know how much you enjoy the time you spend with them.

### Fratelli Tutti Connections

Saint Paul, recognizing the temptation of the earliest Christian communities to form closed and isolated groups, urged his disciples to abound in love "for one another and for all" (1 Thess 3:12). In the Johannine community, fellow Christians were to be welcomed, "even though they are strangers to you" (3 Jn 5). In this context, we can better understand the significance of the parable of the Good Samaritan: love does not care if a brother or sister in need comes from one place or another. For "love shatters the chains that keep us isolated and separate; in their place, it builds bridges. Love enables us to create one great family, where all of us can feel at home... Love exudes compassion and dignity"....

In the first Christian centuries, a number of thinkers developed a universal vision in their reflections on the common destination of created goods. This led them to realize that if one person lacks what is necessary to live with dignity, it is because another person is detaining it. Saint John Chrysostom summarizes it in this way: "Not to share our wealth with the poor is to rob them and take away their livelihood. The riches we possess are not our own, but theirs as well". In the words of Saint Gregory the Great, "When we provide the needy with their basic needs, we are giving them what belongs to them, not to us".

—*Fratelli Tutti*, #62, 119

# Invite children to faith

*Who Is My Neighbor?* invites children to discover God's love as they learn about neighbors near and far. VBS will be a time of adventure as children hear Bible stories, learn about God, and explore how to relate with their neighbors. They will have opportunities to develop their faith through the Bible stories, worship, games, crafts, and other activities.

Vacation Bible school is an excellent time to learn to know families in your parish and community. Connect with parents and caregivers as you invite children to VBS, and be sure to greet parents and caregivers as they bring their children to Bible school. Share with the families about the experiences the children have during VBS. If the children are not part of a congregation, this is a good time to invite their families to make your church their faith home. Invite all families to a closing celebration (p. 15) so that they can find out what the children did during VBS, as well as strengthen their connection to your congregation.

As you prepare for VBS, read the Bible stories and pray for the children who will attend, as well as for their families. Think about ways to talk about faith and a life of loving God and neighbors.

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## Day 1

### Love God and Your Neighbor

Today's story highlights the two greatest commandments, according to Jesus—love God, and love your neighbor as yourself. We need to remember these words every day and consider how our thoughts and actions help us to follow them. Invite children to share what living by these words will mean in their lives. Will Jesus' words make a difference? Will children's attitudes and relationships be improved? Children can pray and ask God for help in following these words, even when it might be difficult to do so.

## Day 2

### Who Is My Neighbor?

It would be difficult to talk about neighbors without considering the story of the good Samaritan. In this story, those who were expected to be good neighbors were not. The man who was not expected to be a good neighbor, was. The tables were turned in this story! The story highlights that when we take care of others, and when others take care of us, we are neighbors. Invite children to thank God for those who have helped them, and to consider who they might help.

## Day 3

### Live Peacefully

Isaac and Rebekah and their family moved a lot because they wanted to live peacefully. Due to their neighbors' jealousy and wanting to keep all of the

good water for themselves, it was not possible to maintain good relationships. Isaac and Rebekah chose to walk away from conflict. This is difficult to do, especially when we know that someone is intentionally wronging us. Ask children to think about how a decision to follow God and resolve conflicts peacefully may have positive outcomes for them.

## Day 4

### Everyone Is Invited!

Many times we think about social circles and geographical neighborhoods when considering our neighbors. This story, however, illustrates that we can find neighbors where we least expect them. People outside of our usual interactions, people with whom we do not usually socialize, are also our neighbors. Everyone is invited to be a neighbor! Have children think about what this means in light of Jesus' words to love our neighbors as ourselves.

## Day 5

### Share with Others

The early church made sure that no one was hungry, that everyone had a place to live, that neighbors' needs were met. Invite children to follow their example by looking around your community, or at organizations around the world which work to address hunger and housing issues. Are there ways children can be involved? Invite children to follow Jesus' words, and the example of the early church, by tending to their neighbors near and far.



# Create a safe learning environment

## General discipline tips

Dealing with unwanted behavior can be discouraging, especially for volunteer teachers.

Determine a plan of action before you begin.

- **Pray for yourself**, that you will be able to show unconditional love to each child.
- **Pray that everyone will experience God's love** and protective care in your classroom.
- **Be prepared.** Have supplies on hand; know the step-by-step plan.
- **Be consistent, yet firm**, with expectations and guidelines during VBS.
- **Be prepared to stop the session** and correct unwanted behavior. Observe the children's learning preferences and accommodate them as often as possible. When children can succeed at learning in their best ways, disruptions are reduced.
- **Expect children to be responsible** for their actions.
- **Practice forgiveness.**
- **Be ready to apologize** when you do or say something inappropriate.
- **Communicate effectively.** Before giving instructions, wait until everyone is quiet and attentive. Speak clearly and slowly, making sure everyone understands.
- **Celebrate with the children** and enjoy learning with them. Let them know you are happy being with them.
- **Seek help for children with special needs.** Ask a youth or adult to give extra loving care to them.
- **Seek counsel from other leaders and parents** if you do not know how to handle a discipline problem.

## Active and easily distracted children

- **Give clear instructions** and make sure the child is listening to you.
- **Look directly** at the child.
- **Establish** a consistent routine.
- **Explain what is happening:** "When we finish story time, we will go to \_\_\_\_."
- **Warn children** when a preferred activity is coming to an end.
- **Offer short** and simple activities.
- **Be positive** and affirming.
- **Involve movement** as much as you can.
- **Assign tasks** such as handing out and collecting supplies.
- **Arrange the classroom** so the child is not sitting near windows or hallways.
- **Seat the child** away from heaters, fans, or air conditioner vents so that the noise is not a distraction.
- **Reward** even the smallest success with a wink or smile.
- **Do not use putdowns** or reprimands.
- **If a child uses medication**, do not refer to it.

## **Make church a safe place**

God calls us to create communities of faith where children, youth, and adults can be nurtured in their faith without stumbling blocks. To provide safe sanctuaries, we must be aware of the risks in our world and put in place abuse prevention policies and procedures that help us manage the risks as we minister to children.

Follow the established procedure in your parish prior to VBS which includes background checks of all volunteers and church staff.

Here are some of the issues to discuss with leaders:

- Create an organized procedure for picking up and dropping off children that ensures children's safety and minimizes children's anxiety. Make sure that Small Group Leaders know who is authorized to pick up each child. (Check registration forms.)
- Require that two adults be present in every classroom and ministry setting.
- Ensure all classroom doors have windows or leave doors partially open.
- Create a procedure for taking children to the bathroom. Whenever possible, two adults should accompany children in restrooms.
- Be attentive to your adult/child ratio so there is adequate supervision, especially for outdoor activities.
- Provide education for teachers and children about safe touch and personal boundaries.
- Explain procedures for reporting suspected child abuse.
- Locate fire extinguishers and first aid supplies.
- Designate a volunteer to scan classrooms and play areas inside and outside the church each day before VBS to remove possible hazards.

Train all leaders and volunteers, adults and youth, on these issues and procedures.

## **First aid**

- Identify volunteers who are certified in CPR or have first aid training. Designate the Assistant Director or a volunteer who will attend to serious first aid needs. Ideally have a nurse or doctor on site.
- Inform all leaders and volunteers where first aid supplies are located.
- Provide gloves for leaders to use in case of an injury involving blood.
- Have ice packs on hand.

# Midweek program plan

You can use *Who Is My Neighbor?* for a 10-week program. Here's a sample plan to help you get started. Sessions are 1 hour each.

## Day 1: Love God and Your Neighbor

### Week 1

- Gather (10 minutes)
- Worship and drama from Day 1 (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (20 minutes)
- Divide into three groups, each doing one Response: Active, Bible, Creative (see guides) (20 minutes)
- Send (10 minutes)

### Week 2

- Gather (5 minutes)
- Worship and Bible memory passage (10 minutes)
- Groups do remaining Response times (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

## Day 2: Who Is My Neighbor?

### Week 3

- Gather (10 minutes)
- Worship and drama from Day 2 (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (20 minutes)
- Divide into three groups, each doing one Response: Active, Bible, Creative (see guides) (20 minutes)
- Send (10 minutes)

### Week 4

- Gather (5 minutes)
- Worship and Bible memory passage (10 minutes)
- Groups do remaining Response times (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

## Day 3: Live Peacefully

### Week 5

- Gather (10 minutes)
- Worship and drama from Day 3 (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (20 minutes)
- Divide into three groups, each doing one Response: Active, Bible, Creative (see guides) (20 minutes)
- Send (10 minutes)

### Week 6

- Gather (5 minutes)
- Worship and Bible memory passage (10 minutes)
- Groups do remaining Response times (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

## Day 4: Everyone Is Invited!

### Week 7

- Gather (10 minutes)
- Worship and drama from Day 4 (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (20 minutes)
- Divide into three groups, each doing one Response: Active, Bible, Creative (see guides) (20 minutes)
- Send (10 minutes)

### Week 8

- Gather (5 minutes)
- Worship and Bible memory passage (10 minutes)
- Groups do remaining Response times (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

## Day 5: Share with Others

### Week 9

- Gather (10 minutes)
- Worship and drama from Day 5 (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (20 minutes)
- Divide into three groups, each doing one Response: Active, Bible, Creative (see guides) (20 minutes)
- Send (10 minutes)

### Week 10

- Gather (5 minutes)
- Worship and Bible memory passage (10 minutes)
- Groups do remaining Response times (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

# Weekend retreat plan

You can use *Who Is My Neighbor?* during a weekend retreat as children's programming, or as intergenerational activities if used during a church retreat weekend. Sessions are 90 minutes each.

## Friday evening—Day 1: Love God and Your Neighbor

- Gather, Worship and drama (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (25 minutes total)
- Response activities: Active, Bible, Creative (see Response guides) (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

## Saturday morning—Day 2: Who Is My Neighbor?

- Gather, Worship and drama (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (25 minutes total)
- Response activities: Active, Bible, Creative (see Response guides) (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

## Saturday afternoon—Day 3: Live Peacefully

- Gather, Worship and drama (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (25 minutes total)
- Response activities: Active, Bible, Creative (see Response guides) (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

## Sunday morning—Day 4: Everyone Is Invited!

- Gather, Worship and drama (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (25 minutes total)
- Response activities: Active, Bible, Creative (see Response guides) (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

## Sunday afternoon—Day 5: Share with Others

- Gather, Worship and drama (see *Worship and Drama Guide*) (25 minutes total)
- Response activities: Active, Bible, Creative (see Response guides) (20 minutes each)
- Send (5 minutes)

# Promoting Fratelli Tutti in your parish

This VBS theme is inspired by and rooted in the powerful encyclical released by Pope Francis in 2020: *Fratelli Tutti* (*On Fraternity and Social Friendship*). It is Pope Francis' "cry from the heart" to all people of the earth to see beyond their differences—indeed to work with their differences—and begin to grow together to build a new and peaceful world. This remarkable document comes from a pastor's heart, setting forth Francis' vision for a new church and new world, against the backdrop of a catastrophic pandemic that has spared nothing and altered everything.

Returning again and again to themes he has developed throughout his papacy, Pope Francis speaks of the need for equality and justice for all, cooperation, caring for the most vulnerable, doing the hard work of learning to listen to and accompany others, and caring for the earth that nurtures and sustains us all.

While this VBS program is a wonderful start, the challenge calls for parish efforts beyond a single week and an audience beyond elementary-aged children. Our hope is that the *Who Is My Neighbor? VBS* will serve as a springboard for activity across your parish. As you begin your planning, have a conversation with *other leaders* in your parish about how you can make a long-term commitment to the themes in this encyclical, and how you can begin to engage parishioners of all ages. Read on for ideas and information on practical tools that will help you in this effort.

## Free Getting Started Tools

We have developed a kit with free resources to help you introduce Pope Francis' new encyclical to your whole parish. They include:

- An introductory webinar by Bill Huebsch, including the Powerpoint slides and three supporting documents.
- *How to Bring Fratelli Tutti to Your Parish*, a short leader guide including ideas for an introductory event and next steps.
- A bulletin summary and faith formation notes to unpack Pope Francis' message for learners of all ages.

## Learning Kits

We asked Fumi Tosu to channel his expertise in Catholic social teaching into creating this flexible set of learning kits so you can share the wisdom of this document with your whole parish. All kits include an event agenda, prayers, reflection questions, detailed talking points, summary, prayers, and more.

- **Powerpoint Kit** • Includes slides for presenting. • \$28/PARISH • PC181
- **Online Video Kit** • Video of Fumi presenting the material. Play at an event or easily share with parishioners. • 60 MINUTES • \$28/PARISH • PC182
- **Learning Bundle** • Both of the above: Best value! • \$35/PARISH • PC180
- **DVD** • \$40 (OR \$12 AS ADD-ON) • PC183

## Print Resources

- **Pope Francis' Full Encyclical**
  - English • \$9.95 • TT8559454
  - Spanish • \$13.95 • IC379269
- **Group Reading Guide** • Plain English summary with discussion questions. • FROM \$3.50 • TT855884
- **Walking Together in Friendship** • 30-day booklet • FROM \$1.95 • TT855938



# After VBS

## Celebrate and Rest!

Planning and implementing VBS is an incredible amount of work, much of which goes on behind the scenes. Take time to celebrate your accomplishment in a way that's meaningful to you. Gather some of your leaders together and go out to dinner. Buy yourself some flowers or a favorite food. Spend a day doing your favorite things.

Rest and be restored. It can be draining and exhausting to be responsible for a big program like VBS. Take some time off, if possible. Find moments to be still and feel refreshed.

## Thanking Staff and Volunteers

If not done during the week, send a note of appreciation to each leader and volunteer.

Consider hosting a lunch or reception for volunteers. Include a time to share stories from the week. Listen to suggestions and feedback. Invite volunteers to fill out evaluation forms on [GrowingUpCatholicVBS.com](http://GrowingUpCatholicVBS.com). This feedback is essential as we work to provide excellent VBS materials for parishes.

## Reflect on the Week

Reflecting on an experience helps you gain wisdom and direction for the future. While the experience is fresh in your memory, jot down some notes of what you learned and what you would do differently next time. This information will be invaluable for whoever directs VBS in the future.

What went well? What types of activities and experiences seemed to resonate with children and families? What was challenging? What unexpected problems arose? Was your timeline effective? Did you have enough volunteers? Was the space organized well? Did you budget enough money for supplies and materials? Was your communication with parents effective?

Write down anything that stands out in your mind. Add the feedback you hear from others to get a full picture of the effectiveness of your program.

## Extending *Who Is My Neighbor?*

Most likely, there are activities from the guides that you did not use during VBS. Consider how you can build on the experiences that children had during VBS in other arenas. Reuse some of the worship materials during subsequent Masses. Include activities as intergenerational activities at a parish event. Also, revisit page 29 of this guide and consider how to keep *Fratelli Tutti* in the forefront of your parish, across ages.

## Thank You!

Thank you for your investment in the lives of the children in your church and community. Thank you for sharing your time, energy, and gifts to make this program a success. Your hard work made it possible for children, families, community members, and the whole church to grow in faith!