



Leader Guide

Thank you for choosing to be a Vacation Bible School leader, and for helping bring Pope Francis' message about caring for our common home to your community.

This document give an overview of the EarthKeepers VBS, including tips for organizing your process.

If you haven't already done so, we encourage you to read our *Vacation Bible School: What, Why, and How* guide for more discussion on what VBSs can accomplish, especially in evangelizing and welcoming families.

We hope you have a fun and enlightening experience leading your VBS!

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Goals for Any Vacation Bible School

No matter what curriculum you choose, most of VBS goals are quite similar. Some may seem obvious, but it's worthwhile to identify them and make sure your team members understand them.

Here are some goals to consider, but add your own. What are your hopes for your VBS?

- Provide a fun and engaging faith formation environment for kids in your area.
- Help your kids develop a stronger relationship with Christ.
- Lead your kids to a better understanding of their faith, lived out in action.
- Welcome families to your parish, inviting them to become active members.
- Provide opportunities for parish members to serve their community.

Goals for EarthKeepers

The *EarthKeepers* VBS is different from other VBSs because it focuses on Pope Francis' encyclical *On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si')*, as well as related Scripture and Church teaching. The additional goals we laid out for this VBS include:

- Introduce children and their families to our obligation as Christians to care for all of God's creation (including people and the rest of nature).
- Present a solid biblical basis for caring for creation, in a way that children can easily understand.
- Model care for creation through the VBS itself, from reducing consumption and waste to being thoughtful about reuse and recycling.
- Lead children and their families to take concrete steps to become better caretakers of creation.

On Care for Our Common Home

Your VBS kit contains everything you need to know to start teaching. However, since it is based so closely on Pope Francis' encyclical, it would be helpful for you and your team to know a little bit more about it.

On Care for Our Common Home (Laudato Si') was released in May of 2015, addressed to every person on the planet. The wide-ranging document asks us to consider the world we want to leave to our descendants, and to consider the crisis our planet is undergoing. Our challenges are both social and environmental, and the Holy Father asks us to enter into dialogue and commit to action.

The document is over 40,000 words, so it's not a quick read, but the full text is [available for free online](#) as well as in book form.

Easy Ways to Learn about the Encyclical

On Care for Our Common Home is an important document that every Catholic should know about, but its length can make that challenging. Fortunately, there are a number of resources available to help.

Consider how you can help not only your leadership team, but parents and other members of your parish learn more about Pope Francis' call to action.

Here are some options:

- The *Laudato Si' Powerpoint and Talking Points* offers everything you need to give an excellent overview presentation.
- The *On Care for Our Common Home Group Reading Guide* summarizes the document in plain English and provides a six-session small group format.
- Various books and articles can also help you understand the basics or go deeper.

You can learn more about these resources at CatholicCreationCare.com.

Pope Francis' Challenge to Educators

In developing this VBS, we set out to help children understand the invitation Pope Francis is making to us in his encyclical, and to help them move to action.

We have taken his words in Chapter 6 of the document ("Ecological Education and Spirituality") very seriously, and we encourage you to read them. He has asked us as educators to:

- Present an ethics of ecology

- Ground our learning in the convictions of our faith
- Help people grow in solidarity, responsibility, and compassionate care
- Critique the “myths” of modern society
- Cultivate sound virtues, including gratitude, responsibility, creativity, and enthusiasm
- Encourage good habits and “little daily actions”

We have done our best to take up this challenge.

Joy and Hope

Considering all the challenges with protecting and restoring creation, it's easy to be pessimistic or negative. Likewise, when we focus on using less resources (so others will have enough), we can dwell on the deprivation.

Pope Francis offers a very different spirit to the conversation that we should share, especially with younger generations. He is all about joy and hope. The reason to live more simply as disciples is because it is a better, more joyful way to live! We can all make a difference if we live this way.

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Putting Together the Pieces

The *Overview Chart* (a separate document) gives you a handy overview of the whole VBS on a single sheet of paper.

We have organized the leader guides into separate files based on the type of activity. This is especially convenient if you have different leaders or teams responsible for each kind of activity. Here are the guides:

- **Large Group Session Guide** - Includes Opening, Go Deeper, and Closing sessions.
- **Bible Stories Guide** - Sessions for hearing the day's Scripture reading and breaking it open.
- **Snack Guide** - Creative recipes, some explicitly connected to the daily theme.
- **Crafts & Activities Guide** - Contains craft instructions, stories, and other learning activities intended for small groups.
- **Games Guide** - Indoor and outdoor game options.

Note that the guides are formatted such that when they are printed double-sided, the section for each day can be stapled as an independent packet.

The VBS also includes the following:

- **Music resources** - MP3 files, sing-along videos, lyric sheets, and scores. Use whatever is most helpful to lead your kids in song!
- **Visuals** - These optional files are provided both in Powerpoint format for projecting on a screen and PDF format for printing and using as a visual aid.
- **Handouts and Worksheets** - PDF files to print out for each child, for use in specific activities.
- **Take-Home Pages** - Send these home to keep your parents in the loop. We have provided them in Microsoft Word format so you can easily edit them.
- **Publicity materials** - Adapt the templates to send out invitation postcards or letters.
- **Logos** - Use these files to help publicize your VBS or create themed items, such as t-shirts.

Preparing for Each Session

You will need to gather four types of materials for each day. The *Overview Chart* document and “Day by Day” section in this document will also help you become prepared.

1. Leader guides

Print out the pages of each leader guides for the associated session. Make sure you have enough for all your leaders. The number of the session is indicated on each page by a white circled number within a green banner.

2. Handouts

The VBS download page has links to handout documents to print out, divided by session. Optional visual aids are also provided.

3. Music

Depending on how you choose to present music, you will need to prepare sing-along videos, scores for musicians, lyric sheets, an audio CD, and/or MP3 files for each day.

4. Additional materials

The “Preparations” section in the leader guides will point you to what extra materials you will need and what else you will need to prepare. This includes snack ingredients, equipment for games, craft materials, and more.

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Daily Schedule

Scheduling and Group Options

The *EarthKeepers* VBS is flexible so that you can adapt it based on your available time, space, or preferences. You can easily expand or shorten it, as time allows. The VBS was designed with a three-hour daily format in mind.

You will need to make an early decision about when and how group you will divide the children into smaller groups. The large group and Bible story sessions are designed to work with any size group and a single leader (although discussion will work better with smaller groups). You will likely need multiple team members to lead smaller groups for crafts, stories, activities, and games.

To Rotate or Not to Rotate

One approach is to have a fixed schedule, with all participants doing the same thing at the same time, throughout the day. This makes for a clear and simple schedule.

Alternately, you can have groups of children rotate through certain activities. For example, one group might be listening to the Bible story while another is doing crafts or eating snacks. This approach can reduce the number of materials you need and allow you to set up and decorate each space for a single use. It also allows you to have more specialized leaders. One leader or small team could present the day's Bible story to different groups of kids throughout the day.

If you choose to rotate and have a large enough team, consider forming small groups of children who stay together throughout the VBS with the same teen or adult group leader. That leader will be responsible for getting them to the correct space at the right time.

Sample Fixed Schedule

9:00-9:20am	Opening Session
9:20-9:40am	Bible Story
9:40am-10:00am	Crafts, Activities, and Stories #1
10:00-10:20am	Snacks
10:20-10:50am	Games
10:50-11:10am	Go Deeper
11:10am-11:30am	Crafts, Activities, and Stories #2
11:30-11:50am	Closing

Sample Rotation Schedule

There are many ways to create a rotation schedule. Here is one that just rotates three of the sessions.

	Group A	Group B	Group C
9:00-9:20am	Opening Session		
9:20-9:40am	Bible Story		
9:40am-10:00am	Crafts & Activities #1	Go Deeper	Crafts & Activities #2
10:00-10:20am	Snacks		
10:20-10:50am	Games		
10:50-11:10am	Go Deeper	Crafts & Activities #2	Crafts & Activities #1
11:10am-11:30am	Crafts & Activities #2	Crafts & Activities #1	Go Deeper
11:30-11:50am	Closing		

Day 1: God Made Everything

Focus

What is Creation?

- God created a good, beautiful, amazing, holy world.
- We are a part of this creation!
- Creation is God's gift to us, to love and appreciate.
- God asks people to take care of creation.

God made creation to work together

- Plants, animals, and people all need each other.
- We all need air, water, sunlight, and food.
- If we don't care for creation, it can't take care of us.

Pope Francis wrote us a letter about creation

- He says creation—our home—is in trouble.
- He tells us God wants us to take care of creation.
- He wants us to make a difference by how we live our lives.

Opening Session

- 📖 Bible verse: Genesis 1:31
- 🎵 Song: Can You See?
- 💬 Discussion: Pope Francis & his letter

Bible Story

- 📖 Creation Story (Genesis 1:1-2:4)
- 💬 Discussion: Origins in creation
- 🖐️ Activity: Silent animal pairs

Snacks

- Planet kabobs
- Spider eggs

Games

- Earth ball
- Love your neighbor
- Shoe scramble

Go Deeper

-  Activity: Favorites
-  Discussion: Creation is for us
-  Creation Care R: Respecting creation

Crafts & Activities

-  Craft: Bubble-wrap beehives
-  Story: Bee story / papal bees
-  Activity: What needs bees
-  Craft: Terrific trees

Closing Session

-  Song: Can You See?
-  Take-home: Outside prayer

Catechism Connections

- The Creator & creation (279-324)
- We come to know God through creation (31-32, 46)
- The visible world (337-349, 353)
- God speaks to us through creation (1147, 2500)
- Our dependence on creation (2, 161, 138-142)
- Biodiversity and value of creatures (32-42)

On Care for Our Common Home Connections

- God & Creation (62-88)
- Appreciating creation (11-12, 45, 97, 112, 215)
- Thanksgiving (213, 220, 227)
- God sustains us through creation (301)
- Creation is for us, but offered back to God (358)

Day 2: God Asks Us to Be Caretakers

Focus

Whose world is it?

- All of creation still belongs to God.
- God gave us a special job: being in charge of creation.
- What does being in charge mean?
- We need to take care of creation and protect it.
- We need to be wise about how we use creation.

Opening Session

- 📖 Bible verse: Psalm 24:1
- 🎵 Song: God's Green Earth
- 💬 Discussion: Being Caretakers

Bible Story

- 📖 The Fig Tree (Luke 13:6-9)
- 💬 Discussion: Stewardship
- 🌟 Story: Grandma's sweater

Snacks

- Watermelon-cicles
- Fig snacks

Games

- Elbow tag
- Have you ever?
- Bottoms-up ball

Go Deeper

- 🖐️ Activity: One paper towel
- 💬 Discussion: Renewable resources
- ♻️ Creation Care R: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

Crafts & Activities

- 🖐️ Craft: Creation collages
- 🌟 Story: St. Kateri Tekakwitha
- ✍️ Activity: Creation works together
- ✍️ Activity: Reduce, reuse, recycle

Closing Session

- 🎵 Song: God's Green Earth
- 🏠 Take-home: Reduce, reuse, recycle

Catechism Connections

- Stewards of creation (373, 378, 2280, 2456-2458)
- Interdependence of creatures (340)
- Respect for integrity of creation; stewardship (2415-2418)
- Human work and creation (2427, 2460)

On Care for Our Common Home Connections

- Caretakers of creation (11, 13-14, 64, 67-70, 79, 82, 210-211, 228-231)
- Reduce, reuse, and recycle (22, 140, 211-213)
- The harmony of creation and universal communion (84-92, 238-240)

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Day 3: We Use Just What We Need

Focus

God asks us to use only what we need

- Taking too much isn't good for us, others, or the rest of creation..

The problem of selfishness.

- We're selfish when we only think about ourselves.
- When we're selfish we may use too much, keep too much, and waste too much.

Everything is a gift from God.

- Everything comes from God's creation.
- God didn't give it to us to waste!
- God wants us to use all of these gifts wisely.

Sometimes we waste what we have

- We don't always use God's gifts, and just throw some away.
- Instead, they could stay in creation (or be used by someone else).
- We can waste less if we are careful.

Opening Session

- 📖 Bible verse: Exodus 16:18
- 🎵 Song: The Manna Song
- 💬 Discussion: Selfishness & waste

Bible Story

- 📖 Manna in the Desert (Exodus 16:1-32)
- 🖐️ Activity: Manna egg hunt
- 🎵 Song: Worms in the Bread

Snacks

- Worms in the bread
- Make-your-own trail mix

Games

- Multitask race
- Feeding experiment
- Floor volleyball

Go Deeper

-  Activity: Wasting food
-  Discussion: Wasting less
-  Creation Care R: Refuse

Crafts & Activities

-  Craft: Upcycled shopping bags
-  Story: Squirrel story
-  Story: St. Martin de Porres
-  Activity: Food choice

Closing Session

-  Songs: The Manna Song / Worms in the Bread
-  Take-home: Wasting less food

Catechism Connections

- Respect for the integrity of creation and the human person; stewardship (1929-1933, 2415-2418)
- Wealth, idolatry, and inequalities (1723, 1938, 2113, 2547)
- The goods of creation intended for all (2402, 2415, 2439, 2452, 2456)
- God will provide for our needs (305, 2547, 2828-2837)
- The common good (1905-1912)
- Sharing our daily bread (2831-2833)
- Solidarity and distribution of material goods (1940-1941)

On Care for Our Common Home Connections

- Taking just what we need (67-68, 90)
- Lifestyle with limits (203-208)
- Creation is a shared inheritance (71, 93-95)
- Waste & throwaway culture (20-22, 51, 90, 123)
- Food waste (50)
- Responsibility to share (71, 93-95, 159-162)

Day 4: God Teaches Us to Heal Creation

Focus

Creation has been hurt by people

- God made creation healthy, with enough for everyone.
- But creation has been hurt and not shared fairly, because some people have made bad choices.
- The first step is to take a Sabbath rest and not try to use as much as we can.

God tells us to make things right again

- We can heal creation and let it rest, to be like God created it.
- We can share creation fairly with everyone, as God wanted.

Opening Session

- 📖 Bible verse: 1 John 3:17
- 🎵 Song: One for You and One for Me
- 🗣️ Discussion: Creation has been hurt

Bible Story

- 📖 Sabbath & Jubilee (Exodus 20:8-11; Deuteronomy 15:18; Leviticus 25)
- 🗣️ Discussion: Understanding Sabbath
- 🎵 Song: Jubilee!

Snacks

- Snack wraps
- Baked earthworms & fruit

Games

- Endangered species tag
- St. Francis' animals
- See speak do

Go Deeper

- 🗣️ Discussion: St. Francis & the pope
- 🗣️ Prayer: Canticle of the Creatures
- 🕒 Creation Care R: Rest & restore

Crafts & Activities

-  Craft: Sabbath mobiles
-  Activity: Sabbath choices
-  Story: St. Francis
-  Craft: Breakfast puzzles

Closing Session

-  Songs: One for You and One for Me / Jubilee!
-  Take-home: Reusable replacement

Catechism Connections

- Jubilee (2449)
- Vocation of lay people (897-913)
- Christian beatitude (1720-1721)
- Love for and sharing with the poor (2443-2449)
- Justice (1807)
- St. Francis and animals (2416)

On Care for Our Common Home Connections

- Jubilee & Sabbath (71, 225, 237)
- Restoring creation (13, 60-61, 210)
- Changing and making a difference (202-208)
- St. Francis of Assisi (1, 10-12, 66, 87, 91, 125, 218, 221, 239)

Day 5: We Live More Simply and Joyfully!

Focus

The Bible reminds us that “less is more.”

- Having more than we need makes it harder to enjoy what we have.
- When too many have more than they need, there isn't enough for everyone else.

Living with less is good for us, the earth, and others

- We can practice moderation.
- We can be happy with only a little.
- We don't need to own lots of things to enjoy life.

Opening Session

- 📖 Bible verse: Luke 12:15
- 🎵 Song: Dream God's Dream
- 💬 Discussion: Less in more

Bible Story

- 📖 The Greedy Farmer (Luke 12:13-21)
- 💬 Discussion: Understanding the story
- 🖐️ Activity: Ecological footprint

Snacks

- Ants on a log
- Fruit flowers

Games

- Stepping stones
- Kidhunt
- Team cleanup

Go Deeper

- 🖐️ Activity: “Too much” relay race
- 💬 Discussion: A better way
- 📖 Creation Care R: Remember

Crafts & Activities

- 🖐️ Craft: Dream God's Dream
- 🖐️ Activity: Planting seeds
- 🌱 Stories: Less is more
- ✂️ Activity: Needs vs. wants

Closing Session

- 🎵 Song: Dream God's Dream
- 📦 Take-home: Give away

Catechism Connections

- You shall not covet. (2534-2557)
- Temperance (1809)
- Thy kingdom come (2816-2821)
- Joy and beauty (2500-2501)

On Care for Our Common Home Connections

- A new lifestyle (203-212, 230)
- Technology (101-114)
- Joy and peace (222-227)
- Sabbath (225, 237)
- God's plan (76-88, 113)
- Christian hope (13, 80, 83, 100, 205, 243-245)