

# The VOICE

January 2022

Missouri District Newsletter



***In This Issue: Vacation Bible School Planning***

***Pictured: VBS participant from Christian Friends of New Americans***

# From the President's Desk

## Good News for Our Communities

The ministry of Jesus is marked by a number of noteworthy things. People with all manner of infirmities were made whole by Jesus whether by His touch or words. Our Lord also had compassion on those considered the least and the lowest by societal standards. He also demonstrated power of creation, such as stilling the storm or feeding the masses. However, the most important part of Jesus' ministry was the message that He came to bring. When the imprisoned John the Baptist sends his disciples to inquire if Jesus is the Messiah, our Lord responds by saying "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."

While our Lord ascended to the Father's right hand long ago, His Kingdom still comes among us also as the Good News of His salvation is preached. The Gospel literally means Good News. It is also where we draw the word evangelism, which is nothing more than telling the Good News of Jesus to others. In a culture of conflict, where fears and anxiety over the future run rampant, Christ's Church has the countless opportunities to speak Good News of hope in Christ.

While the theme for this issue of *The VOICE* is preparing for summer Vacation Bible Schools, it is part of our District emphasis on engaging our communities. For our congregations and schools, community engagement is never just about helping people in need or caring for children. Our purpose in engaging our communities is always to confess Christ, telling the Good News to children and adults alike.

Our reason for having this theme featured this time of year is that congregations can make plans for reaching their community through Vacation Bible School programs. We hope that congregation leaders can see that VBS events come in different shapes and sizes and are often done collaboratively with other congregations and even in multiple locations. Perhaps this issue will help your congregation to consider a new way of serving children through Vacation Bible School programs.

As a college student, I was a summer intern at a church in Atlanta and had the task of organizing Vacation Bible Schools in neighborhoods and at an apartment complex. Some of the events were multiple days, others were one morning or afternoon and none of them took place at the church. The whole focus was the Good News being preached throughout the community. May God bless your community through your congregations proclamation of this Good News to all.

Fraternally in Christ,



President Lee Hagan



Note: in the articles below you'll see photos from past Vacation Bible Schools around the District, like this one from Immanuel in St. Charles.



# VBS Leaders Unite!

VBS is all about God's Word and His salvation in our Lord Jesus shared with all the kids, families, volunteers, congregation members, and your community. VBS leaders are often blessed to tell the stories of God at work in and through His Word at VBS! Here are some reminders from seasoned VBS leaders:

**Don't be Shy** A great way to share ideas, tips, and inspirations is by connecting online. VBS publishers are on Facebook, blogs, videos, webinars, and more. There are often useful threads and comments made by VBS leaders on these sites. Plus, social media can provide great ideas for decorations, crafts, snacks, and solving challenges. Friending or following active VBS leaders unearths a treasure trove of helpful information.

**Help Comes From Anywhere** Brainstorming "across disciplines" can stir up new ideas. Craft leaders can have great decorating ideas. Recreation leaders can have ideas about Bible stories. Resource those in your immediate congregation, of course! But also, technology also allows for easy connection from great distances. Someone may have a friend or a friend of a friend who has just what is needed. Your community may even have other congregations doing the same VBS on a different week and can share decorations and supplies.

**Order Early** Selecting the crafts early allows ample time for supplies orders, which can eliminate stores running out of a needed item, delays in shipments, and can ease gathering donations. Unite with other congregations and place orders together to qualify for free shipping or other savings, or to share component donations. Another good way to increase engagement and donations is by reaching out to families in local summer programs who plan to attend your VBS.

**Connect with Your Community** Often families and individuals in your community will be VBS "regulars" as their children and parents attend VBS events and volunteer, and community members donate time, supplies, and funding (even if that's the only time they connect with your church.) Many VBS leaders develop great relationships with these kids and adults! Direct contacts to alert them to the VBS dates, invite them to register, and connect about the Jesus-centered message of this VBS. God is at work when these "strangers" can become dear friends in Christ.

We pray that God blesses all the efforts of the VBS leaders and volunteers as they work to share the good news of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

*Pictured below: VBS at Immanuel in St. Charles*





*Pictured above: VBS at Faith in Knob Noster.*

## Sharing Resources

### How One Church Shares Resources Across Two Campuses

One of the hurdles for churches trying to host a Vacation Bible School is finding (or funding) resources, but even something as simple as sharing decorations can help. Redeemer Lutheran in Southwest Missouri is a unique church; they are one church with two campuses: Springfield and Nixa. One of the special things this church does is share VBS resource materials amongst campuses.

Rev. Stephen Moser, Associate Pastor Parish Life at Redeemer, explains that Redeemer does a five day VBS, in the evening. (While it can be a bit challenging for the younger ages to be out five evenings in a row, they found this schedule that works really well for both volunteer availability and parents.) Usually they host one VBS, allow a week break, then finish at the second campus. And while it's essentially the same VBS in terms of material both weeks, the towns serve different audiences. There's variety in terms of staffing, too, as Redeemer uses volunteers from each location.

Pastor Moser notes that licensing may not allow for the VBS source material from the company to be shared between different congregations— although many VBS themes allow for multiple campuses. But even sharing items like decorations and craft supplies really go a long way. "One of the advantages is that I tend to get a little over enthusiastic for the decorations," Pastor Moser jokes. "So it feels good to be able to use the decorations for two weeks... it's a huge benefit. For example, we can create the sets in Springfield, use them in Nixa, and then even pass them onto another congregation."

Congregations don't need to be directly linked like Redeemer to benefit from sharing resources. Smaller churches can group up with surrounding congregations and order supplies in bulk. Or different congregations can coordinate and rotate VBS decorations. Redeemer has even found that it's a benefit for their t-shirt order, since it's cheaper to print with a larger quantity. There are a number of ways for congregations to work together to save time and money, keeping the focus on sharing the Gospel.



# Ways to Promote VBS for Your Community

Most churches find Vacation Bible School a very exciting and much anticipated event. Promoting VBS can be seen as twofold: within the congregation and out in the community. For many, VBS is an “old standard” and favorite among families. But never assume everyone is knows “how it’s always done”. Early communication includes new members and serves as an easy way to ask for volunteers. Use your church’s newsletters, bulletins, screens, apps, outdoor signage, or mailings to share the VBS theme, updates, and any needs you may have.

A neat aspect of VBS is that it is often an event heavily attended by the community. Larry Yochum, Director of Youth Ministry at St. John’s in Arnold notes that before COVID-19, their congregation/community attendance was about 50/50. That is a wonderful opportunity to witness! He also observes that because St. John’s has been doing VBS for so long, the Arnold community has come to expect it. Their church even tries to pick the same week of the year to host VBS. This helps the community remember and helps to eliminate a conflict with surrounding churches’ programs.

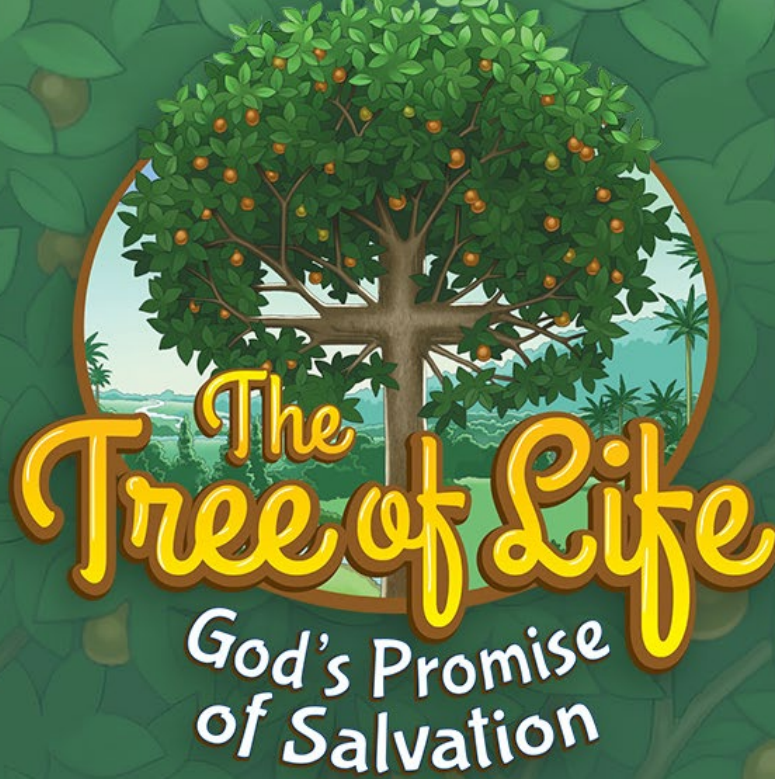
Does your congregation have an online presence? Check and make sure the website is up to date. Consider having a special section dedicated to VBS, which can be easily found on the homepage. Churches can prepare a short paragraph which can be shared in online groups, such as NextDoor, Facebook, or even online community bulletin boards through the local government offices. These make for great resources, for often for no cost.

Fliers with a simple design can be printed at church for a lower cost. Then teams of volunteers can canvas a neighborhood and distribute the fliers at homes or on cars. This is an easy way to reach people that may not currently be in the same communication channels of the church. Not everyone will take the initiative to randomly visit a church’s website, but most people will read a piece of paper on their door. A great way to spread the flyers is to give each family in the congregation at least two...one for them and one to give to a friend or neighbor. Redeemer in Springfield mails out postcards, which they find has a better impact than placing ads in mediums like radio or newspapers.

VBS is a great blessing and a wonderful way to have unchurched or “other churched” interacting with the Lutheran faith. Everyone needs to hear the Gospel, so use your resources to maximize your church’s impact.

*Pictured below: Leaders got slimed at VBS at St. Paul in St. Joseph after raising \$2400 during their VBS!*





## Tree of Life: God's Promise of Salvation

Concordia Publishing House's 2022 Vacation Bible School offers more than a new theme – it offers whole new avenues for your congregation to customize and use. This year's theme "Tree of Life: God's Promise of Salvation" uses 10 key stories in God's salvation plan broken down into three areas: Creation (tree of life/tree of knowledge of good and evil), Cross (which is sometimes pictured as a tree of life and we know brings us eternal life), and New Creation (referencing the Book of Revelation, where we see the perfect life we will have forever with Jesus).

But this year brings even more ways to reach your congregation and community. Learning from experiences in 2020, CPH set out to create flexible kits that involve the whole family, not just kids. Their top priorities? Jesus, outreach, and families. This new theme has adaptable components, much like their Jesse Tree Advent Kit. There is a Church Kit, which is available at a much lower price than starter kits from previous years, and a Family Kit, which can be sent home as additional material for family learning and further engagement.

CPH also realized that VBS materials need flexible scheduling. Some churches love offering a morning VBS that lasts for five days. But many churches struggle with finding volunteers or have busy families. This theme is designed to be easily used as an evening, a one-day, or weekend VBS. Taking it one step further, since many churches try to give volunteers a break over the summer, this theme can also be used as a summer Sunday school program or even a congregational sermon series.

By having so many different avenues of learning, churches can easily take material and apply it throughout the year. For example, a church could do a weekend VBS in July, send families home with the additional Family Kit, have a winter sermon series based on this theme, and then host a "VBS reunion" in early spring. Having so many ways to extend the VBS experience throughout the year connects with visitor families, so that the relationship grows more past that first visit.

To learn more about "Tree of Life: God's Promise of Salvation" reach out to Anna Johnson at CPH at [anna.johnson@cph.org](mailto:anna.johnson@cph.org).



# Tell the Next Generation Conference

"Tell the Next Generation" is all about passing on our faith to the next generation as taught within the family unit. It's based on Psalm 78: 6-7, "that the next generation might know them, the children yet unborn, and arise and tell them to their children, so that they should set their hope in God and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments". But this isn't a new church program, instead it's a refocusing and a shift from relying solely on the church to train youth, to have parents and family play an active role in passing on the faith. Rev. Steven Andrews, Associate Pastor at Saint Matthew Lutheran Church in Lee's Summit notes, "For a long time, we've been trying to pass on the faith to the next generation in a way other than God designed it...and it's failing miserably. This initiative is seeking to return to God's design, and that's always a good thing."

From January 4-7, 2022 church workers from across Missouri gathered for the "Tell the Next Generation" coaches' training at Heit's Point in Lutheran Camp in Lincoln. Training and discussion was led by Ben Freudenburg, who serves as Executive Director for Concordia Center for the Family. Attendees started the process of becoming certified as trainer-coaches by Concordia Center for the Family. From there, the District will partner with churches to help them grow their ministries.

"This is not about buying a program or adding another program to your church," states Larry Yochum Director of Youth Ministry at St. John's in Arnold. "The 'family ministry tweak' is taking what you have, and how to take that one thing and make it an opportunity for parents and sharing faith for kids."

The training will continue with monthly meetings until trainees are fully certified. "Our congregations talk about what we are working towards, but struggle to make the transition," says Angie Brenner who serves as DCE at Trinity in Jefferson City. "I am excited about the roadmap with specific steps to help congregations with this transition."

"Tell the Next Generation" also serves as the theme for the upcoming District Convention, held June 12-14, 2022.

*Pictured left: Church leaders gathered for the conference. Pictured right: Ben and Jennifer Freudenburg*



# E2 Conferences

There is still time to join in an E2 Conference! Designed for lay people and church workers, this Saturday morning conference is a time to come together to be encouraged, equipped, and connected to others in ministry.

Participants choose from a variety of breakout sessions including topics like Teaching Faith in the Home, Witness Basics, Church and Culture, Strengthening Marriages, Anxiety, Living in Two Worlds, and more.

There is no cost to attend, but please register online so that we know you're coming! See you soon!

Click here: [mo.lcms.org/e2-conference-equip-encourage](https://mo.lcms.org/e2-conference-equip-encourage)

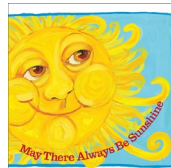


## Upcoming Events

Visit [mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events](https://mo.lcms.org/upcoming-events) for more information on these events.



**E2 Conferences**  
January – March



**Early Childhood Conference**  
March 5



**JR & SR Youth Gathering**  
April 1 – 3



**SHINE!**  
April 22 – May 1



**District Convention**  
June 12 – 14



**NYG Event in Houston**  
July 9

For more news from the District office, sign up for email communications at [mo.lcms.org](https://mo.lcms.org) and follow us on social media.



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