

The A,B,Cs of VBS

I have received numerous inquiries regarding implementing a program ever since my name has been connected with “VBS Coordinator” on the holycrossonline website. Well, I have to say it’s not always as easy as it looks, but it’s not quite as difficult as say, climbing Mt. Everest backward and blindfolded.

Imagine if you really were blinded and forced to walk backwards down the street where you live (never mind Mount Everest), could you do it without help? Of course not and neither can one individual run a VBS program without a team committed to planning and implementing a successful program. Our program occurs during business hours which makes some folks unavailable to help every day since they must work. However, some are willing to take a day or two off in order to help with the program. This year, we combined our efforts with another parish which provided a larger pool of possible volunteers.

Once you have a good team of volunteers ready for action, a curriculum needs to be chosen. Ideally, this happens at least 6 months before you plan to implement the curriculum to allow plenty of planning time. Last year, we used a Gospel Light (Evangelical Protestant) curriculum and modified it to suit our needs and desire to keep the content Orthodox. This obviously takes a little more work than a ready made Orthodox Curriculum, but there also aren’t many Orthodox Curricula available. We used the, “Living in an Orthodox World” curriculum this which we found on the Greek Archdiocese website. Our team discussed writing our own curriculum this year, but ultimately decided it would be best/easiest to stick with one that had already been created.

Once the curriculum is chosen, delegation of responsibilities is necessary. The curriculum will guide you in how many people you need to run your program. We’ve usually ended up with “leaders” for designated areas such as: Crafts, Recreation, Music, Lessons, Lunch Lady, etc. This year, our lesson time was conducted according to an age group determination and a leader was designated for each group. I think it is a good idea to have a coordinator of sorts who tries his/her best to keep the troops rallied, so to speak. Last year, however, I as coordinator ended up taking over for several leadership roles that were never filled. This year we had coverage for every responsibility as well as a few “extra” folks here and there which definitely helped to keep the program running smoothly and allowed me to jump in as needed if someone fell ill or couldn’t volunteer for an unforeseen reason.

Once you have a leader for every activity, the bulk of planning for that area goes to the individual in charge. It’s obviously a good idea for the coordinator to make sure that planning and preparation for each individual area is occurring. Having planning/coordination meetings leading up to the event in order to brainstorm solutions to possi-

ble problems can be very helpful. These meetings also help everyone to have a “big picture” of the program as opposed to one little segment of it.

I have found it helpful to have additional activities and games, which ideally might reinforce the theme or lesson for the week on hand in case the planned activity does not fill up the amount of space allotted for it. This is not necessary but came about because I've been in situations where the scheduled activity ended before the slated time and there was a room full of kids with nothing to do. There is the occasional rare group of kiddie personalities which can amuse themselves in a safe and virtually non-violent matter. However, most groups have at least one kid that thinks propping up a folding table coated with butter on folding chairs and then skiing down it on styrofoam lunch trays is a great idea and will convince most of the kids and sometimes even one or two adults this is a good idea. You know the script...mayhem with possible multiple injuries ensues. Trust me, even if you're not obsessive like I am...a little over planning is never a bad thing!

This year we invited the teenagers in our parish to help us out by having them apply and interview for positions. This is mostly a formality at this point since I've noticed that most of the teens volunteering seem to be the more “responsible” ones. It also seemed important to have someone “coordinate” the teenagers and check in with them throughout the VBS day. We have found that limiting the number of teenagers volunteering within the program to be a good idea.

Once you've planned and delegated everything, checked off numerous to do lists and made 1001 phone calls or emails, something will still go wrong or be forgotten. It's OK...VBS will still happen. It's good to realize this at the outset and know that even with all the planning, the program needs room to breathe. It's supposed to be fun and keeping boot camp mentality throughout the whole week is not fun...be a sarge when planning, but take the funny hat off (or rather put it on) once the week arrives...and don't forget to pray!

-Laura Nee, with thanks to Deborah Thomas for her help in editing the above article.