

Why VBS Needs Clergy... and Why Clergy Need VBS

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Clergy and Vacation Bible School

Jerusalem Marketplace, Fun Fair, Surf Shack, the list goes on! Throughout my career as a minister I have participated in many weeks of Vacation Bible School, and regardless of the church or the theme, VBS always puts a spring in my step.

Last summer I joined children, teens, and adults at St. Paul's in Alexandria, Virginia for "Surf Shack VBS." St. Paul's loves having clergy at Vacation Bible School, and the church leadership supports the program at every level. For me, the week was an absolute blast—a blessed blast. And it made me ask: Why is VBS so powerful to me as a clergy person? Clergy will have their own answers to that question, but for me I've boiled it down to four reasons:

1. Cheering for Formation Staff and Volunteers

Many clergy know that magic moment of walking into the church or parish hall and seeing how VBS has transformed the space. Decorations, materials, Bible verses, games... all seemingly out of thin air! Of course... not from thin air. VBS appears through countless hours by formation staff and volunteers. Thanking these VBS troopers is critical, and the thanks feel good for both parties.

Clergy have a joyful opportunity to commend, congratulate, and bless VBS efforts, especially the efforts of the Christian Education director, if he or she has coordinated VBS. As we all know, words of affirmation go a long way in ministry. In my case, I end up using the same VBS catch phrase all week as I thank staff and volunteers: "Wow, you really knocked it out of the park!"

To my fellow clergy persons: Find your affirming catch phrase and use it often—before, during, and after VBS.

2. Working Side by Side with Formation Staff

Nothing builds a working relationship like rolling up sleeves and taking on a project together. When clergy help at VBS—beyond just observing or checking in—we end up forming bonds, especially with formation staff.

Last summer, the Christian Formation director Mandy Hodges invited me to do the opening sessions each morning. Mandy and I pre-planned, going over the themes and Scripture for each day. Then at the sessions themselves, we tag-teamed, with her



introducing me, and me 'passing the mic' back to her for prayer and announcements. This sort of clergy/staff work is valuable because 1) it's fun, and 2) it enhances collaborative ministry down the line.

To my fellow clergy persons: Enjoy the freedom of not being in charge at VBS. Take cues from your director. A great clergy line at VBS is "Where do you want me?"

3. Honing Preaching and Teaching Skills

Teachers, parents, and ministers know that if you can explain a concept to a four year old, you can explain it to anyone. VBS provides an exciting—and challenging—opportunity for clergy to share the good news of Jesus Christ with little ones. (And by the way, those older kids and teen volunteers are also listening very carefully, even if they don't appear to be.) By helping with VBS, clergy often develop sharp, succinct, and clear explanations for theological concepts. This is such a blessing for future preaching and teaching.

At some VBS weeks, I have focused on prayer—guiding the kids in giving thanks and asking for God's blessing. At this VBS, Mandy did the prayer time, so I focused on several key Christian messages: God created you and loves you... Jesus has power... God watches over you. In addition, I try to share a line that is near and dear to my heart: "If you had been the only person to ever live, Jesus still would have come, died, and rose again, just for you."

To my fellow clergy persons: What are the two or three truths you want children to hold in their hearts? Think about how you can express those truths in as few words as possible.