

College Station church takes VBS into its community

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COLLEGE STATION—Concerns about possible COVID-19 restrictions and a commitment to reaching its community prompted a College Station church to move Vacation Bible School into open public spaces.

Last year, when many congregations cancelled VBS due to the COVID-19 health concerns, First Baptist Church in College Station adjusted rapidly. The church offered “VBS at Home,” providing some online instruction along with crafts and activities designed for parents to complete with their children.

First Baptist in College Station started making VBS plans for this summer long before anyone knew exactly what the health and safety protocols would look like in June. So, Minister to Children Bronwyn Stanley began thinking outside the box—or rather, outside the church walls.

“I wanted to plan something we could do whether we had COVID to deal with or not,” she said. “And I felt strongly I wanted to do something with families engaging together.”



Children participated in Bible learning activities at parks when First Baptist Church in College Station took VBS into the community. (Photo courtesy of Bronwyn Stanley)

Outdoor gatherings seemed safest and least likely to be restricted due to the pandemic, and the VBS “Destination Dig” curriculum seemed to lend itself well to an outdoor setting, she noted.

First Baptist in College Station planned a one-day VBS experience on Sunday afternoon, June 13. Leaders set up and staffed four stations for children and their families to visit—one outdoors on the church property and three at parks in the surrounding neighborhood.

Each station offered participants the opportunity to learn about a story from the Gospels, beginning with a depiction of the Nativity at the church property—complete with animals the children could pet.

While the total number of children involved—about 150—did not match the crowds involved in pre-COVID VBS weeks, Stanley said she was “pleased as punch” at the number of children and families in the community who were involved.

“We had a great response,” she said. “There were as many guests as there were our own folks involved.”

‘Parents engaged with their children’

Every child who was enrolled received information about the church, and the gospel was presented clearly, she noted.



Families engaged together in learning activities when First Baptist Church in College station took VBS to local parks. (Photo courtesy of Bronwyn Stanley)

“We had such an amazing experience,” Stanley said. “My favorite parts were seeing parents engaged with their children in God’s word and the other activities. What we do at church should be the ‘amen’ to what parents are doing at home, but I fear much too often our parents are counting on the church to do all of it. It’s just not enough.”

She particularly was pleased to see the community involvement.

“We even had a couple of families that told me that some they brought with them would have never stepped inside the church building, but they were willing to join in this way,” she said.

“Every comment I heard was positive. It was hot, but there was no rain—which seemed like a miracle—and ending at the pool cooled everyone off! We feel like this was a huge success.”

With all the turmoil and heartache associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, one positive benefit was the way it compelled churches to exercise creativity, Stanley noted.

While next year’s VBS likely will be more traditional in some respects, she said she definitely would consider incorporating some element of community-focused activity to move beyond the church building again.

“I don’t think we’ll ever go back to doing the same-old same-old,” she said.