

VBS stands test of time in reaching families

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Many discipleship and outreach ministries have come and gone over the years, but Vacation Bible School still is a mainstay for most Texas Baptist churches.

As many as 85 percent of churches and missions affiliated with the Baptist General Convention of Texas continue to hold annual Vacation Bible Schools, said Diane Lane, preschool/children's ministry specialist with the Baptist General Convention of Texas.

"Some churches think they are too small, but the vast majority of our churches still do Vacation Bible School," she said.

Fewer than 60 people typically attend Grace Temple Baptist Church in Waco most Sundays, but more than 80 children participated in Vacation Bible School.

Free curriculum churches can download from the BGCT enables many small churches to conduct VBS, she noted.

But why—when other programs have faded away—is Vacation Bible School such a strong presence after so many years?

"I think churches have seen and recognized that lives are changed," Lane said. "It's a very obvious act when after VBS, the church gets to see children baptized."

[Grace Temple Baptist Church in Waco](#) uses the BGCT free online VBS

curriculum, and director Merle Neumann said the planning begins as soon as the curriculum is available.

The core cadre of workers who have worked on VBS for years approach the summer outreach ministry with passion and expectancy, she said.

"Our teachers for VBS are very dedicated and very interested in children who are not church children and teaching them about who Jesus is," Neumann said. "We have children who tell us they have no Bible in their home, and it is very exciting to get to be the ones who share about Christ with them."

Rod Payne, minister of missions and media at [First Baptist Church in Wichita Falls](#), believes part of the appeal of Vacation Bible School is drawn from its longevity.

"I think one of the things VBS has going for it is that it hasn't changed," he said.

Many adults have attended Vacation Bible School at least once, so they know what it is.

As an example, Payne said, he was distributing flyers at a community event the week before VBS and only had to explain what it was to one person.

"Parents identify with VBS, they know what it is. Not a lot of explanation about what we're going to be doing with their kids is required," he said.

Also, for many parents, VBS can take them back to a very fond childhood memory, Payne said.

"They want to pass those pleasant memories on," he said.

The ubiquitous appeal crosses denominational lines. It's not just a Baptist thing, he pointed out.

This year more than 1,500 children enrolled in the Wichita Falls church's VBS.

"It's not about counting noses, but hearts," Payne said. "But if I have their noses, it's pretty inclusive that I have their hearts, as well."