

Welcome

There are times when we search for that which adds meaning not only to our own lives, but also to the lives of others. There are times when that meaningful something comes to us, and all we can do is accept and say yes. As a young director of faith formation, I was asked by Sister Maria to “do” Vacation Bible School. I was frightened, but I chose to jump in with both feet anyway. In the early 1990s, I began doing an original Catholic version of VBS—and have continued ever since. This daunting proposition turned out to be more meaningful than I could have ever imagined.

Over the years, I’ve seen a wonderful “church” in the making—people coming together in the name of God, to be of service to others, young and old alike, pitching in with time and materials. It is marvelous to see how people of all ages, all backgrounds, and with varied interests can come together to build something out of nothing. Facilitating Catholic VBS has been a journey filled with wonderful surprises.

Hundreds of kids, along with many volunteers, have helped me throughout this journey. To this day, they tell me what they remember—the Scripture stories, the songs, and most importantly, the Catholic messages that guide them on their faith journeys. It is my hope that these themes will inspire and invite today’s CVBS leaders to “do” Vacation Bible School, using their own untapped wealth of creativity and imagination.

Marian Bach

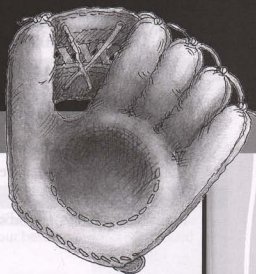
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Playing for God's Team

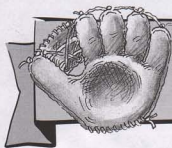
Theme 1



A team is a group of people working together toward a common goal. In sports, a team follows rules to win a game. In life, a team works together to accomplish its goal. What does it take to be part of a team?

Teamwork takes **cooperation**, which means that we work together to reach the same goal. It takes **confidence** in our abilities, which allows us to know that our strengths and talents have value. It takes **fortitude**, courage to admit to our mistakes and to learn from them.

These traits are not only important to teamwork, but they are also important to being a good Catholic. Through the activities that follow, children will learn the importance of being part of a team, most especially God's Team.



Introduction



Theme Summary

Playing for God's Team compares the members of the Catholic Church to the players on a sports team. Through the analogy of baseball and the idea of teamwork, children learn what it means to be one with Christ, to work together as part of God's plan, and to love one another as God loves all of us.

Objectives

- ☉ Recognize what it means to be part of the team that we call Catholic.
- ☉ Demonstrate that Jesus is our team captain, all-star, and most valuable player.
- ☉ Determine that Catholics are team members who support, encourage, forgive, and love one another.



Five-Day Planner

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5
Let's Play Ball!	Batter Up!	Striking Out	Home Run!	Team Spirit!
Before the Day Begins: Planning and Arrival 30–45 minutes				
The Warm-Up: Welcome 10 minutes				
Learn rules of the game.	Display team banners and pennants.	Wear team T-shirts.	Use megaphones.	Find fans in the stands.
The Opening Pitch: Large-Group Gathering 20 minutes				
What does it mean to be part of a team?	How do our efforts lead to our successes?	How do we fix poor choices we make?	What does it mean to do our best?	How do attitude and effort build team spirit?
In the Dugout: The Scripture Story 10 minutes				
The Greatest Commandment: Matthew 22:34–40; 5:19	God Takes Care of Us: Luke 12:6–9, 28–34	Peter Denies Jesus: Matthew 26:69–75	Simile of Light: Matthew 5:13 Simile of Salt: Matthew 5:14–16	Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand: Matthew 14:13–21
Seventh-Inning Stretch: Craft Time 45 minutes				
• Team Pennants • Team Banner	• Team T-Shirts	• Megaphones	• Fans for the Stands	• Keepsake Photo Frames
Concession Stand: Snack Time 15 minutes				
• peanuts • caramel popcorn	• popcorn • caramel popcorn	• mini-hot dogs • soft pretzels	• nachos with cheese • mini-hot dogs	• baseball cookies
Bottom of the Ninth: Closing 30 minutes				
We can be good team members.	God will always care for us.	Forgiveness is important.	Jesus is our biggest fan.	God wants us to live a certain way.

Modify this schedule to reflect the times your Catholic Vacation Bible School will meet. Provide a copy of this schedule to each volunteer. See BLM 9 (page 174).



Before You Begin

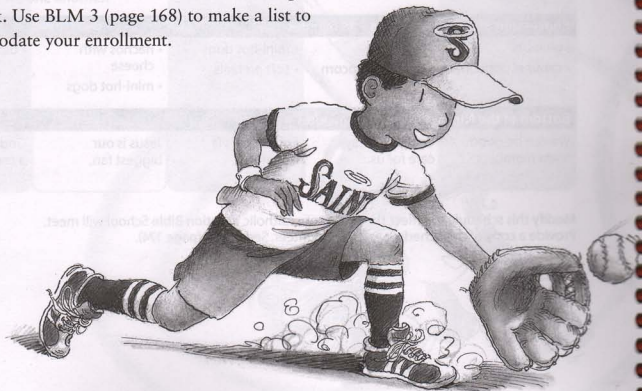
Team Configurations

Organize children into small teams. Use catchy team names related to the week's baseball theme. For example:

God's Team

Mary-ners	Holy Sox	Saints	Bishops
Cardinals	All Souls	Ambassadors	Braves
Padres	Angels	Doves	Deacons

After adjusting the list based on actual enrollment, make copies of the team list for coaches to use throughout the week. Use BLM 3 (page 168) to make a list to accommodate your enrollment.






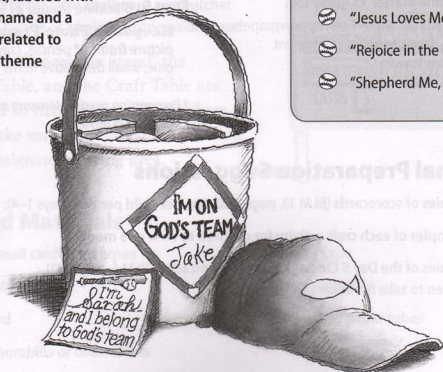
Choose a Theme Song

The chart to the right lists possible musical selections that can be used throughout this theme. Select a song from the list or one of your choosing to be used as the theme song. Each time this theme song is played, have children move to the next part of the program. Select other songs to use for sing-alongs, to lead marches through Savior Stadium, and to build a sense of community.

Game Equipment and Uniform

To build children's enthusiasm for the week's theme, provide each child with the following items on the first day:



-  baseball cap
-  theme-based name tag
-  craft bucket, labeled with the child's name and a statement related to the week's theme





SONG SUGGESTIONS







Related to the Theme

-  "Take Me Out to the Ballgame"
-  Instrumental baseball organ music

Marching

-  "We Are Marching"
-  "When the Saints Go Marching In"

Inspirational

-  "Lord, You Have the Words"
-  "Jesus Loves Me"
-  "Rejoice in the Lord Always"
-  "Shepherd Me, O God"



Materials



Craft Time Preparation

Each day's craft time requires a blackline master that includes illustrated instructions and materials needed to complete the activity. Review each day's activities ahead of time and use this list to prepare those materials that must be cut out or assembled for children's use. If you wish, make a copy of the Scripture Story and Cheer page and the craft-activity instructions for each child.

Day 1: Blackline Masters 11–12 (pages 176–177)

Team Pennants: *pennant cutouts*,* paper, pencils, construction paper, glue, felt, markers, glitter, buttons, sports stickers, small decorative items (beads, paper cutouts, sequins, and felt shapes), long dowels or sticks

Team Banner: butcher paper, poster paint, markers or crayons, rulers, letter templates, construction paper, scissors, glue, heavy dowel

Day 2: Blackline Master 15 (page 180)

Team T-Shirts: white T-shirts, newspapers, fabric paints, fabric markers, permanent markers, paper towels

Day 3: Blackline Master 17 (page 182)

Megaphones: *construction paper or cardstock quarter-circles*,* scissors, glue, markers or crayons, paper or plastic streamers

Day 4: Blackline Master 19 (page 184)

Fans for the Stands: *body outlines*,* pencils, scissors, crayons or markers, paint and brushes

Day 5: Blackline Master 21 (page 186)

Keepsake Photo Frames: *cardstock picture frames*,* pencils, crayons or markers, glue, small decorative items

**Preparation needed. Measure and cut out these materials in advance.*

Additional Preparation Suggestions

- ☞ Make copies of scorecards (BLM 13, page 178), one per child per day (Days 1–4).
- ☞ Make samples of each craft activity for children to view as a model.
- ☞ Make copies of the Day 5 Closing Ceremony invitation (BLM 6, page 171) for children to take home on Day 1.

Decorating Savior Stadium

Help children imagine they are in a ballpark stadium by turning your meeting space into Savior Stadium, the setting for the week's events. Invite people to lend or donate baseball memorabilia or decorative baseball-related toys and decorations. Include features of a baseball stadium on the floors and walls and as freestanding structures.

Savior Stadium Decoration Ideas

Entrance: Build an entrance arch of cardboard supported by large box pillars and label it with the theme name and date.

Scoreboard: Construct a scoreboard from cardboard and label it with *God's Team* and *Other Teams*. The scoreboard can be mounted on a wall or on cardboard tube posts at the far end of the field.

Ball Field: Use brown, green, and white butcher paper to turn the large assembly space floor into a green ball field with white bases and baselines and a brown pitcher's mound.

Walls: Paint butcher paper to suggest bleacher seats and decorate with sports memorabilia.

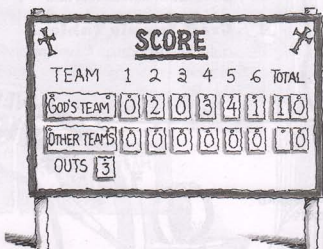
Use existing bleachers if they are already there.

Paint butcher paper to suggest outfield fencing.

Add children's crafts as the week progresses.

Concession Stand: Use cardboard and butcher paper to make a facade of a ballpark concession stand.

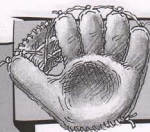
Be sure that the Concession Stand, the Registration Table, and the Craft Table are clearly marked so that children know where to find these. Make sure that the signs also mark each team's designated seating area.



Suggested Materials

- large and small cardboard boxes
- poster paint
- poster board
- sports memorabilia or decorations

- heavy tape
- butcher paper
- dowels or paper tubes

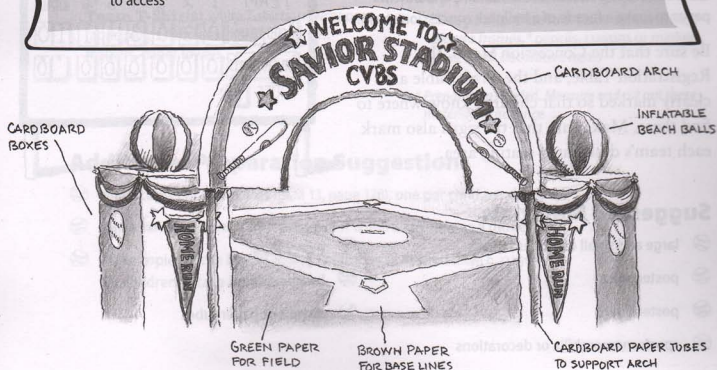


Savior Stadium

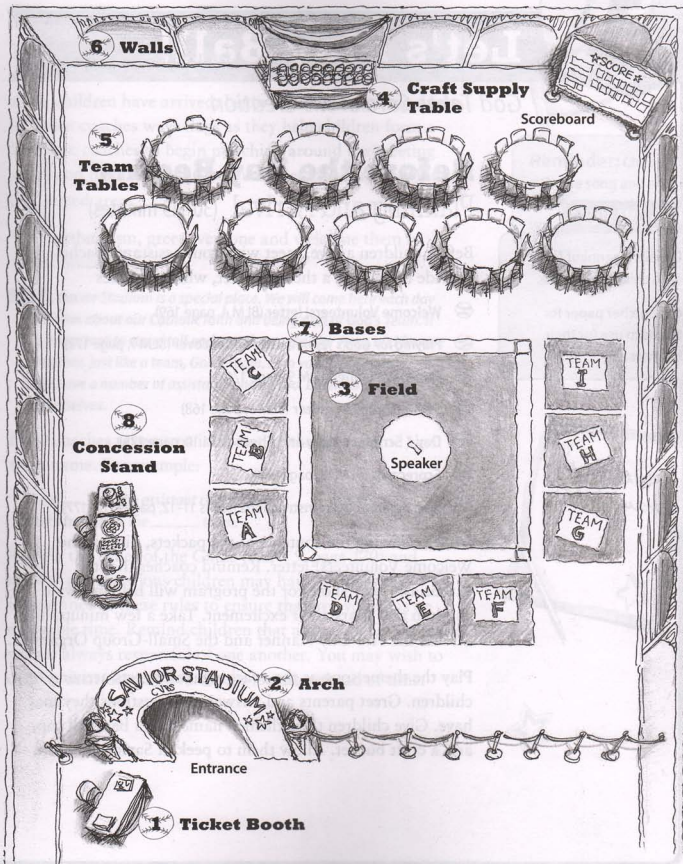
Here are further suggestions on how you can turn your Catholic Vacation Bible School meeting space into Savior Stadium, featuring structures and decorations that denote a baseball stadium with a Catholic influence.

Field Key

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 Ticket Booth
registration table for participants and volunteer check-in</p> <p>2 Arch
dramatic entrance into the stadium</p> <p>3 Field
speakers use pitcher's mound; teams are seated in surrounding field</p> <p>4 Craft Supply Table
craft-material location for volunteers to access</p> | <p>5 Team Tables
where Craft Time activities occur</p> <p>6 Walls
decorate to match the theme</p> <p>7 Bases
marching area around bases during large-group assemblies</p> <p>8 Concession Stand
set up and distribute snacks</p> |
|---|--|



Floor Plan





Let's Play Ball!

God Takes Care of His Creation

IN ADVANCE

Cut out a pennant for each child to decorate.








Cut butcher paper for teams to use for their banners.



Before the Day Begins

Planning and Arrival (30–45 minutes)

Before children arrive, meet with your assistant coaches. Provide them with a theme packet, which includes

-  **Welcome Volunteers! letter** (BLM 4, page 169)
-  **Playing for God's Team theme folder cover** (BLM 7, page 172)
-  **Five-Day Planner** (BLM 9, page 174)
-  **Small-Group Organizer** (BLM 3, page 168)
-  **Day 1 Scripture Story and Cheer** (BLM 10, page 175)
-  **Scorecards** (BLM 13, page 178)
-  **Day 1 craft-activity instructions** (BLMs 11–12, pages 176–177)

After reviewing the contents of the packets, discuss the Welcome Volunteers! letter. Remind coaches that the enthusiasm they show for the program will help motivate children and spark their excitement. Take a few minutes to discuss the Five-Day Planner and the Small-Group Organizer.

Play the theme song as the coaching staff greets arriving children. Greet parents and answer any questions they may have. Give children their themed name tag, a baseball cap, and a craft bucket. Allow them to peek at Savior Stadium.

The Warm-Up

Welcome (10 minutes)

After children have arrived, begin the marching song. Have assistant coaches wave flags as they help children form a line. Ask coaches to begin marching around the meeting space and to enter Savior Stadium. Get children seated in designated areas.

With enthusiasm, greet everyone and welcome them to Savior Stadium.

SAY: *Savior Stadium is a special place. We will come here each day to learn about our Catholic faith and being part of God's Team. It is important to stand tall and march together for Jesus and for one another, just like a team, God's Team. I am your head coach, _____. We have a number of assistant coaches too. Listen as they introduce themselves.*

Have coaches take turns introducing themselves and their team name. For example:

*I am _____, the assistant coach for the _____ team. Go _____!
Let's hear it for the _____ team!*

Review the Rules of the Game (BLM 5, page 170) and answer any questions children may have. Discuss the importance of these rules to ensure that everyone has an enjoyable time. Remind children that as part of God's Team, we are always respectful of one another. You may wish to display the rules in a prominent location ahead of time.



Reminder: Choose a theme song and a marching song for the Welcome.





The Opening Pitch

Large-Group Gathering (20 minutes)

Bring the group together by leading them in a familiar inspirational hymn. Invite children to play rhythm instruments, clap, or use appropriate gestures while the music plays.

Use questions to guide the opening discussion, starting with the idea of sports teams in general and eventually connecting to the idea of how we are all part of God's Team.

ASK: *How many of you have ever been on a sports team? What were the requirements to become part of the team? How did you feel once you were a part of team?*

Allow children time to think about each question. Accept appropriate responses and guide the discussion as needed.

ASK: *What were the good things about being on a team? What were the difficult things?*

Tell children that although some things about being on a team are difficult, the challenge offers a great chance for a reward.

SAY: *Being part of a team can be fun. It's very rewarding to work with others to accomplish something good, isn't it? Let's be a team. Join me as we sing a song together.*

Play another inspirational hymn that children may know. Encourage children to sing along, clap, or participate with appropriate gestures.



Reminder: Choose two inspirational sing-along songs for the Large-Group Gathering.



Faith Focus

After children have thoroughly discussed the various aspects of being a team member, help them understand the connection to our Catholic faith and to being a member of God's Team.

SAY: *God has a team too. Today we will learn what it's like to be part of God's Team. Who is on God's Team?*

Allow volunteers to share their answers. Point out that no matter what, we are all members of God's Team.

SAY: *To be chosen for a baseball team, a player must practice and put forth a lot of effort. Even then, not everyone is chosen to be part of a baseball team. Some players go to major league teams, some to minor league teams, and some aren't chosen at all. The good news is that each of us is a first pick for God's Team. We are all on God's Team. Let's think about the sacrament through which we were chosen for God's Team: the Sacrament of Baptism. In God's eyes, there is no major league or minor league. God loves each of us unconditionally. When we are baptized, we are part of God's Team forever.*

Follow up by discussing what it means to be part of God's Team.

ASK: *What is our job as a member of God's Team? What is God's job as our "head coach"?*

How can we help one another as we play for God's Team?

If needed, you may want to prompt children with examples of how we help others. After volunteers have had a chance to share their answers, move on to the Scripture Story.

SAY: *Now grab your hats. It's time to go "in the dugout."*

Use questions and build on children's answers to guide the discussion as you see fit.





In the Dugout

The Scripture Story (10 minutes)

Remind children that the Bible is God's Word and that Scripture teaches us how to be a good member of God's Team.

SAY: *Today's Scripture Story is about the Greatest Commandment. With this commandment, Jesus shares with us the rules of the game: God's rule is for us to love God and one another.*

Read aloud the Bible passages, Matthew 22:34–40; 5:19 (BLM 10, page 175).

Connect the Scripture Story to the day's theme.

SAY: *Players prepare physically and mentally to play a game. This is when their hours of practice pay off. As they wait for their turn to bat or to play the field, players visualize how they will contribute to the team. As members of God's Team, we do the same thing. We should visualize and prepare for how we are going to make a difference in the Church, our community, and the world. How can we show our love for God and one another? What plays will we make for God's Team? As Catholics, it is our responsibility to find and represent God in all that we do. This is how we all show we are part of God's Team.*

Introduce the teams. Call out the team name and its assistant coach. Encourage children to cheer for every team. Have the coach stand and read the names on the team's roster, asking each team member to stand in turn. To build camaraderie, have each coach gather the team together, form a huddle, and repeat the following cheer, naming individual teams each time:

SAY: *Hup, hup, hup! We're on God's Team: Go _____!*

Have everyone collectively cheer for the team. Play the theme song as a signal for children to follow their assistant coach to their respective Craft Time location.

Seventh-Inning Stretch

Craft Time (45 minutes)

After teams have gathered in their assigned location, have assistant coaches introduce the craft activities. Make sure assistant coaches connect the activities to the day's theme. Remind coaches to explain that children will make their own pennants, but they will work together to make one team banner. Have coaches show children where supplies are located, review the samples and illustrated directions, and demonstrate the steps as outlined on the blackline master. As teams work, circulate and support coaches as needed. Remind older children to assist younger ones.

Announce when teams have five minutes remaining. Remind coaches to complete the activity by having children share details of their pennant designs.

At the end of this session, have coaches hand out the invitations for Day 5's closing ceremony and explain that children should share them with their families. Then have coaches teach children the Team Cheer (BLM 10, page 175). Have coaches remind children that they will be performing this cheer tomorrow.

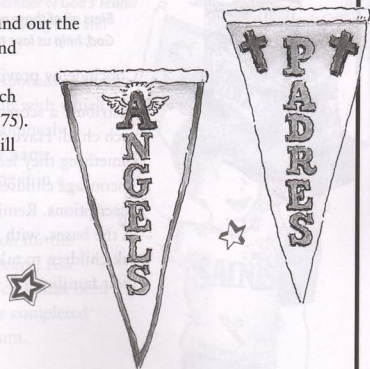
CRAFT ACTIVITY

Team Pennants, one per child
(BLM 11, page 176)

- pennant cutouts, paper, pencils, construction paper, glue, felt, markers, glitter, buttons, sports stickers, small decorative items, long dowels or sticks

Team Banner, one per team
(BLM 12, page 177)

- butcher paper, poster paint, markers or crayons, rulers, letter templates, construction paper, scissors, glue, heavy dowel








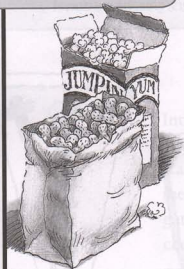
Concession Stand

Snack Time (15 minutes)

TODAY'S SNACKS

Adjust snack choices based on the dietary restrictions and needs of your children.

-  peanuts
-  caramel popcorn
-  juice or water



After children have finished cleaning up their craft supplies, have them wash their hands. Then invite children to visit the Concession Stand. You may wish to stagger groups until all the teams have been served.

When children have finished their snack, lead them in prayer. Choose an appropriate Catholic prayer such as the following:

Dear God,

We thank you for all that you have given us.

We are especially grateful for the gift of love, as we learned in our Bible story today.

We are asked to love one another. We can do that by praying for those who do not have enough food to eat and for those who made our snack today.

Bless all of those whom we love and who love us. But most of all, dear God, help us love those who feel that they are not loved.

Conclude by praying aloud the Sign of the Cross.

Distribute a scorecard (BLM 13, page 178) and pencil to each child. Have children complete a scorecard and describe something they learned or particularly enjoyed this day. Encourage children to use either words or drawings for their descriptions. Remind children to rate their day by coloring in the bases, with four bases being the highest score. Then ask children to take the scorecard home to share with their families.

Bottom of the Ninth

Closing (30 minutes)

After children finish their snack and clean up, play the theme song as a signal to assemble and have teams gather in Savior Stadium. Use these questions to lead a dialogue that ties the day together, allowing children time to respond after each question.

ASK: *What did we learn from today's Scripture Story? What did it teach us about teamwork?* (Possible answers: We should treat others with love and respect; we all should work together for this goal.)

What did you make during Craft Time? How does it help us be part of a team?

Accept reasonable responses and guide the discussion as needed. Then play a hymn that children know. Encourage children to sing along or clap.

ASK: *Why do we call this place Savior Stadium?* (Possible answers: Christ is our Savior; Christ taught us about being on God's Team.) *How can each of us strive to be a good member of God's Team?* (Possible answers: by helping those in need; by showing love and care for others; by spreading God's Word)

Be sure to thoroughly discuss children's responses to these questions. Then together sing another hymn with which children are familiar. Have children ceremoniously march out of Savior Stadium, putting their name tag and hat in their craft bucket and placing it in a designated location for the next day.

Remind children to take home the invitation for the closing ceremony on Day 5 and their scorecard. Ask coaches to supervise their team until each child has been picked up by a parent or guardian. Display completed pennants and banners within Savior Stadium.



Reminder: Choose two sing-along songs and one marching song for the Closing.

