



Vacation Bible school gets a facelift

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — It's a wonder vacation Bible school made it out of the 1960s.

Back in the days of black-and-white TV, churches offered kids lemonade, cookies and flannel-board stories about Jesus, all set to a clanging piano. Children sat in short wooden chairs and listened to the tales for what seemed like an eternity.

Things are different in 2008. DVDs and video screens are everywhere, along with professionally recorded music, dancing and slick lesson books. Kids are as likely to jump on inflatable moon bounces or go to water parks as play on a church swingset once Bible time is done.

Vacation Bible school, once a homestyle tradition, has become big business, with families helping to foot the bill through registration fees and donations. A handful of Christian publishers provide the curriculum, thereby setting the summertime agenda for millions of elementary-age kids at thousands of churches nationwide.

"Gone are the days of making bird houses and golden macaroni frames," said Kevin Clark, children's pastor at Life Church in suburban Birmingham for the last eight years. "It costs a lot more compared to what it did when I first came here, but it's really good."

At Mountain Brook Community Church, volunteer John Byrd pulls on a black wig, puts on a long white coat and gyrates at the front of the chapel for his role as a professor in this year's "Power Lab" VBS, a curriculum produced by the Colorado-based Group Publishing Inc.

Jumping around with a key-board slung around his neck, he lip syncs a song with about the power of Jesus — the most powerful thing there is, the lyrics say.

"What did we learn yesterday?" a leader calls out above the buzz

of excited children.

"Jesus gives us the power to be thankful!" they yell back.

Used by hundreds of churches this year, the "Power Lab" theme incorporates music, DVDs, crafts and handouts. Children's pastor Walter Arroyo said the \$2,000 investment was well worth it for the non-denominational church.

Small groups of children move between classrooms every few minutes rather than sitting in one place, and all the activities and lessons tie in to a central daily idea. Arroyo acts as the supervisor, patrolling the church campus with a walkie-talkie and clipboard.

"What it has helped us do is organize and keep things moving," said Arroyo. "We're committed to the message of the Gospel, but we also have to engage them in their world."

For children's pastor Chuck McCammon, 38, VBS 2.0 is all about using new tools to reach children who have grown up on TV's and computers.

"The biggest difference between now and when I was a kid is we try to make it more interactive, with things that are more tactile," said McCammon. His church does its best to pull in children from a wide area. This year, Valleydale Baptist advertised VBS with a billboard on Interstate 65.

The roots of vacation Bible school go back at least 130 years, when Christian summer camps began operating. A doctor's wife in New York City is widely credited with having the first true vacation Bible school in 1898 in a rented beer hall.

Baptists began publishing vacation Bible school materials in 1922, and the format was mostly unchanged for decades, according to Mary Katharine Hunt of LifeWay Christian Resources, the Southern Baptist publishing arm.

But in the 1990s, LifeWay, the non-denominational Group Pub-

lishing and other companies began turning out expansive packages with everything from Bible-based curriculum to craft supplies and professionally produced music and videos.

Publishers won't release sales figures on their VBS products. But the Southern Baptist Convention said nearly 26,600 churches reported using LifeWay's VBS materials last year with a total enrollment of almost 2.9 million children.

Vacation Bible school is most popular in the Southeast, where it's seen as an important tool for bringing new families into the church, but it's hardly a regional

phenomenon.

"We have churches all over the country using our vacation Bible school material," Hunt said. "Obviously it's strongest in the Bible Belt, but we have tons of churches using our material in California. It's happening in New York."

Small churches generally spend no more than a few hundred dollars on VBS, she said, but some spend \$2,000, or even more.

Many churches seek donations, charge registration fees or sell T-shirts to make up for the increased cost of materials plus camp-style extras like visits to water parks, said Jody Brolsma, senior vacation Bible school editor at Group

Publishing in Loveland, Colo.

"Thirty dollars isn't unheard of for a day camp-style experience, and some charge more," said Brolsma.

To help defray costs, many churches that purchase materials from companies like Group Publishing share as much as they can. Copyright laws prohibit copying most music and videos, but most everything else is fair game.

"The main thing is to help churches, no matter how large they are, pull off a really spectacular event and reach families with the Gospel," said Hunt. "The message hasn't changed, but the method has."



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Torah scroll stolen from St. Louis area synagogue

ST. LOUIS (AP) - A Torah scroll valued at about \$30,000 that was reported stolen from a St. Louis-area synagogue is one of a handful of Torah scrolls stolen in the past year in the United States, mystifying police and the Jewish community.

No one seems certain of a motive, but speculation includes a hate crime or selling the sacred documents on the black market.

The scroll taken in May from a synagogue in suburban University City had last been seen a week before. Police Capt. Mike Ransom said police had no leads and found no sign of forced entry into the building, which was locked.

In April, two Torah scrolls and a laptop computer were stolen from a synagogue in Kenosha, Wis. Another Torah and an overheard projector were taken from a high school in a St. Paul, Minn., suburb in September.

In Miami Beach, Fla., a Chabad house burned down in April. Po-

lice suspect that a Torah was taken before the fire started because investigators found no remnants of the scroll inside the ark and a rabbi found a piece of the Torah's wooden post outside the next day.

Torah scrolls, entirely handwritten in Hebrew by a scribe, contain the five books of Moses. New scrolls cost between \$30,000 and \$50,000 to produce.

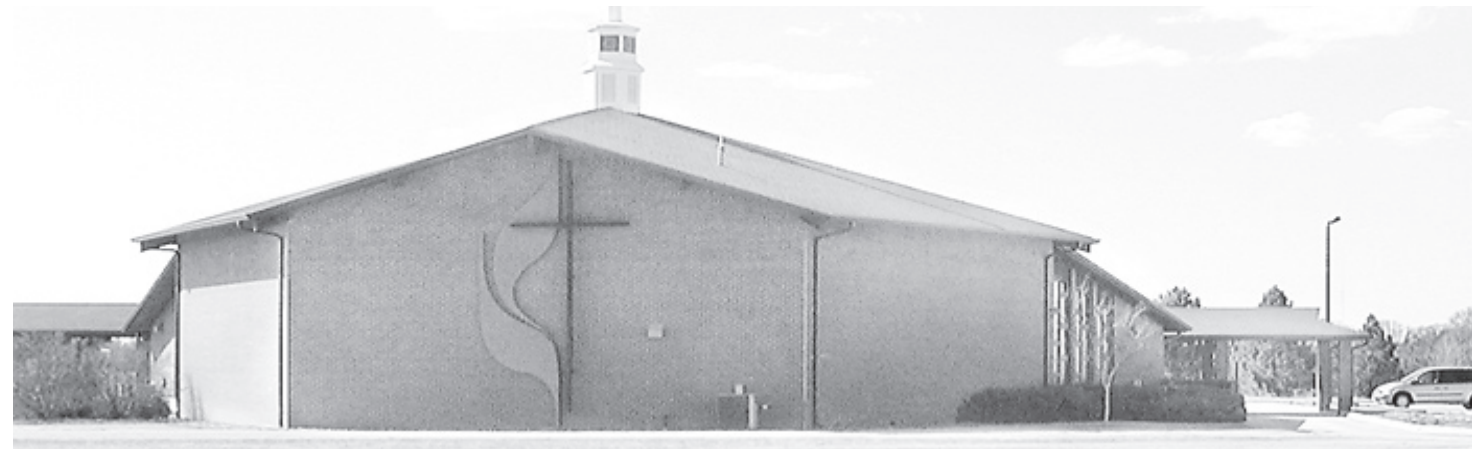
Torah theft was common 20 or 30 years ago, said David Pollock, associate director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of New York. Back then, security was minimal and a few hundred scrolls disappeared each year.

But in 1982, Jewish organizations stepped up security. Pollock and others founded the Universal Torah Registry, which uses a super-fine needle to give the sacred scrolls unique serial numbers.

None of the scrolls reported missing this year has been recovered.

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Schedule of church services

COLBY INDEPENDENT BAPTIST CHURCH, 730 E. 3rd (former Jaycee's building), Pastor Bernard Heinz, 460-0313, Sunday School 9:30 a.m.; Sunday Morning Worship 10:30 a.m.; Sunday Evening 6:00 p.m.; Wednesday Evening 7:00 p.m.

ASCENSION-ON-THE-PRAIRIE EPISCOPAL, Rev. Don Martin, College Drive & Wheatridge Rd., 462-3041, Holy Eucharist, 9:00 a.m. every Sunday. Evening Prayer, 5:15 p.m. Wednesday, September through May. Christian Education for Youth, 6:30 p.m. Wednesday, September through May

COLLEGE DRIVE ASSEMBLY OF GOD, Pastor, Jeremy Gundling, 245 W. College Dr. - 462-8234, Sunday School 9 a.m., Worship Service 10:15 a.m., Sunday evening Prayer Service 6:30 p.m., Wed 3:30 Rock out @ The Rock, Wed. 7 p.m. Youth @ The Rock. E-mail: cdag@st-tel.net. www.collegedriveonline.com

BEREAN CHURCH, 1000 S. Franklin, 460-2763, www.colbyborean.com; Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:45 a.m. Awana Clubs, Wednesday, 7 p.m., Middle & High School, Wednesday, 7 p.m. @ the Heartland Christian School Gym

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, (Affiliated with American Baptist Churches USA) Carroll H. Morony, Pastor, 615 W. Webster, 462-2867. Sunday School: 9:15 a.m.; Family Worship: 10:30 a.m. Sunday evening Bible Study: 7 p.m.; Wednesday afternoon Bible Study: 3 p.m.; RC Club 2nd & 4th Sunday: 2 p.m.

COLLEGE VIEW BAPTIST CHURCH, Pastor Tom Huffman, 1185 Wheatridge Rd. at College Drive, 460-7144, Sunday Bible Study 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship services, 10:45 a.m.

MINGO BIBLE CHURCH, 420 Main Mingo, 785-462-2992: An independent community church served by Village Missions Intern Pastor Pat Colley. Sunday School: 9:30AM - all ages. Sunday Services: 10:45AM. Sunday Nights: 1st Sunday of the month: potluck following morning service - no evening service; 2nd Sunday: services at 6:30 PM; 3rd Sunday: informal fellowship - bring a snack to share!; 4th and 5th Sunday: services at 6:30 p.m.

SACRED HEART CATHOLIC, 462-2179, Father Dana Clark, Pastor, Saturday Eve. Mass 5:30 p.m., Sunday Masses 8:00 & 10:00 a.m., Confessions will be heard Saturday 4:30-5:05 p.m. and from 7:30-7:45 a.m. and 9:25-9:40 a.m. on Sunday.

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, Rev. Carol Rahn, 515 W. 4th, 462-6342, Saturday evening worship 5:30 p.m.

WESLEYAN CHURCH, 320 W. Pine - 462-8391, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:40 a.m., Sunday Evening Cell groups at 6:00 p.m., Wednesday Youth Ministries, Kids Clubhouse 7 p.m.

CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS, 1145 S. Franklin - 460-6605, President Gary Slavens, 460-2656; Jordan Barrett, 1st counselor, 460-1101; Tim Wilson, 2nd counselor, 785-846-7796. Sacrament meeting 10 a.m., Sunday School and Primary 11:20 a.m., Priesthood, Relief Society, YM/YW, 12:10 p.m.; Family History Center open to public, 7-9 p.m. Thursdays or by appointment. Call 462-3571.

COLBY UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, Rev. James Mardock, pastor, 950 S. Franklin, 460-6521, Sunday Worship Services at 8:30 and 11:00 a.m., Fellowship coffee 9:30 a.m., Sunday School, 9:45 a.m., KXXX broadcasts 11:00 worship. www.colbyumc.org

REDEEMING LOVE MINISTRIES, INC., 345 N. Franklin, Dr. W.G. and Rev. Orvela Romine, Equipping Class, Sunday, 10a.m., Sunday worship, 11a.m., Wednesday, R.L.M Training Centers (Bible School), 5 p.m. Shop online at: www.rlmregionalchurch.com

CHURCH OF CHRIST, 510 E. 4th, Sunday Bible Study 9:30 a.m., Sunday Worship 10:30 a.m., Sunday Eve. Worship 6:00 p.m., Wednesday, Bible Study 7:00 p.m.

FIRST CHRISTIAN CHURCH, (Disciples of Christ), Pastor Pat Stuart and Pastor Lyle Knebel, 385 W. 3rd - 460-2718, Sunday Morning Worship at 10:00 a.m.; Sunday School at 11:15 a.m. E-mail: fcccolby@st-tel.net

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH, Rev. John L. Schmidt, East 5th & Country Club, 462-3497, Services, Sat., 5:30 p.m., Sunday; Sunday School and Adult Bible Class 9:15 a.m.; Services, 10:30 a.m. Visit us at www.trinitycolby.com

OUR SAVIORS LUTHERAN CHURCH, Brewster, Sunday worship 9:00 a.m.; 2nd Sunday of the month at 8:00 a.m.

PLEASANT HOME CHURCH, Pastor, Charlie Busch, 694-2242, 3190 Road 70, Edson, Worship, 9:00 a.m., Sunday School 10:00 a.m., Evening service, 6:00 p.m.

LEVANT COMMUNITY CHURCH, 205 1st St., Pastor Jerry Vincent, 586-2376, Sunday School (classes for 3 years & up and 3 adult classes) 9:30 a.m., Morning worship 10:30 a.m.

WINONA METHODIST CHURCH, Rev. Sheryl Johnson, Sunday School, 10:30 a.m., Morning Worship 9:15 a.m. (CDT)

BREWSTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH, PO Box 250, Brewster. Pastor Dorine Chambers, 785-462-6044, Sunday School: 9:45 a.m.; Worship Service, 10:45 a.m.

THE SHEPHERD'S STAFF, REXFORD, Joan Dingwerth, Director, 687-2565

REXFORD COMMUNITY CHURCH, Rexford, Pastor Lane Purcell, 687-3305, Sunday School 9:30 a.m., Worship Service 10:30 a.m.

BREWSTER COMMUNITY CHURCH, Mike Pinkelman, Pastor, Brewster - 694-2720, Sunday School (all ages) 9:30 a.m., Worship Service 10:30 a.m., Bible Study 7:00 p.m., Wed. mornings 6:30 a.m. - Men's Bible Study, Wed. 7:00 p.m. - Children's Ministries (Royal Rangers/Missionettes), Wed. 7:15 p.m. - Intercessory & Prayer, Thurs. 4:00 p.m. - Women's Bible Study

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