

— News Release —

For Immediate Release
For News and/or Community and/or Religion Editor(s)

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Vacation Bible School a Slipping Priority for America's Churches

• **Spiritual Formation Important Part
of "Children's Day" Movement**

Batavia, Ill., July 2, 2007 (*The Religion Wire™*) —

It's been part of the summer culture of America for over 80 years. It's called VBS. In 1923, Cincinnati-based Standard Publishing became the first publisher to create a full-scale vacation Bible school program.

In recent years the number of churches and ministries offering VBS has been slipping. This trend alarms many Christian educators and advocates for children.

A July 2005 report released by The Barna Group of Ventura, Calif., a researcher specializing in Christian trends, notes, "Another shift in children's ministry since 1997 has been the 15% decline in the percentage of churches offering Vacation Bible School (or VBS) - from 81% to 69%. That represents about 38,000 fewer churches offering VBS than eight years ago."

Barna also noted that the most common reason for no offering of VBS is lack of teachers.

The report further states, "Those most likely to offer VBS were Southern Baptist and mainline churches, congregations with 250 or more adult attenders, and black congregations."

Children's Day



Second Sunday in June

John Ross, advocate for "**Children's Day**" and part of a growing movement spearheaded by the website www.nationalchildrensday.us, laments, "The church played a vital role in the beginning of *Children's Day* and now again needs to reaffirm its commitment to children by initiating, continuing, and expanding VBS. Now more than ever, children need the church to step to the plate. Children are in direr need of spiritual and moral guidance. VBS reaches beyond denominational boundaries. It's a great tool for spiritual formation and community outreach. I hope all of America's churches can make that commitment... that's what *Children's Day* is about... commitment."

It is estimated by publishing industry sources that VBS enrolls some three million students annually according to a 2006 *Rockford Register Star* article.

The *Christianity Today* website lists the following VBS publishers as of 2006: Augsburg Fortress; Cokesbury; Concordia Publishing House; Cook Communications Ministries; Faith and Life Resources; Gospel Light; Group Publishing; Kids in Action Publishing; Lifeway Christian Resources; Regular Baptist Press; Standard Publishing; TruthQuest Ministries; Urban Ministries, Inc.; VBS Outreach Adventures; and Word Action Publishing.

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Note about "**Children's Day**" —

"**Children's Day**" observations in the United States predate both Mother's and Father's Day. This day dates from the 1880s and earlier. The General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in 1883 designated the "the second Sabbath in June as *Children's Day*."

Chase's Calendar of Events cites *Children's Sunday*.

Denominations that officially observe the day include the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the Church of the Nazarene.

This year, Illinois became the first state in the start of a movement to proclaim *the second Sunday in June* as "**Children's Day**." Illinois governor Rod R. Blagojevich issued a proclamation. The Illinois cities of Batavia and Aurora (Illinois' second largest city) also issued mayoral proclamations.