



Prayer Service

Stellar Totally Catholic VBS 2023

Many parishes incorporate a prayer celebration as part of their VBS, inviting the participants, their families, and the entire parish community to join in the celebration. This prayer service may be celebrated on the eve of the final day; for example, Thursday night if the last day of *Vacation Bible School* is on Friday, or it may be celebrated on Friday to end the VBS week. This prayer service uses readings that highlight that Jesus is the Light, and we are called to shine his light to others.

Preparation and Supplies

- Confirm availability of a parish priest or deacon.
- Place an announcement in the parish bulletin inviting participant households and the entire faith community to the closing prayer celebration.
- Determine which reflection option you will use (see below) and prepare as needed.
- Choose songs from the suggestions below.
- Decorate the worship space, if desired, by displaying items from the week in an appropriate spot in the gathering space. If you have chosen to participate in the VBS Outreach Project during the week, place an appropriate display in the narthex or welcome area for people to see as they enter the gathering space.
- Recruit and prepare or practice with the necessary ministers from among the VBS participants and adult volunteers—lectors, music ministers, hospitality ministers, and so on.
- Consider including a collection for the VBS Outreach Project after the reflection, unless you have incorporated the VBS Outreach Project collection during the week and feel that another request is too much.

Opening Song

“He is the Light” (found on the *Stellar Sing and Play Music Soundtrack*) or another gathering song of your choice

Opening Prayer

God of all Creation, throughout history you have shown your great love to your people. Your greatest gift to us was your Son, Jesus, who is the Light of the World. Send us your Holy Spirit upon us, that we may shine your light in good times and in sad or dark times, bringing peace and offering help to others. Amen.

Scripture Readings

Instruct reader to begin by saying, “A reading from the prophet Isaiah” and to conclude with “The word of the Lord.” At the conclusion of the reading, prompt assembly to respond, “Thanks be to God.”

- First Reading: Isaiah 9:1-6 (Note: This reading can be found in the Lectionary for Years A, B, and C Christmas: Mass at Midnight) [Lectionary 14])
- Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 100:1-2, 3, 5 (Note: This reading can be found in the Lectionary for Year A, Fourth Sunday of Easter) [Lectionary 51])
- Gospel Acclamation (Alleluia)

Gospel

If a deacon or priest is not available, make sure the reader knows to begin by saying, “A reading from the holy Gospel according to Matthew” and to conclude with “The Gospel of the Lord.” At the conclusion of the reading, prompt assembly to respond, “Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ.”

Gospel: Matthew 5:13-16 (Note: This reading can be found in the Lectionary for Year A, Fifth Sunday in Ordinary Time [Lectionary 43])

Reflection

Here are two options to help the participants reflect on the readings and their experience of the week.

Option One: Priest or Deacon Homily/Director Reflection

Consider including the following points in the reflection:

- Jesus is the Light of the World.
- We are called to shine Jesus’ light when life feels dark, when people don’t get along, when good things happen, when people are sad, and when people need help. In this year’s VBS, we focused on aspects of our Catholic Tradition that remind us of shining Jesus’ light, including the Paschal Candle, the Sign of Peace, Blessed Palms, the Sorrowful Mysteries, and the Corporal Works of Mercy.

Option Two: Large Group Presentations

Depending on the number of VBS crews that have been part of the week, consider inviting each crew or a combination of crews to come forward to share with all those gathered a brief summary of their experience of the week:

- a. Assign each group a particular aspect of the week to share with the group — the Scripture passage for a day, a favorite station, a favorite song.

Or

- b. Invite each VBS crew to create a brief presentation that summarizes their central learning from the week—it may be one of the songs that summarizes the week for them, a brief drama that they create and share, a poster with their key thoughts and reflective images on it, one of the station days from the week, or highlights of their conversations as they discussed the VBS Outreach Project. Issue the invitations a day or two in advance so the crews will have time to prepare their presentations.

If your physical space allows, an effective way to facilitate the large group sharing is by creating a “circle theater.” In a circle theater format, everyone has easy access to the center space and everyone can see.

Place chairs for visiting adults and family members unable to sit on the floor around the perimeter of a large circle.

Inside the circle, sit each crew on the floor, as if they are sitting in a “slice” of the circle.

Leave an open space in the center of the circle for the crews to present, as well as space between each slice to serve as aisles.

To create a prayerful tone to the sharing, select a simple song that the community can sing after each crew has shared and another crew is stepping forward to share.

Prayer of the Faithful

After the intercessions listed below, add any specific intentions for the VBS participants, their families, or the community in general. After each petition, please respond with, “Lord, hear our prayer.”

For Church leaders, that they may continue to shine Jesus’ light by being good shepherds to God’s people, we pray to the Lord.

For leaders of all countries, that they shine Jesus’ light by caring for their people, we pray to the Lord.

For the poor and the suffering, especially those suffering from hunger, that God may use us to shine his light by caring for their needs, we pray to the Lord.

For those who are sick and dying and all those who are living in dark times, that Jesus' light will bring them hope and healing, we pray to the Lord.

For all who serve this parish as leaders, especially those who helped with VBS this week, we pray to the Lord.

For all those gathered here. May we shine Jesus' light by living in harmony, walking together in faith, we pray to the Lord.

Lord's Prayer

Trusting that the Lord hears all our prayers, let us pray the prayer that Jesus, Light of the World, taught us. Our Father ...

Sign of Peace

Concluding Blessing

At the end of each blessing, we can all respond, "Amen."

May God bless you with grace to shine his light even in difficult times. Amen.

May God bless you with mercy so that you can shine his light by living in harmony with others. Amen.

May God bless you with compassion and forgiveness, so you might see the needs of others and shine Jesus' light to them. Amen.

And may the blessing of almighty God, the Father, and the Son, + and the Holy Spirit, come down on you and remain with you forever.

Closing Song: "Shine His Light" (found on the *Stellar Sing and Play Music* soundtrack), or another song selection of your choice.