

Education-focused curriculum makes Summer Academy 2008 a success



For the 110 children who participated in the St. Mary of the Lake Summer Academy 2008, education didn't end with the close of the 2007-2008 school year. A few days of summer vacation allowed for relaxation, and then participants dove in to the summer learning experience.

Mary J. Fritz, St. Mary of the Lake Principal said Summer Academy keeps children's minds actively engaged over the summer months. "Children who come back in the fall with no formal summer learning experiences take a few weeks just to get back to where they were when school ended in June," she said. "Summer Academy is designed to be an active and engaging educational experience that crosses multiple curriculum areas. Kids hardly notice that they are doing math and reading when it is couched in this kind of an environment."

Summer Academy, with programs geared for all ages from preschool through grade six featured an experiential education setting allowing time for arts, athletics and academics. Licensed teachers presented age-appropriate lessons focused on plants, animals, insects, space, cooking, theater arts and much more.

Tracy Kalthoff, parent of two Summer Academy participants, said her children had a lot of fun this summer. "We were lucky to have found out about St. Mary's Summer Academy," she said. "It was unique to have lessons by trained teachers, unlike other summer programs where staff may have less experience. The cost also was reasonable compared to other summer programs such as the YMCA or community centers. Our involvement was tailored around our schedule – a definite plus during the busy summer months."

The schedule for the summer program was flexible to meet the needs of parents and students, with cost varying depending on days of participation. Preschoolers could register for half or full-days for up to three days per week and elementary through grade six students for one to five days per week. With no set registration requirements, participants also could "drop-in" as desired.

Sr. Sharon White, St. Mary of the Lake Assistant Principal said the staff's energy enhanced the experience for every participant. "We had an excellent faculty for Summer Academy," she said. "They were creative and excited which made for an optimum learning environment."

Eager to help the children enjoy the summer while learning and growing, preschool Summer Academy teachers covered topics such as Green Growing Things; Ways We Travel; Big, Blue Oceans; Stars of Day and Night; and Get into Shape and Shapes.

In addition to study in various curriculum areas, kindergarten through grade six students had math and reading lessons daily. Students also took part in organized exercise and physical activity in the gym and outdoors. Challenging weekly topics included Orienteering, First Aid, Internet Projects, Art, Mini Olympics, Environment, Play Production, Stewardship and more.

"The children enjoyed the changing themes," Sr. Sharon said. "However, the favorite offering was the field trips. They were able to participate in unique, on- and off-site activities that broadened their learning on particular subjects."

Field trips included visits to the butterfly house at Como Zoo, Tamarack Nature Center, the Minneapolis Institute of Art and a water park. Preschoolers also participated in walking field trips around the neighborhood.

Kathy Fummger, parent of Summer Academy participants said, "Overall my kids loved Summer Academy. We felt safe leaving them there. I think St. Mary's program has a lot of variety yet the right amount of structure, too."

Kalthoff said she will consider Summer Academy 2009 for her children. "I'll definitely recommend Summer Academy to anyone I talk with about next year's summer programs," she said. "It was an excellent, well-organized experience for our family."

Sr. Sharon noted that St. Mary of the Lake already has been receiving inquiries about Summer Academy 2009. "We are planning for next summer, and we expect to have complete information available in the spring of 2009," she said. Visit www.stmarys-wbl.org for additional information.