

True North: Trusting Jesus in a Wild World

This year's Vacation Bible School theme took students on a virtual wilderness trip to Alaska. Vacation Bible School participants, or "campers", met every morning for a week at the end of July to learn about their faith in a fun and engaging way.

Shelly Fellin, Coordinator of Formation & Liturgy at St. Agnes, said this year 22 three to five-year-old children and 26 students in grades one through five participated in the summer event.

Learning to trust Jesus in different ways

"Our goal is to engage children in faith-based learning during summer vacation," Fellin said. The VBS curriculum is from Our Sunday Visitor and this year has an Alaskan wilderness theme. Each day had a bible point, key bible story and a bible memory buddy to help the children remember to "Trust in Jesus." St. Joseph volunteer, Deb Wuerl, lead the opening and closing sessions each day. She explained to the children that during different circumstances in their lives they can "trust in Jesus." And each day's "Buddy" helps them remember these important points. On Day 1 the children learn that when they wonder, they can "trust in Jesus". On Day 2 they learn that when they feel alone they can "trust in Jesus". The point on Day 3 lets the children know that when they feel powerless, they can "trust in Jesus". On day 4 the point focused on hope. When children need hope, they can "trust in Jesus". And finally, on Day 5 the children learned that when they need help they can "trust in Jesus."

Wuerl said that every day they used a different animal as a memory buddy. The memory buddies included: Ponder the Otter, Clawdia the Crab, Kody the Kodiak Bear, Earnest the Eagle, and Bruce the Moose.



Volunteer Deb Wuerl from St. Joseph Parish stands with cutout posters of some of the Bible Buddies.

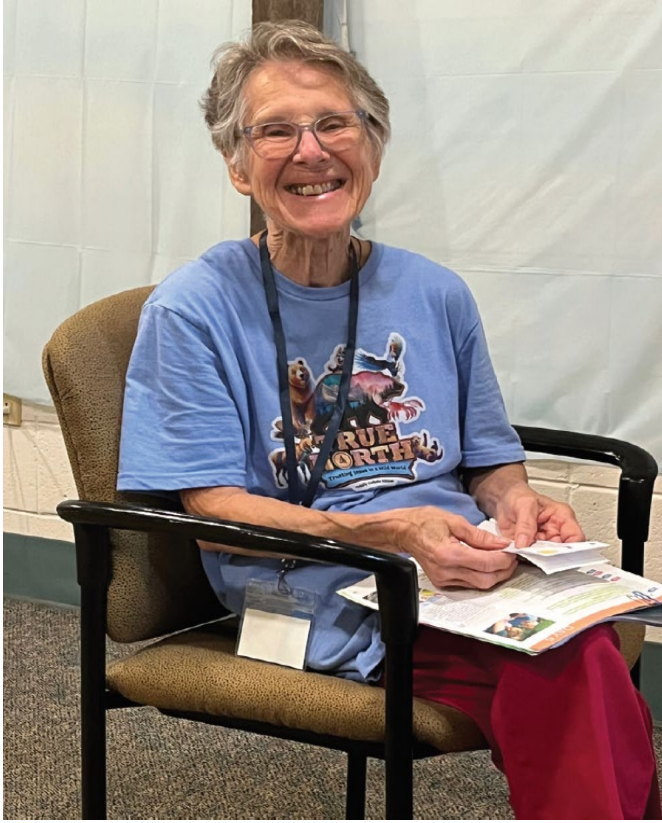


VBS children do an activity during Sticky Scripture Station.



Preschool VBS children listen to the leaders, Carrie Krassman and Holly Jozwiak, during Bible Adventure.

Teaching: Taking on new challenge is rewarding



Darlene Kocher taught her first class this summer.

During VBS the children attended four different “stations”. Each Station had a specific focus. Imagination Station used science experiments to help the children apply the bible point to their lives. Sticky Scripture Station helped the children to memorize bible verses. Glacier Games gave the children an opportunity to play. Bible Adventure Station focused on a specific Bible story each day.

Darlene Kocher volunteered to lead the Bible Adventure Station for the first time this year. “It’s been intense,” she said “and extremely challenging.” First, she had to learn the information provided in the leader guide and then she had to figure out how to present the information in a way that would be understandable and relevant. The curriculum gave directions for how to explain to the children what the pain of Jesus’ suffering on the cross was like. She followed the guide which directed the kids experience the pain felt when putting your hands in a dishpan of ice. The sensation of pain, numbness, tingling and outright suffering helps them to understand better how much Jesus suffered for us. The ice melting away is like sin being forgiven.

Darlene was assisted by Dick Ognenoff, who helped with many of the different aspects of the lesson of each day. Youth volunteer, Aiden Armstrong, also helped with the station and for one of the days he dressed up as a Roman soldier to give the kids a real-life experience of the bible story.

“I get into it so much,” Darlene said, “I concentrate. I hope this makes a difference.” There is lots of preparation for the lessons. She does research and tries to be creative in explaining each part of the lesson.

Darlene said she has gotten a lot more knowledge about teaching. When students get unruly, I’ve learned how to get them back on track.

“I’ve used examples from my own life,” she said.

Mid-morning snack break Children enjoyed a theme-based snack each day of VBS.





It's always a treat when Father Sergio visits the students at their mid-morning break.

Reflection: Educating the Young



Dick Ognenoff with Charlie and Aiden, a couple of the youth volunteers.

Dick Ognenoff is a member of Our Lady of Lourdes parish, but his grandchildren—Brooke and Brady—are friends with children who go to St. Joseph's in Wauwatosa, which is how he found himself volunteering again to teach at St. Agnes this summer.

"Educating the young—it's a fun thing to do," he said. "It's not just 'boring' talking." This summer at Vacation Bible School he taught first through fifth graders—a wide-ranging group but one he was prepared for. He likes to teach, which is why he volunteers now. He has a Master's degree in religious studies from Cardinal Stritch University.

"A few years ago, my granddaughter and I participated in a Vacation Bible School at St John the Evangelist, where they attend school" he said, "and we enjoyed it. I co-led a station. It was no longer offered there so I was looking for another location. Some friends of ours attend St Joseph's in Tosa. I noticed the ad in their bulletin for VBS at St.

Agnes. Shelly graciously accepted my volunteerism and 5 participants. We all felt very welcomed. For the last number of years my wife and I co-led the 7th/8th graders in RE (called GIFT) at Our Lady of Lourdes, and we serve in our grandkids' school library.