

# Camp GLOW participants share 'love of Christ'

SPARKS — Playing air guitar to a favorite song during a talent show, lounging by the pool or taking a nature walk are just a few of the activities 135 adults with special needs will participate in as part of the Archdiocese of Baltimore's Camp GLOW (God Loves Our World) program this summer.

Individuals with intellectual and physical challenges - including autism, Down syndrome, mobility issues, blindness and hearing difficulties - will participate in four week-long residential camps, according to Deacon William R. Fleming III, director of the Office of Special Needs Ministry for the Archdiocese of Baltimore.

"All are welcome," Deacon Fleming said.

The Catholic Review visited Camp GLOW July 18 at the Monsignor O'Dwyer Retreat House in Sparks, during one of its three camp weeks. The other is held at the Hickory Environmental Education Center in the Garrett County town of Accident.

"It's an opportunity for people with disabilities to be with each other for a week," Deacon Fleming said. "It's a respite for families and caregivers. They can go away (on vacation) and know their family member is well taken care of, and is in a place they want to be and have a great time."

The faith aspect of camp plays an important role for participants, as Bible study opportunities and Mass are available.

"They come for faith and not just for fun and games," according to Deacon Fleming. "The goal of Camp GLOW is to meet the faith and social needs of folks with disabilities."

"Every time I come here, I feel my life is touched by the love of the campers," auxiliary Bishop Adam J. Parker said after celebrating Mass July 18 for campers at the O'Dwyer Retreat House. "They have the purity of Christ, the innocence of Christ

and the love of Christ they show us.”

Operational costs for Camp GLOW are approximately \$20,000 per session, or \$600 per camper. The generosity of parishioners during the Archbishop’s Annual Appeal, gifts from the Knights of Columbus and other donors allow participants to attend camp at no cost.

Laura Platania is a fulltime school guidance counselor who takes a week’s vacation to work as a Camp GLOW companion.

“I guess I’m addicted,” says Laura, who’s worked at the camp the past 10-years. “It sounds kind of corny, but their smiling faces really make it worth it.”

*Also see:*

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*Email Kevin Parks at [kparks@catholicreview.org](mailto:kparks@catholicreview.org).*