

Family fun day invigorates families of children with disabilities

Even before the first Family Fun Day was over, William Fleming was planning the next one. The coordinator of catechesis for persons with developmental disabilities for the Archdiocese of Baltimore was so pleased with the turnout of more than 80 people at the Monsignor O'Dwyer Retreat House, Sparks, he knew he and volunteer Debbi Dempsay, a parishioner of St. Joseph, Fullerton, would have to plan another event.

Targeted to families with children and adults with developmental disabilities, the afternoon of May 31 was all about fun.

"This was fun. That's what we need," one 40-plus participant told Carol Augustine, director of evangelization and catechesis. "We just wanna have fun."

With simple activities like face painting, balloon sculpting, duck pond, bean bag toss, a magic show, music and crafts, participants were entertained, which was evident by the smiles decorating the room.

Kenice Fleming (no relation to Mr. Fleming), 42, agreed she had a good time and graciously posed for a photo with a rainbow "tiara" of long balloons adorning her short, black hair. Ms. Fleming lives independently in an apartment with the help of a house counselor.

The idea for the event, said Mr. Fleming, originated from a parent's comment that something fun should be offered for children with special needs.

"That stuck with me," he said. "It is another way for the archdiocese to let persons with special needs know that they are valued and welcome."

While the idea was to attract families with children, there was not an age limit for the event, which was open to all persons with developmental disabilities. Many adults took part.

Kelly Scheel said her 8-year-old daughter, Ellen, who has Down syndrome, “loved it! It’s nice to know they care about our children. It’s not easy. We have to fight to get them accepted and included. We need to have more programs for our kids.”

Mrs. Scheel, a parishioner of Cathedral of Mary Our Queen, Homeland, is an active member of the Chesapeake Down Syndrome Parents’ Group. Ellen recently made her first Communion and is a member of their faith formation group on Sundays.