

# Leap of Faith: St. Clare dance camp nurtures body and soul

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One by one, girls as young as 5 sprinted onto the dance floor at St. Clare in Essex. It was the end of a dance routine they had been practicing all morning June 25 as part of a daylong dance camp, and the youngsters seemed eager to express their personalities. Some leapt into the air. Others placed their hands on hips and grinned. Still others struck poses with just a bit of swagger.

"Can we do that again?" squealed one youngster in pink ballet slippers as the final notes of the accompanying music echoed in the hall. An instructor gave the go-ahead for yet another practice run, and the girls giggled.

"I just love all the people here," said Savannah Hinson, a 10-year-old camper and a fifth-grader at Park Hall Elementary School. "I love making new friends and all the dances are so much fun."

St. Clare's summer girls' dance camp, which ran June 23-27, attracted 24 participants ages 5 to 12 this year. The popular event was designed not only to teach girls ballet, jazz and modern dance techniques, but to strengthen faith.

For the last four years, the camp has been led by Sarah and Olivia Sears, sisters and St. Clare parishioners. The siblings had participated in the camp when it was run by a teacher at St. Clare School. After the school closed in 2010, they offered to take over.

"When the school closed, a lot of the youths left," said Sarah, a 19-year-old sophomore at Towson University. "It's a good way to bring them back."

*View a video of the camp in action.*

Olivia, a 16-year-old junior at The Catholic High School of Baltimore, noted that special themes were covered each day of the camp. They included healthy friendships, caring for the environment and loving God. During the June 25 camp, children were given St. Clare medals and prayer cards. Contemporary Christian music was often selected for the choreographed routines.

"We have a big recital on the last day, and all the parents come and watch their kids perform," she said.

Dance vocabulary and technique were emphasized throughout the week, but not as much as simply having fun.

"If they are not pointing their feet, I don't really care," Sarah said, "as long as they walked out and they're like, 'I can't wait to come back tomorrow.'"

Father Jesse Bolger, pastor, said the camp helped children to see a broad view of what it means to be Catholic.

"It's cool to be Catholic in many venues," he said, "and this dance camp kind of exemplifies that."

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