

# Teens, young children both take home lessons

WESTMINSTER – Energetic kids filled the auditorium of St. John's School every morning from June 27 to July 1 for the parish's Vacation Bible School. Not everyone running around, however, was a camper.

Teenagers and young adults turn out every year to volunteer at the Bible school, giving their time and talent to help teach the little ones in the church community about God.

About 110 children aged 3-12 attended the one-week Bible school at St. John Parish in Westminster. Thirty volunteers, over half of whom were parish youths, assisted in various ways, as teachers, classroom assistants or helping with crafts or snacks. They helped children learn new songs, play games and focus on the Bible story of the day.

Camp director Ruth Hartman is grateful for the help of the young volunteers. Hartman, retiring after 30 years of organizing Vacation Bible School, said the camp is made possible by volunteer support.

"These young people bring their energy, new ideas, and excitement about teaching the children," Hartman said, "It shows the younger students that it's important to get involved in your parish activities."

"Many of the students help out to begin accumulating volunteer service hours," Hartman said of the youthful helpers, "but they return year after year because they really enjoy working with the young people and have expressed to me what fun they've experienced."

Such was the case of Anthony Messina, a rising junior at Westminster High School and parishioner of St. John's. Messina began working to gain volunteer service hours, but said he continued volunteering because he enjoyed meeting new people, trying new things and having fun with the kids.

Having previously helped out as a classroom assistant, this year Messina decided to teach instead.

"I had helped out there since I was in sixth grade," Messina said, "and I felt this year would be a good year to do something different."

Messina, who expressed an interest in possibly becoming a teacher, said it was a good experience. "It was a lot more stressful than just helping out in the classroom, but it was a lot of fun," he said. "I had to work and plan and do things that a normal teacher would have to do."

Despite the demands involved with planning classes, games and other activities for the students, Messina said that he will be back next summer.

"I might not be teaching next year but I am definitely going to be helping out in some way," he said.

Bethany Fischer, St. John's youth minister for high school-aged students, also assisted with the Bible school. Every morning, she would tell jokes with the children and introduce the day's theme. Fischer expressed excitement at seeing so many teens being active in the parish community.

"It is important for teens and young adults to serve because through service they are following Christ's example of self-sacrifice and love," said Fischer. "With Vacation Bible School the teens and young adults wake up early and give up half of their day to spend with little kids.

"The younger kids really look up to the older ones; it makes them feel special when they know one of the teens or young adults."

Fischer also stated that she hopes the young adults will not only teach the children, but learn from them as well.

"The younger children have a lot of joy, love for Jesus, and trust in Jesus - all areas in which teens and young adults could take a lesson." Fischer said. "From my own experience, I feel like I get more out of it than the kids do sometimes."