

St. Mary's Academy open house aims to increase enrollment

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CHAMPLAIN — After a dip in enrollment for the 2009-10 school year, St. Mary's Academy has decided to open its doors next week to show the unique educational environment they have to offer.

The school will be open half a day Thursday, March 11, closed Friday, March 12, following the schedule of Northeastern Clinton Central School. However, St. Mary's principal Sister Marie Cordata Kelly said the school will remain open both days to allow NCCS students in pre-K through sixth grade to come and see the way the school is run.

"We're going to have 'pseudo' classes," Cordata said. "They'll be classes to give a taste of our education, but it'll also be fun."

Students do not have to stay the entire two days, but can come and go as they please. Parents are also welcome to visit the school.

"We believe that if people, especially the kids, see the school and they experience the school, they want to come to the school," said Father James Delbel, pastor of St. Mary's. "It's a nice atmosphere. It's relaxed, happy."

Delbel said he isn't against what public schools have to offer, yet is aware of some kids who have fallen through the cracks.

"They just need that little special care that we can give to them," he said. "We'd like to sort of encourage them to take a look at us and maybe, if possible, to come next year."

Lisa DeLong, who has two children who attend St. Mary's, said it took just one day for her to be impressed by the school.

"The first day I was there, like three or four teachers knew my children's names," she said. "As we left, they said 'Goodbye.' That impressed me so much because why should a fourth grade teacher know my first-grader? I had never experienced that."

DeLong said everyone in the school acts the same way.

"Right from the lunch room person, to the gym teacher, to the janitors, to the principal, to the priest. Everybody knows all the children and I think that's what makes it so special," she said.

Another aspect of the school Cordata, DeLong and Delbel all noted, was there is no bullying and teachers never raise their voice to the students.

Students in kindergarten, first and second grade listen as Father Roger McGuiness of St. Joseph's Church in West Chazy delivers a mission. The school is having an open house March 11-12 to encourage more children to attend.



"Those types of things don't happen at St. Mary's," said DeLong.

Cordata recalled one instance where a third-grader who had just enrolled at the school was asked by her mother if she was making any friends.

"She said, 'Mom, at St. Mary's, everybody's friends,'" Cordata quoted of the student. "There's no making fun of anybody, or looking down on anyone, and also the gospel values are taught."

Gospel values such as integrity, responsibility, caring for others, and selflessness, are ones Cordata said can't be taught in public schools, but she believes makes for a "total education."

Delbel also noted students who attend St. Mary's do not necessarily have to be of Christian faith.

"It's not just Catholic parents. We take children of all religions and no religions," he said. "They're all welcome to come."

"We don't breathe down their necks. So, if a Protestant child came, or a child with no religion, or a non-Christian child came, we would make sure they were just as nicely treated and respected for who they were," Delbel added.

The school will be open March 11 at 11 a.m. and March 12 at 7:30 a.m. There is no fee for the open house, except for lunch, if desired, which is \$2. For more information, contact the school at 298-3372 or visit www.stmarysacademy.net. The school is located at 1129 State Route 9.

Bonus for registration

According to Lisa DeLong, Global Fitness and Martial Arts on State Route 9 in Champlain will give a family membership to the gym for any student who enrolls at St. Mary's Academy for the 2010-11 school year, to be used throughout the year.