

IHMs IN ACTION



Sister Faye uses the world around her to prepare her second-graders to become environmental stewards.

When Sister Faye (Marie Denise) McFarlane says she teaches second grade at a school with about 100 children, in a town with less than 15,000 people, it's easy to think in stereotypes.

Students probably learn "readin' ritin' and 'rithmetic", but not much more, right?

Wrong. Although the students **do** learn the "three Rs" and achieve great academic success, there's much more to their curriculum.

Sister Faye teaches at St. Edward on-the-Lake School in Lakeport, Mich., directly across the street from Lake Huron. She has used the surroundings to open her students' eyes to the natural beauty all around them.

"We learn about different eco-systems," Sister Faye notes. "Our motto is, 'We are the Lakers. We are keepers of God's creation.'"

With that in mind, she uses Lake Huron, the beach, woods, plants and animals in her lesson plans.

When Sister Faye came to St. Edward after spending 19 years at St. Cecilia in Detroit, one of the first things she noticed was the silence. Pesticides had killed or driven off many of the birds and other wildlife, so she set out to bring them back.

"I brought the concept of 'green' with me when I came," Sister Faye recalls. "Luckily, the parish and school were very open to the idea."

Now 13 years later, all of the grades – K through five – incorporate environmental health into their curricula, even participating in a school-wide "beach day" when students learn about wind and solar energy, fossils and Petoskey stone.

St. Edward students also learn about the abundant wildlife living nearby. It's not uncommon to see bald eagles, hummingbirds, deer, raccoons and snakes.

"We've actually been chased into the school by skunks," laughs Sister Faye. "We do studies on environmental health based on the number of frogs and toads in a given locale. We learn about composting and the importance of worms for soil health. And each year, the second-graders do a research project based on different habitats. This year, it's the grasslands, and we're turning our classroom into an African savannah."

"What I want to do now is to set things up so the projects we've developed will be carried on when I'm not able to work on them anymore," Sister Faye continues. "I love working with little children. Their creativity and freedom to explore and discover have kept me in the teaching game, but I know at some point I'll need to stop."

"Hopefully, the awareness and environmental stewardship we've fostered at St. Edward will continue long into the future."