



**Little Disciples Preschool**  
414 North Main Street, Pontiac, Illinois 61764  
Phone 815-844-6585 Fax 815-844-6987  
Father Adam Cesarek, Administrator  
Mrs. Karen Jones, Principal

**Little Disciples Preschool**  
**Handbook**  
**2022-2023**

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### **SCHOOL PERSONNEL**

#### ***Administration and Faculty***

Fr. Adam Cesarek, Pastor

Mrs. Karen Jones, Principal

Mrs. Carol Hepner, Preschool Director

Mrs. Danielle MacZura, Preschool Paraprofessional

Mrs. Taryn Tissiere, Preschool Paraprofessional

Mrs. Kelly Krenz, Director of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Mr. Adam Lawrence, Physical Education

Mrs. Ellen Yedinak, Music

#### ***Staff***

Mrs. Heidi Gregory, Administrative Assistant

Mrs. Donna Gray, Business Manager

Mrs. Danielle Gill, Director of Development

Mr. Mark Corrigan, Maintenance Director

Mr. Tory Farney, Custodian

#### ***Commission on Education***

Mrs. Angela Ehrgott

Mrs. Jill Francis

Mrs. Jenny Murphy

## **CATHOLIC SCHOOL STATEMENT OF PURPOSE**

“From the first moment that a student sets foot in a Catholic school, he or she ought to have the impression of entering a new environment, one illumined by the light of faith and having its own unique characteristics, an environment permeated with the Gospel spirit of love and freedom....”

### **The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School, #25**

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Peoria are established to assist the Bishop and Pastors in the transmission of the faith to the young people of the diocese. We welcome non-Catholic students into our schools who wish to take advantage of the opportunities provided by Catholic education. Every school’s main goal must be to help each student develop a personal and ecclesial relationship with our Lord, Jesus Christ, who is “the Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). The principles, practices, and beliefs of the Catholic Faith must be fully integrated throughout the school’s curricular service projects, co-curricular activities, and culture.

Students in our Catholic schools are reminded of their dignity as children of God through the study of Catholic Doctrine, frequent opportunities for personal and communal prayer, and active participation in the sacramental life of the Church. Together with parents, the primary educators of their children, our Catholic schools pursue academic and spiritual excellence by helping students to develop their intellectual abilities, foster wholesome friendships, practice discipleship, strengthen their daily prayer life, grow in virtue, and become leaders through serving others.

All personnel that work in our Catholic schools must have at heart the promotion of the educational mission of the Church, and live as visible role models of faith within the parish/school community. Catholic doctrinal, moral and social teaching is an integral part of each school. Therefore, all faculty, staff, administrative, and volunteer personnel must support the teachings of the Church, actively practice their faith in daily life, and be loyal to the Church’s Magisterium. Our Catholic school personnel share this educational mission and its various commitments and responsibilities with parents and the local Church communities.

“It is crucial that the policies and procedures of Catholic schools reflect that primary purpose and that the Catholicity of the school and its faithfulness to the teaching authority of the Catholic Church (Magisterium) are not compromised.”

**Sister Mary Angela Shaughnessy, SCN, JD, PhD**

## **MISSION STATEMENT OF ST. MARY'S SCHOOL**

“As part of the evangelization mission of St. Mary’s Parish, St. Mary’s School is dedicated to teaching children to know, love, and serve God, to developing their spiritual, academic, social, and physical gifts, and to promoting responsible Catholic Christian citizenship.” (Commission on Education, 12/12/06)

### ***School Philosophy***

St. Mary’s School is a Catholic co-educational community where human culture and knowledge, illuminated by Faith, is shared. Here, students are helped to develop a sense of God, responsibility, direction, and mission.

### ***Vision Statement***

St. Mary’s School is a religiously devout community committed to enriching the lives of students through knowing, loving, and serving God. The students will achieve academic success through creative teaching strategies, increased technology, and an up-to-date curriculum based upon the National Common Core Standards of Learning. The school will offer a wide range of extracurricular activities that support social interactions, physical development, and creative expressions. The students will also continue their commitment to the service of others within our community and surrounding areas. St. Mary’s School will challenge each family to live faithfully through participation in weekly Mass, daily prayers, and the sacramental life of our universal Church.

### ***Belief Statements***

- We believe students, parents, faculty, and staff work together to create a loving community where students are valued, welcomed, and empowered to reach their potential.
- We believe that parents must be actively involved with the school and parish in order for their child to receive the full benefits of a faith-filled school.
- We believe all students can learn and succeed in an environment that provides exceptional learning experiences, while considering different learning styles and development stages.
- We believe students will develop a love and knowledge of God through the sacraments and the teachings of the Catholic Church.
- We believe all students can grow spiritually, intellectually, socially, and physically in a safe, nurturing environment rich in Catholic faith and traditions.
- We believe Mass attendance and daily prayer enrich every aspect of our lives.
- We believe that service to others is important to the growth and development of each child as a whole person. Service to others, inside and outside the school and parish community, enhances a child’s awareness of the social concerns of others.
- We believe co-curricular activities contribute to the development of the individual, socially and academically, while improving school and community relationships.

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## ***The ABC's of Little Disciples Preschool***

### **ADMISSIONS**

Parents must submit the following at the time of registration:

- Copy of birth certificate
- Completed registration forms
- Non-refundable registration fee

Acceptance will not be granted until registration requirements are met. All students must have a current physical and immunization records on file in the school office by the first day of school.

### **ADMISSION ELIGIBILITY**

No child shall be refused admission on the basis of religion, race, gender, or ethnic origin.

In order to remain fair to St. Mary's parishioners and employees, while providing a Catholic education to as many Catholic students as possible, the following priority list will be used for enrollment to Little Disciples Preschool if registration exceeds capacity:

1. Children whose parents are employees of St. Mary's Church or School.
2. Children whose siblings are already attending St. Mary's School & whose parents are practicing Catholic parishioners of St. Mary's Church.
3. Children of practicing Catholic parishioners of St. Mary's Church who are enrolling their first child.
4. Children of practicing Catholic families from parishes that have no school of their own.
5. Children of non-practicing Catholic families or children of non-Catholic families whose siblings already attend St. Mary's School.
6. Children of non-practicing Catholic families or children of non-Catholic families who are enrolling their first child.

\* Parishioner is defined as one who fulfills their Mass attendance obligations and regularly supports St. Mary's Parish according to their means.

### **AGE REQUIREMENT**

Children must be three years old by September 1.

### **ARRIVAL**

Class starts at 8:00 a.m. Children can be dropped off anytime between 7:30 and 8:00 a.m. at the MPR doors in the school parking lot.

### **ATTENDANCE**

In case of an absence, parents are to notify the school office by 8:30 a.m. For the safety of our students, if parents have not notified the school when a child is absent, the office staff will make an attempt to contact the parents at home and/or at work. If your child will be late or needs to leave early, please send a note or email your child's teacher ahead of time.

### **BATHROOM READINESS**

Children must be fully potty-trained to attend Little Disciples Preschool. Our preschool program expects parent cooperation with their child's bathroom readiness. To be fully potty-trained means not having consistent accidents and being able to wipe him/herself after using the toilet. Teachers are not able to assist children with wiping. Please note that wearing Pull-ups is not considered

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being fully potty-trained and therefore Pull-ups are not allowed. Parents are asked to send a complete change of clothes appropriate for the season in case of an occasional accident. Parents will be notified if a child has an accident.

If a child is not completely potty-trained when preschool starts, parents will need to withdraw the child. The child's name will be placed at the top of our waiting list. Registration fees will not be refunded, however, if the child re-enrolls later in the year fees will not be charged again.

### **BIRTHDAYS**

Birthdays are a very special day for every child. Talk with your child's teacher at least one week in advance if you wish to send special snacks. Please be aware of students with allergies when sending birthday treats. If you are having a party for your child and are only inviting a few children from class, we ask that you mail invitations to avoid hurt feelings. However, if you're inviting the entire class we will be happy to put the invitations in the students' backpacks.

### **CHAIN OF COMMAND**

In keeping with church principles of subsidiary, complaints should be solved at the lowest level possible. Persons with concerns should first attempt to address the concern with the teacher. Only after such attempts have failed should the administration be contacted. The Pastor should only be contacted if all concerns have not been satisfied through the classroom teacher and school administration. If a parent wishes to communicate with a teacher, he/she is encouraged to make an appointment. Spontaneous visits to classrooms are discouraged. All faculty members may be contacted through school email or by leaving a message in the school office.

### **CLASS SIZE**

St. Mary's School will limit the number of students in Little Disciples Preschool to a maximum of 18 students. The Principal reserves the right to make changes to this policy if warranted.

### **COMMUNICATION**

Your child's teacher will check their email daily. This is a good way to send any questions or comments you might have. Please check your email regularly for bulletins, announcements, and reminders. Teachers have 24 hours to respond to emails.

### **CONFERENCES**

Parent-Teacher Conferences will be held in late-October for all school families. Conferences may be scheduled throughout the school year if the teacher or parent deems necessary.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The faculty and staff of St. Mary's School are mandated to maintain the confidentiality of personal, academic, health, and financial records. Parents, the custodial parent, or the legal guardian will be involved in any decisions to share information with District #429 or the Livingston County Special Services Unit in the event that their child requires special services. Teachers and administrators will keep confidential information entrusted to them as long as no one's life, health, and/or safety is at stake. Moreover, confidential information is entrusted with teachers and administrators as mandated by law and Diocesan policies in regard to the Safe Environment Program.

### **CORPORAL PUNISHMENT**

It is the policy of the Diocesan Office of Catholic Education and this school that NO CORPORAL PUNISHMENT be administered by the principal, faculty, or staff.

## **CURRICULUM**

Little Disciples Preschool is a Christ-centered, play-based learning environment. We enrich students' lives by offering them hands on experiences, encouraging social-emotional skills, and bringing the awareness of Christ into their rapidly expanding world. Your child will develop age-appropriate academic skills in math, science, and language through a wide variety of activities. Our caring and professionally trained staff will, in partnership with the family, develop the skills each child needs to have success in kindergarten.

## **CUSTODY ISSUES**

In cases where the custody of a child resides with only one parent or is shared by separated or divorced parents, a copy of the custody agreement or court order should be placed in the child's school records so that school officials are aware of the arrangement. In cases where a child is not allowed to be picked up from school by one of the parents, a written statement signed and dated by the custodial parent must be presented to the school principal.

## **DISCIPLINE**

We believe children can be taught self-discipline skills as a part of the total school curriculum. To this end, the school implements a positive approach to discipline based on the developmental level of the student. The two goals of discipline are to maintain safety and order within the community, and to identify, teach, and practice the skills necessary to be self-disciplined. With this in mind, discipline is not punishment, but rather an opportunity to teach a skill that is not yet developed. We expect students to conduct themselves in a manner that is becoming of a Catholic student and exhibit self-disciplined behavior at all times, on or off campus, in conformity with the norms of this handbook. The Preschool Director and Principal are the final recourse in all disciplinary situations. In preschool, we work to eliminate any potential problems before they happen. Our staff expresses appropriate respect and affection for the children and model positive social interaction and expression of feelings. We will work together with parents to keep the lines of communication open. The school administration is committed to maintaining a safe environment for all students and staff.

In the case of persistent behavior problems, the teacher will communicate the concerns with the parents so that positive methods to promote appropriate behavior can be used at home and school. In certain situations, a parent might be asked to pick their child up and take them home. Continued discipline problems might result in the parent being asked to withdraw their child. A child may be removed from the program if:

- the child poses a threat to self, staff, or other children in the program
- the child behaves in a manner that is difficult to manage in a large group
- the child, or parent(s), use abusive language or threaten other children or staff
- the child or family continues to act against Preschool policies, as explained in the student-parent handbook
- the child's presence is adversely affecting the program

## **DISMISSAL**

Parents have the option of a 12:30 p.m. or 3:00 p.m. dismissal time\*. Children are to be picked up at the preschool doors on Chicago Street. We will only allow the child to leave with the persons listed on the child's registration form. Parents are required to keep this list updated. Please email or send a note to your child's teacher in the event that someone else will be picking your child.

*\* There is no tuition discount for choosing the earlier dismissal time. Parents cannot change their chosen dismissal time from day-to day; a set schedule must be established.*



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## **DRESS CODE**

Our preschool curriculum consists of teaching children through creative play, therefore, we paint, play with nature, and anything that will engage our creative minds. It will get messy! Children should be dressed in comfortable, washable clothing that he/she can manage in the bathroom. Please be aware of buttons, zippers and dresses that are difficult for little ones to manage in the restroom. For the sake of modesty, we do ask that all girls wear shorts under dresses and skirts. Children spend time outdoors each day and should have appropriate outdoor wear; warm outer clothing in the winter and light clothing in the spring. Sunscreen should also be applied. Children run on the playground, so we recommend socks and sneakers. Sandals and flip-flops are not permitted.

## **DRILLS – Fire Drills, Lockdown Drills, Tornado Drills**

To keep the children safe, we will practice these drills throughout the school year.

## **FIELD TRIPS**

As with all school activities, field trips are part of our educational curriculum. Teachers will plan on campus field trips to places such as the church, atrium, and school library. With advance notice, teachers will plan off campus walking field trips to places such as Pontiac Public Library, Evenglow Lodge, and the Pontiac Fire Station. Trips will be planned with safety in mind.

## **FORGOTTEN ITEMS**

If a child forgets an item at home, parents may drop that item off in the office and the office staff will make sure the child receives it. This helps limit disruptions throughout the school day.

## **GOD IS FIRST**

As Catholics, we start and end each day with a prayer and a prayer before our meals. Our classrooms and hallways are decorated to constantly remind the children of God's love for them. Preschool students will spend time in the Atrium each week for Catechesis of the Good Shepherd as part of our curriculum. In addition to prayer, part of each day is devoted to learning more about God and our faith, His love for us, and how He wants us to treat others.

## **HEALTH EXAMINATIONS AND IMMUNIZATIONS**

### **Health Exam Required**

Each student in a Catholic school in the Diocese of Peoria shall have a current health examination (dated less than one year prior to entering preschool).

### **Immunizations Required**

Each Catholic school student shall receive such immunizations against preventable communicable diseases as are required by the Illinois School Code and the Communicable Disease Prevention Act, at the time those immunizations are required to be received, unless one of the Diocesan approved exceptions is satisfied. Please contact the school principal for more information.

## **ILLNESS**

Do not send your child to school for 24 hours after he/she has had a fever over 100 degrees, rash, vomiting, diarrhea, or a severe cough. **THE 24 HOUR POLICY WILL BE STRONGLY ENFORCED.** If your child has a communicable disease (complete list available in the St. Mary's School Student-Parent Handbook), inform the school so parents of exposed children can be alerted. If a child becomes ill at school, the parents will be contacted. If we are unable to reach parents by phone, we will contact an authorized person listed on the emergency information sheet on file for the child. Please keep this information updated.



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## **INJURY**

Should a child become injured at school, the child will be taken to the school office and assisted accordingly. The child may need a band aid, ice applied, observation, and/or a call to the parent for emergency assistance. If we are unable to reach the parent by phone, we will call from the emergency information sheet on file for the child. Please keep this information updated.

## **INTERNET USE**

Little Disciples Preschool supports the use of computers and the internet in its instructional program. This will allow the school to facilitate access to information, research, collaboration, and interpersonal communications. The use of computer hardware and software shall be consistent with the Catholic identity of our school, reinforce the curriculum, and reflect the varied instructional needs and learning styles of our students. Students and staff are expected to act in a responsible, ethical, and legal manner in accordance with the moral principles of the Catholic Church. Students and staff will also act according to the accepted rules of network etiquette as well as federal and state law.

## **LICE**

Head lice are a common occurrence among young children. Head lice spreads from person to person by direct contact with hair or by sharing items such as hats, brushes, etc. Lice do not carry diseases or illnesses, they do cause a nuisance. Little Disciples Preschool has a "NO NIT/HEAD LICE" policy. This means that all nits and lice must be removed from the hair before your child may return to school. If head lice are discovered on one child, all preschool students will be checked. Children with head lice will be sent home immediately and a notification letter will be sent home with classmates.

## **LUNCH**

Each morning the teacher will ask students if they are having hot or cold lunch. If they bring lunch from home, they can order milk for 35 cents/carton. If they order hot lunch from Central School, the lunch is brought to St. Mary's and your lunch account is charged \$3.10. There may be other opportunities to sign-up for special lunches sponsored by parent groups throughout the year. All lunch money will be paid in advance through FACTS Management.

## **MEDICATION**

If it becomes necessary for a child to take medication during the school day, the parent and doctor, must complete a medication form from the school office. Only authorized school forms will be accepted. We do not administer medication at the preschool. All medication is stored in the school office. For more information on medication at school, please refer to the St. Mary's School Student-Parent Handbook.

## **OUTSIDE PLAY**

Weather permitting, children will go outside. Please send them in appropriate outerwear.

## **PARENT RESPONSIBILITIES**

Little Disciples Preschool recognizes the parent as the child's first and most important teacher and supports this role by providing opportunities for parents to participate in the education of their children. When parents and teachers work together, the link between home and school is strengthened. For children, parent involvement demonstrates that education and school experiences are valued. For parents, classroom participation provides an opportunity to gain insight and understanding of child development and supports the development of parenting skills useful in everyday interactions with children. Parent participation means a greater investment and greater return. The cooperative efforts of parents and teachers working together provide the best learning environment for young children.

## **PICTURES**

Pictures of the children at work and play will be taken on a regular basis. These may be used for projects or for marketing purposes. Parents are asked to sign a photo release allowing students to be photographed and/or video-taped. We will also have a photographer come to school in the Fall to take school pictures of the children. Purchase of these photos is optional.

## **REST TIME**

Students will have rest time every afternoon. The school will provide a cot and a sheet for each student. Parents are asked to send a large towel that will be kept at school all year. Sheets and towels will be laundered at school each week.

## **SMOKE-FREE ENVIRONMENT**

The use of tobacco or vaping by any school personnel, student, volunteer, or other person is prohibited within the St. Mary's School building or on school grounds when students are present. Tobacco is defined as cigarette, cigar, or tobacco in any other form, including smokeless tobacco that is intended to be placed in the mouth without being smoked.

## **SNACKS**

Students will be offered snacks each morning. Parents will be asked to send store-bought, prepackaged healthy snacks to school. Some examples of acceptable snacks are: pretzels, crackers, cheese, and fresh fruit and vegetables. More information will be given in the classroom monthly newsletter.

## **TUITION AND FEES**

### **Fees**

Facts Management charges all new families a \$20 per child fee for account maintenance. St. Mary's School charges a \$100 per child, non-refundable, registration fee. These fees are paid online when applying for admission.

### **Tuition**

The base rate tuition for each student, regardless of faith, will be determined annually by the Parish Finance Council. **The base rate tuition for 2022-2023 is \$3,960.** This fee may be paid in installments through FACTS. If a child leaves the school during the academic year and tuition has been paid in full, tuition will be prorated for the months the student was not in attendance.

### **Payment Plans**

Parents/guardians are responsible for creating an account with FACTS Management. Tuition payments will be made through FACTS. Families will choose one of the following installment plans:

- One payment – due in August
- Two payments – due in August and February
- Ten payments – due every month from August through May
- Twelve payments – due every month July through June

Families may choose a due date of the 5<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> of the month.

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### **Delinquent Accounts**

The following actions will be taken according to duration of outstanding balances:

- Upon delinquency: The parent/guardian must contact the school office to make arrangements.
- 30-days overdue: The child will not be permitted to attend class until the account is up to date.
- 60-days overdue: The child may be dismissed from the program.

### **Other Fee Policies**

- Preschool students do not count toward the K-8 multi-student discount at St. Mary's School.
- Preschool scholarships are not available at this time.
- Any family who disables their FACTS account will be subject to dismissal from the program.
- All payments returned for insufficient funds will incur a \$30 charge.
- Students enrolled for part of a month will owe tuition for the entire month.
- Registration will not be accepted for the next school year until all debts owed have been paid. If tuition becomes delinquent after early registration, the child(ren) will be considered conditional until all debts have been paid from the previous year.

### **VOLUNTEERS**

There are many volunteer opportunities available to parents. Every volunteer must complete the Safe Environment Training Program as mandated by the Diocese of Peoria. Visit our website and click on the CMG Connect Safe Environment Training link to complete the necessary steps. All volunteers must sign-in at the school office before proceeding to the classroom.

### **WEAPONS**

St. Mary's School is mandated to follow Diocesan Policy D-150, entitled "Possession or Use of Weapons or Look Alike Weapons in School." The policy is as follows:

Catholic schools in the Diocese of Peoria teach and uphold the sanctity of human life. Virtues such as respect for others, peacemaking, and self-discipline are foundations of Catholic education. Furthermore, a safe academic and social environment is essential for learning and Christian formation. The possession or use of weapons not only disrupts the school's learning environment, it fundamentally violates the sanctity of human life by threatening the very health and safety of teachers and students. Therefore, diocesan schools have zero tolerance towards weapons.

It is strictly forbidden for any student to possess, use, attempt to use, manufacture, distribute, purchase, trade or sell (or seek the sale or trade of) any weapon on school premises or at any school-related activity or function, including but not limited to travel to and from school and/or school-related functions. Possession means having a weapon on one's person or in an area subject to the student's control such as desks, lockers, backpacks, and vehicles. Any student possessing, using, attempting to use, manufacturing, distributing, purchasing, trading or selling (or seeking the sale or trade of) weapons at school or any school-related function shall, at the discretion of the pastor and principal, be subject to immediate expulsion. Further information on this policy can be found in our St. Mary's School Student-Parent Handbook.

### **WEATHER CLOSINGS**

Sudden weather changes during the winter may make it necessary to close school. If weather problems should arise prior to or during the school day, an announcement will be made using the Facts Management alert system. Generally, whatever is announced for Pontiac Grade School District #429 and Pontiac Township High School will apply also to St. Mary's School. If school is

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canceled during the day, children will be given an opportunity to call their parents to make arrangements. Parents are encouraged to have a family plan for such occurrences. Because conditions may vary depending on location, parents are free to pick up their children if school is not canceled but conditions in their home area necessitate early dismissal.