



# Parent Handbook

## 2020-2021

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[www.OurRedeemer-peters.org/preschool.html](http://www.OurRedeemer-peters.org/preschool.html)

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## History

Noah's Ark was established in the Fall of 1988 as an outreach ministry of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church for their preschool children. Under the experienced teaching of Gerda Moul, a group of eight children met two mornings a week to hear Bible stories, sing songs, and share activities. Each year the number of children grew, more classes were formed, new staff members were added, and the curriculum was expanded. A Board of Directors was formed in 1998 to govern the preschool. Members include parents, teachers, Director, and church representatives. During the 1998-1999 school year, Noah's Ark met at St. Benedict the Abbot Church while Our Redeemer church building was expanded. We moved into our two new classrooms in the fall of 1999. After the church expanded the fellowship hall in 2004, we added another classroom downstairs. Noah's Ark became a nationally accredited preschool (NAEYC) in 2006 and was re-accredited in 2016. Phase I of a natural outdoor play space was constructed in the summer of 2010, the first in Western Pennsylvania. Heidi Garner became Noah's Ark new Director when Gerda Moul retired on June 30, 2016.

Noah's Ark continues to be an outreach ministry for Our Redeemer and teaches children Bible stories and preserves Christian themes, in addition to secular curriculum. We now serve approximately 140 children, ages 2-5.

## Accreditation

Noah's Ark Preschool is accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) having demonstrated compliance with their nationally recognized criteria for high-quality early childhood programs. [www.naeyc.org](http://www.naeyc.org)

## Noah's Ark Mission Statement

Our goal is to create a safe, nurturing and creative environment for each child. We strive to enhance social, emotional, physical, language, cognitive and spiritual development in order to build a foundation for life-long learning.

## Philosophy

**A child's uniqueness** We provide an atmosphere of trust and respect. We emphasize individual growth in a shared environment. We provide peer experiences that strengthen communication skills and enhance self-confidence.

**Parent Involvement** We are a family-orientated, child-centered school that welcomes parents. Parents are an enhancement to our program, not an interruption.

**Low Student-Teacher Ratio** This enables us to nurture, support and stimulate each child's discovery of his or her own special gifts. The teachers serve as a guide to be consulted by the child as discoveries are made with the emphasis on the child's self-control, rather than the teacher's control of the child.

**Christian-based Program** This provides opportunities for spiritual development through monthly chapel time, songs, and dramatizations.

## Developmental Goals for Children

**Social-Emotional Development**-promoting children's social skills for diverse adult and peer relations, including listening, turn taking, following directions, rules and routines, group participation, care for shared materials and conflict resolution.

**Physical Development**-giving opportunities to use their growing bodies to develop small and large motor skills and coordination.

**Early Literacy Development**-facilitating comprehension and expression skills beginning with oral language and progressing to written language.

Early Mathematics and Science Development-fostering a positive attitude toward learning through questioning, observing and experimenting with varied materials related to diverse themes.

Creative Expression and Appreciation for the Arts- cultivating each child's ability to express ideas and emotions through art, music, movement, and drama.

Social Studies and Health & Safety Development-encouraging each child's pride in individual characteristics, families, experiences and accomplishments and their role in their community. Children are responsible for personal care, actions and words to keep our classroom safe.

Family Involvement-working closely with families to promote the child's learning and well-being.

Christian Education-providing opportunities for spiritual development through Biblical stories and songs.

### **Child & Family Outcome Statement**

Children will experience a loving environment that offers safe, fun and challenging opportunities to learn. Families are considered an enhancement, not an interference. They are welcome partners who may assist in the classroom for a first-hand view of their child's learning experiences. Teachers and administration will serve as a support system to the families during their child's early developmental years.

### **Multicultural Policy**

A goal of Noah's Ark Preschool is to provide the socio-emotional and educational conditions in which every child garners self-respect and respect for the differences in others. This assists children to function not only in their own cultural community, but builds children's cultural competencies for humankind. We seek to recognize, appreciate and respect the uniqueness of each child. We cultivate each child's ability to think critically about biases, hoping to instill the ability to stand up for her/himself and for others, in the face of bias.

### **Staff**

Noah's Ark Preschool staff is made up of a full-time Director, Office Assistant, Financial Administrator, and 16 qualified teachers committed to each child's total development. The staff also includes a Spanish teacher and music teacher. Educational specialists and therapists from public and private agencies also assist the staff and their clients in our inclusive classrooms.

### **Special Resource Staff**

Our preschool is enhanced by the presence of additional staff. This will include para-professionals (volunteers) who assist in the classrooms to provide extra TLC. We are also a part of Peters Township High School's Community Service Class. Several high school students will be assigned to our afternoon preschool classes throughout the year. These students assist the teachers in varied capacities. Noah's Ark welcomes therapists from different agencies (including the Washington County Intermediate Unit) to support the developmental stages of our students. Speech, occupational, and physical therapists visit our children when parents have initiated their services.

## Program

At Noah's Ark, we have a child-centered program. The teachers prepare an engaging learning environment for exploring a theme. They use a group meeting time each day to set the stage for the investigation and to introduce relevant concepts. The children are given multiple choices of activities to explore in a variety of areas. The staff monitors the activities, so that we may facilitate the children's learning and challenge them at an appropriate level. The curriculum is structured to encourage the child to explore both on his own and in a social context with others.

Children's explorations enrich their development of concepts related to the theme and strengthen their skills in all areas. They extend their concepts by experimenting with various materials in the school. They also express their understanding by creating their own representations in a variety of media. Through their explorations, the children develop

- Sense of themselves as competent learners,
- Strategies for collaborating with peers and adults,
- Approaches to communicating their ideas verbally and visually,
- Means of discovering new ideas about physical properties,
- Skills for small motor manipulation of tools and materials as well as large motor actions,
- Means for expressing their creative ideas.

### A typical preschool schedule would include:

Free Choice Time: The children independently choose from a variety of activity centers. These centers include blocks, dramatic play, manipulatives, library, science, sensory, and writing centers.

Meeting Time: The children participate in one of more Circle/Group times each day. The group gathers with their teachers to discuss plans for the school day, sing songs, listen to stories, or share something from home.

Small Group Time: The children work in small groups with a teacher to explore a concept more in depth.

Playground/Gross Motor Time: Children go outdoors, weather permitting each day. This is an opportunity to explore, discover, and respond to all that nature has to offer-from gardening to sand and water play. During inclement weather, we use the social hall or areas downstairs for gross motor activities.

### Enrollment and Operating Schedule

The preschool year is nine months, September through May. Noah's Ark Preschool offers the following classes:

- Young 2 year olds - suggested age is 2 by October 1  
Friday morning 9-11:30 AM
- Older 2 year olds - suggested age is 2 ½ by October 1  
Monday & Friday morning 9-11:30 AM
- 3 Year Olds - suggested age is 3 by October 1  
Monday & Wednesday 9-11:30 AM  
Tuesday & Thursday 9-11:30 AM or 12:30-3 PM  
Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 12:30-3 PM
- 4 Year Olds - suggested age is 4 by October 1  
Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday 9-11:30 AM or 12:30-3 PM  
Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 9-11:30 AM

5 Year Olds - suggested age us 5 by October 1

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday 9-11:30 AM

STEAM - age 4 by October 1

Wednesday 12:30-3 PM

Friday Workshop - age 4 by October 1

Friday 9-11:30 AM

Lunch Bunch - \$10/day drop in program, all enrolled students are eligible.

Tuesday, Wednesday, & Thursday 11:30-12:30

## **STEAM**

STEAM enrichment is offered on Wednesday afternoons. During the class, children will engage in exciting studies of Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math!

## **Friday Workshop**

Friday Workshop children will explore many different areas of study including foreign language, cooking, science and more!

## **Registration**

In-house registration, offered in early February is open to:

Children enrolled in Noah's Ark Preschool and their siblings who plan to attend the following Fall

Members of Our Redeemer Lutheran Church

Children of alumni families

Community registration is held after in-house registration is completed and is open to the general community.

Per child fees due at registration:

ORLC member commitment fee: \$25 Non member commitment fee: \$50

The commitment fee holds your child's spot.

Activity Fee (not applicable for Young 2's): \$40

The activity fee helps defray the cost of resource teachers-Spanish, Yoga, Chapel, Music and Science.

Registration fees are NONREFUNDABLE

## **Tuition, Refunds, and Withdrawal**

Tuition is based on an annual fee covering September-May. This annual tuition has been divided into 9 monthly payments to make payments easier for our families. No credit is allowed for illness, holidays, or vacation. The first payment must be made by May 15 for Fall enrollment or when registration paperwork is submitted.

The first tuition payment is NONREFUNDABLE

Tuition for the 2020-2021 school year is due during the second week of the month or on the following dates:

May 15, 2020 (covers September 2020)  
 September 15, 2020 (covers October 2020)  
 October 15, 2020 (covers November 2020)  
 November 15, 2020 (covers December 2020)  
 December 15, 2020 (covers January 2021)  
 January 15, 2021 (covers February 2021)  
 February 15, 2021 (covers March 2021)  
 March 15, 2021 (covers April 2021)  
 April 15, 2021 (covers May 2021)

A late fee of \$10 will be assessed to a payment made after the 15th of each month. If you pay in full by September 15, 2020, you will receive a 3% discount. There is also a \$10/month discount on tuition (on core classes only) for siblings concurrently enrolled in Noah's Ark Preschool.

If early withdrawal becomes necessary, the tuition responsibility ends 30 days after the Director is notified in writing.

Scholarships are made available through private contributions and fundraisers. Scholarships are awarded yearly and applications are held in the strictest confidence. If your family experiences an unexpected financial emergency, please contact the Director for a scholarship application.

### **Security Precautions**

There are security cameras on the playground and at each entrance to the preschool that can be viewed in the preschool office. All doors are equipped with keypads and are locked during operating hours. Peters Township Fire Department makes unannounced visits to our preschool to guide the children through fire drills. The children practice with their teachers and choose a designated place to meet outside. The school has an automatic alarm and smoke detection system that is connected to the fire department.

In addition to fire evacuation drills, we also have implemented plans for emergency evacuations and weather-related procedures. We have kits (water, blankets, snacks, radio, flashlight) ready in the event that we need to take shelter in the conference room downstairs or in case we need to be out of the building for a length of time. Preschool staff have access to family cell phone numbers for your immediate notification. Our teachers are trained in CPR and first-aid. In addition, every teacher carries a cell phone if emergency services need to be called.

### **Playground and Facility Use**

We welcome the use of our space for gathering and play. Parents should monitor children at all times to ensure both their safety and the respect and care of our playground and facilities. There should be no running or climbing in the building and care should be taken to respect the church office staff during their work day. The playground should be cleaned up after use and any damages should be reported to the director for repair.

### **Discipline**

Noah's Ark Preschool staff uses positive approaches, such as active listening, to help children behave constructively, as well as to encourage sharing, caring and active participation in conflict resolutions.

The primary form of discipline used in the classroom is proactive. Methods used include: redirection of focus, reminders of classroom rules, clear expectations and teacher-facilitated arbitration when necessary. Classroom rules are few in number, clearly defined and consistently followed.

When a child is unable to respond positively to appropriate and consistent expectations, the teachers and director will maintain open communication with the parent for the purpose of developing a strategy that will enable the child to be successful. In some cases, the parents may be encouraged to consult an outside agency. If a teacher requests a consultation from an outside agency, parents have 6 weeks to obtain that and to discuss the outcome with their child's teacher and director.

### **Suspected Child Abuse**

Mandated reporters are required by law to report suspected child abuse or neglect immediately to the Youth and Family Services agency, after consultation with their director. Due to their contact with children, preschool teachers and child development professionals are considered and trained mandated reporters.

### **Arrival & Pickup Times \*See COVID-19 Protocol**

As busy parents, we know the value of a few extra minutes to prepare for our day! Our teachers have the same need to "get a few things done" before the children arrive. So if you need to arrive earlier than the starting time, please plan to stay with your child so that the preparations for the day can be completed. It is equally important to be prompt when you pick up your child(ren). They often worry and feel anxious when you are late. Consistently late pickups will be charged \$5 per day.

Your child will only be released to a parent or person authorized by you on the emergency form. Proof of ID will be required. It is imperative that you inform a teacher or the Director if there is a change in plans for pickup. For safety reasons, please do not take your child from the classroom or playground without the teacher's acknowledgment.

### **Confidentiality**

It is the policy of Noah's Ark Preschool that employees, board members, therapists and educational consultants may not disclose, divulge or make accessible confidential information belonging to or obtained through affiliation with Noah's Ark Preschool. This information may only be shared with those who have legitimate need for such information and to whom Noah's Ark Preschool has authorized disclosure or parental consent. This policy is not intended to prevent disclosure where disclosure is required by law.

### **Plan for Assessment of Child Progress**

Our preschool program has a written plan for assessment that describes assessment purposes, procedures and use of the results. Teachers (through observations, anecdotal records and communication with parents) identify children's interests and needs. The developmental progress is shared with parents at conferences held twice yearly (and more often when necessary). Student portfolios, daily conversations, and written communication are shared as well. Each child's records are confidential.

### **Parent-Teacher Conferences**

Conferences are scheduled in November and March. Parents can meet with the teachers on an individual basis to discuss their child's interests, goals and developmental progress. Conferences can also be scheduled as needed throughout the school year. Please check your school calendar for scheduled conferences dates.

## **Developmental Concerns**

When a staff member or administrator suspects that a child has a developmental delay or other special need, this information is communicated to families in a sensitive, supportive and confidential manner. The parent is provided with an explanation for the concern, suggested next steps, and information about resources for assessment. If a teacher requests a consultation of an outside agency, parents have 6 weeks to obtain that and to discuss the outcome with their child's teacher and the director.

## **Sick Child Policy** \*See COVID-19 Protocol

Consideration is the key factor. Coughs and runny noses can last "forever", but common sense tells us when a child would be more comfortable at home. If your child is sick with the following, they should remain home: 1) Fever (100F), 2) Sore throat, 3) Diarrhea, 4) Contagious infestations such as head lice, chicken pox, conjunctivitis, strep throat, impetigo, or pink eye.

If a teacher feels that a child is not well enough to be in school, the parent will be contacted and required to pick up the child. Please contact the school if your child is diagnosed with a contagious disease. Staff will not dispense medication without written parental consent on the Emergency Form.

## **Health Standards**

All health and immunization forms must be current with a well-child visit within one year. The form needs to be signed and dated by the physician showing that the child is current for routine screening tests and immunizations.

## **Hand Washing** \*See COVID-19 Protocol

In order to maintain a healthy environment and reduce the risk of transmitting infectious diseases, all children, staff and volunteers will wash their hands upon entering Noah's Ark Preschool classrooms.

## **No Smoking Policy**

Noah's Ark Preschool is a smoke-free facility. The outdoor play area is also considered part of the facility, therefore, no smoking is permitted.

## **Nutrition** \*See COVID-19 Protocol

Snack time is a great opportunity to learn about manners, socialize and practice self help skills while exploring different tastes. Each class has small water pitchers that the children take turns filling and then they pour their own drink during snack time. Children wash their hands before snack and must remain seated while eating. There will be a weekly sign-up sheet for snacks in each classroom. We aim to serve fresh fruits and vegetables, foods that are low in fat and sugar and free of dyes as often as possible. On a child's birthday, parents may provide special decorations (napkins, hats, etc....) and a type of frozen confection such as popsicles and fruit bars. Cupcakes and other sweet baked goods are discouraged at our birthday parties.

Please be sure that your child's registration form contains all relevant information about any food allergies your child may have. NOAH'S ARK IS A PEANUT-FREE ENVIRONMENT! Because of severe allergies, we do not serve peanuts or any peanuts products during snacks.

## **School Closing**

If Peters Township School District delays opening due to weather conditions, the morning sessions will meet from 10:30 AM-12:30 PM and the afternoon sessions from 1- 3 PM. If Peters Township cancels school due to weather conditions, Noah's Ark will cancel both AM and PM classes. Tune to the cable school news channel or KDKA (1020 radio) and watch for Peters Township or Noah's Ark listings.

**Parent Involvement** \*See COVID-19 Protocol

Regular communication is encouraged among parents, caregivers, and the school staff. Be sure to check the white boards outside of each classroom for daily activities! We offer parent orientation, scheduled parent conferences, regular newsletter, and frequent spontaneous interaction. The teachers will frequently communicate through email or text as well.

We are always looking for individuals who would like to share their time and talents with us. Reading a favorite story, sharing your hobby or career, preparing a snack, planting flowers or sharing your family heritage are just a few examples. Parents are also welcome and encouraged to participate on the Noah's Ark Board of Directors or serve on committees that direct the pre-school.

**Parent Orientation** \*See COVID-19 Protocol

This is held on an evening within the first week of school and includes an introduction of staff, description of daily routines and policies, a question and answer period, and a tour of the classroom.

**Home Visitation** \*See COVID-19 Protocol

This is offered to each student the week before classes begin. This is a good opportunity for teachers, parents and children to get to know each other and make everyone more comfortable during the first sessions of school.

**Shortened sessions**

The first week of school can be an especially stressful time for younger children. The schedule is altered to provide more support, individual attention and guidance during that transitional time. Half of the class will attend for the first hour and the other half of the class will attend the last hour of the session.

**Free Little Library**

A wooden box is located on the playground that is stocked with parenting and children's books. You may borrow these for one week and then please return them.

**Field Trips** \*See COVID-19 Protocol

These events provide an excellent social experience for all of us. Several trips are scheduled during class time throughout the year. Some are on the calendar. Others, the teachers will plan as the year progresses and the children's interests are observed. Parents or other caregivers must attend each trip and furnish transportation for their child. Admission fees are the responsibility of each family; these costs are not included in tuition. No refunds are given if you do not attend the field trip.

**Fundraisers**

Noah's Ark is supported by your tuition, Our Redeemer contributions, and several yearly fundraisers. Tuition alone does not cover all operating expenses. Fundraising is a big part of how our school is able to operate and provide so many wonderful experiences for our children. The money raised allows us to maintain our playground, do training workshops for our teachers, hold special events for our families, and other improvements. Some of our fundraisers may include holiday Sarris candy sales, Kidstuff Coupon book sales, and a spring dinner-auction which is our biggest event. These can not be run successfully without the help of parents. Please consider volunteering to help us keep Noah's Ark Preschool successful.

## Service Projects

At times, we ask the children to participate in service projects for our community. This may be: selecting a child from an angel tree at Christmas, baking cookies for Meals on Wheels, bringing in canned food for the Food Bank, collecting items for the Washington Women's Shelter, or saving their change to give to the Heifer Project (buying an animal for someone in a third-world country to begin a farm). If you have any suggestions, we welcome your comments. Children respond with enthusiasm and interest when they know that they are bringing a smile to someone else's face and truly helping.

## Holiday Celebrations

Our motto for the holidays, in keeping with the needs of the children, is to "Keep It Simple". We do not permit candy and treats for any holiday celebration. For Halloween: the children may create their own "masks", hear various stories and songs or have a class parade. For Valentines: they might choose to create a special card or letter for a friend or family member with various art materials. For Christmas: the focus is on the birth of Baby Jesus. Many times, the classroom parents plan a birthday party. The older classes also hold a special Christmas pageant.

## Grievance Procedure

Noah's Ark has an open door policy. If an issue comes up:

Discuss the issues with the child's teacher(s)

If discussion proves unsatisfactory, arrange a meeting or dialogue with the Director. At the discretion of the Director, a meeting could be called with the parents, Director and teacher(s)

If results remain unsatisfactory, the parents can discuss the situation with the President of the Board of Directors and/or the minister of Our Redeemer. Following this action, a meeting could be called that would include all parties involved.

## Nondiscrimination Policy

Admissions, the provisions of services and referrals shall be made without regard to race, color, religious creed, disability, ancestry, national origin, age or sex.

Program services shall be made accessible to eligible individuals with disabilities through the most practical and economically feasible methods available. These methods include, but are not limited to the provisions of aides or the use of alternative service delivery locations. Structural modifications shall be considered only as a last resort among the available methods and subject to available funds. As always, we strive to the best of our abilities, to meet the needs of every child enrolled in our program.

Noah's Ark Preschool  
105 Gateshead Drive  
McMurray, PA 15317

Bureau of Civil Rights Compliance  
Department of Public Welfare  
Room 521 Health and Welfare Building  
P.O. Box 2675  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

Office of Civil Rights  
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Region III  
P.O. Box 13716  
Philadelphia, PA 19106-9111

Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission Executive House  
Suite 300  
101 South Second Street  
P.O. Box 3145  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

Bureau of Civil Rights Compliance  
Department of Public Welfare  
Western Field Office  
Room 702 State Office Building  
300 Liberty Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

## **COVID-19 Protocol**

Noah's Ark Return to School Plan (Revised 8.13.2020)

Attached you will find more details regarding our plans to return to school as safely as possible.

### **Maintaining a safe and healthy environment:**

We will: Increase our cleaning and disinfecting protocols. Where we normally allow children to clean tables, this will be a teacher only task for the time being. Teachers will be sanitizing before class, before eating, and after the use of high touch surfaces (tables, chairs, light switches, bathrooms, etc). We will utilize Bleach/water solutions, Lysol products and when we can find them, other EPA approved disinfectants for use against SARS-CoV-2, for cleaning. In addition, we will be continuing to have the preschool areas deep cleaned weekly. All water fountains will be out of use during this time.

We will: Increase the quantity of supplies to reduce high touch shared items. Each child will have their own bag of supplies including crayons, pencils and glue sticks, in addition to the usual separation of playdough by child.

We will: Increase ventilation in our classrooms by opening windows daily, when weather permits.

We will: Modify layouts at our group times (snack, lunch, circle time) where feasible to promote social distancing.

We will: Ask families to forgo the use of backpacks for the time being.

We will: Store extra changes of clothes inside of the room.

We will: Be cognizant of our use of disposable items for painting, creating etc. as an attempt to reduce the spread of germs. Where this is not feasible, (ex: paintbrushes, blocks, smocks, books) we will increase our cleaning and sanitizing procedures.

### **Promoting behaviors to reduce spread of illness:**

We will: Utilize strict adherence to our traditional sick policies, in addition to our COVID-19 policies. If a child has a fever greater than 100, sore throat, diarrhea or vomiting, your child should not be at school. In addition, if anyone in your family has been diagnosed or exposed to COVID, please alert us. We will ask that you and your child self-quarantine for 14 days for the safety of all involved. We will be utilizing daily temperature checks for children, as well as staff.

We will: Increase hand washing and continue to teach and monitor the appropriate method of this important tactic. We will also increase the use of hand sanitizer.

We will: Ask families to send a water bottle daily marked with your child's name as well as an individually packed snack to reduce sharing of food and germs.

We will: Utilize pre planned playground time for each class in order to keep our playground numbers low and avoid mixing of groups.

We will: Welcome families use of the playground on the weekends and evenings but not during the school day or pick up times. This is an effort to keep numbers of children low and to avoid mixing of large groups.

We will: Keep children from excessively traveling throughout the building by bringing special classes to the rooms.

We will: Ask our teachers to wear face coverings when in direct contact with children. As per the Governor's Mandate, all children and adults will be required to wear a face covering while at school.

We will: Temporarily suspend all in person staff meetings that include more than 10 adults at once in an effort to protect our teachers.

We will: Adjust building access and drop off/pick up routines. To decrease the number of adults in our building, each family will drop children off at the entrance nearest their child's classroom. The child will be greeted by one of his/her teachers, temperature checked, given hand sanitizer, and brought directly to the classroom. Adults will be required to wear face coverings at pick up and drop off. Your teachers will send more guidance as school begins as to which door you will use. Pick up will be conducted in the same manner.



