

STRENGTHENING THE MINISTRY OF TRINITY'S PRESCHOOL PLAYGROUP

Submitted by the
Trinity Preschool Playgroup Task Force

April 5, 2019



I. INTRODUCTION

The Trinity Preschool Playgroup Task Force¹ (the “Task Force”) was formed in the summer of 2018. The Task Force’s mission was to reflect on the strengths of the successful Preschool ministry and evaluate ways in which the Church² and Preschool³ could collaborate to make the Preschool an even stronger ministry of the Church. The Task Force met monthly from July 2018 through January 2019.⁴ This report summarizes the discussions, findings and recommendations of the Task Force.

II. SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

The Task Force makes the following recommendations to the Church’s Congregation Council:

- The formation of a Board to oversee the strategic direction and management of the Preschool.
- The adoption of a mission statement and core values to guide the strategic direction and daily operations of the Preschool.
- The intentional incorporation of Christian elements into the Preschool’s curriculum and daily/weekly schedules.
- The regular evaluation of Preschool revenue and expenses to ensure that the Preschool is commanding fair and appropriate tuition rates and controlling expenses
- The review of all Preschool (and Church) employment policies and practices by outside counsel to ensure compliance with federal and state laws and best practices.
- The continued improvement of building security with emphasis on the educational wing.

This list is only a summary of the major items recommended by the Task Force. A more comprehensive review of those recommendations and the reasons for them is provided below.

III. PRESCHOOL SNAPSHOT

The Preschool has operated at the Church for over forty years. The Preschool staff includes a Director and ten teachers. The Preschool uses five classrooms in the upstairs educational wing of the Church. During the 2018-19 school year, the Preschool offered instruction to 104 students in six different classes.⁵ Several Preschool staff members are members of the Church. Moreover, numerous students over the last forty years have been children of Church members. The Preschool has a stellar

¹ The Task Force was comprised of the Chair, Jon Andrews – Congregational Council Member and Members, Kelly Falck – Director of Faith Formation; Paul Hensel – Director of Finance; Jack Horner – Lead Pastor; Amy Koch – Preschool Faculty Representative; Gerrie Reddinger – Congregation Representative; and Heather Rose – Preschool Director.

² Trinity Lutheran Church of Camp Hill.

³ Trinity Preschool Playgroup.

⁴ The Task Force Chair notes sincere thanks to all members of the Task Force for their time and attention to this effort. The Task Force members were all stakeholders who sought to build upon the Preschool’s outstanding history and develop it into an even more robust ministry of the Church. The Task Force meetings were filled with honest and thoughtful dialogue.

⁵ The six classes offered currently are the (i) 2-day, 2.5 year old class; (ii) 2-day, 3 year old class; (iii) 3-day, 3 year old class; (iv) 3-day, 4 year old class; (v) 4-day 4 year old class; and (vi) 4-day Older Pre-K class.

reputation in the community for providing outstanding play-based learning experiences for children at an affordable cost.

IV. PROGRAMMING

One of the first topics discussed by the Task Force was the programming for the Preschool. The programming is an important topic as it addresses items that serve both the external and internal stakeholders of the Preschool and Church. The term programming was used by the Task Force to encapsulate the Preschool's mission statement, core values and branding. The mission statement and core values will serve as a "North Star" for all decision-making related to the Preschool.

The Task Force spent considerable time crafting the Preschool's first formal mission statement, which is intended to establish the philosophy and vision for the Preschool. The Task Force agreed to the following as the Preschool's mission statement:

We are a play-based preschool that seeks to advance the educational, social, emotional and spiritual development of the whole child.

In conjunction with the mission statement, the Task Force established core values that reflect the existing culture of the Preschool and will serve to guide the Preschool through future ethical and performance concerns. The Task Force established the following core values for the Preschool:

1. *We value meeting the needs of each individual student.*
2. *We value play as the foundation of all early learning.*
3. *We value positive view of self as a child of God.*
4. *We value the diversity of our students, staff and families.*
5. *We value positive partnership between parents and teachers.*
6. *We value collaboration in the classroom and with the Church and our community.*

If the Preschool – with the support of the Church – upholds its core values, it will succeed in achieving its stated mission. The Task Force discussed the importance of sharing the mission statement and core values with Preschool staff to ensure a common understanding amongst everyone at the Preschool.

The Task Force also discussed the importance of viewing the mission statement and core values through the lens of potential Preschool families. By having a formal mission statement and stated core values, the Preschool can communicate its vision and culture through the Church website and other marketing materials. To that end, the Task Force also discussed creating a new slogan for the Preschool. The Task Force agreed that a new slogan of "*Trinity Preschool: We Play to Learn!*"⁶ will serve the Preschool well.

Finally, the Task Force discussed creating a new logo for the Preschool to aid its marketing efforts. The new logo⁷ will incorporate the Church's logo to show the tie between the Preschool and Church.

⁶ Note the deletion of "Playgroup" in the slogan. The concept of play is incorporated later in the slogan. This is not a formal renaming of the Preschool, but rather a more succinct approach for the slogan.

⁷ The new logo is being created by the Preschool Director's sister at no cost to the Preschool or Church. The Task Force thanks the Director's sister for this creative and valuable contribution.

The Task Force is optimistic that the Preschool will be able to take advantage of the new mission statement, core values, slogan and logo to take a more strategic approach to marketing.

V. CURRICULUM

The Task Force spent considerable time discussing the Preschool's overall curriculum and educational philosophy. This discussion occurred at a macro level and did not get into individual teacher plans. The Task Force did not discuss educational or developmental standards and benchmarks. The Task Force does not want to interfere with individual teacher freedom. Finally, the Task Force discussed the importance of maintaining the Preschool's historical approach of learning through play.

The discussion focused on identifying ways to ensure that the Preschool is a "Christian preschool" rather than a "preschool in a church." The Preschool's Director offered observations she made of how another church-related preschool incorporates Christian elements into its curriculum. The Task Force members concluded unanimously that the Preschool must be a "Christian preschool." The Task Force looked for ways to incorporate more Christian elements into the Preschool's curriculum.

The Task Force identified three major approaches in which Christian elements could be incorporated into the Preschool's curriculum. First, the addition of a Bible story into each class' schedule on a semi-regular basis. The stories would be used to teach Christian values and morals. The Bible stories to be taught can be pulled from the Faith Connections' Frolic programming currently used on Sundays. The Frolic programming provides real-life examples for applying those Christian values and morals as well as resources that could be provided to Preschool parents. Second, the Pastors or Director of Faith Formation could present semi-regular sermons at the class level. Finally, the Pastors or Director of Faith Formation could meet with the entire student body (or a large portion thereof) for occasional "chapel time" that would be an informal service.

The Task Force also discussed using key dates and holidays in the Church calendar as teaching moments (e.g. Advent, Lent, etc.). These teaching moments could come in the form of the "chapel time" discussed above. One of the Preschool teachers has been piloting the regular Bible story component in her class during the 2018-19 school year. It is expected that the remaining additions to the Preschool curriculum will be implemented school-wide in the 2019-20 school year.

VI. FINANCES

The Task Force discussed the Preschool's tuition rates in comparison to peer institutions in the area. The Task Force discussed the importance of reconciling the Preschool's tuition rates with the supreme quality of education being provided. Simply put, the Task Force concluded that the Preschool historically undervalued itself. As a result of that discussion, the Director increased the tuition rates for the 2019-20 school year approximately eleven percent (11%). The Director also increased the registration fee. The Director should continue to evaluate tuition rates annually and make increases whenever appropriate. The Director should not be afraid to have the Preschool on the higher end of the tuition rate spectrum. The Preschool does not need to have a positive impact on the Church's financial performance, but a neutral impact should be aspired to.

Finally, the Task Force discussed whether a "supplies fee" should be charged each year (in addition to tuition). The Task Force concluded that a supplies fee is not necessary for the 2019-20 school year given the tuition increases but is a concept that should be considered going forward.

VII. EMPLOYMENT POLICIES & PRACTICES

The Task Force reviewed the Preschool's employment policies and practices. The Preschool generally follows the Church's employment policies and practices. It is unclear how recently the Church's policies have been reviewed internally or by outside counsel to determine compliance with amended laws and best employment practices. Moreover, it is unclear whether all the Church's policies or practices are ideal for the Preschool.

The Task Force concluded that there would be significant value in having an employment lawyer review all the Church's policies and practices, including its employee handbook. This review should keep in mind the Preschool's operations, which may require variations from the policies or practices that work best for the Church. The review should focus on compliance with federal and Pennsylvania employment laws. The review also should take into consideration the at will employment of Preschool staff and consideration of when Preschool staff are "on the clock."

VIII. FACILITIES

The Task Force discussed the Preschool's use of Church facilities. The classrooms used by the Preschool generally are in good condition and provide quality space for the Preschool's operations. The Task Force did not identify any specific improvements that are needed for the classrooms.

The Task Force discussed the need to improve the outdoor playground that is utilized mostly by the Preschool (but occasionally also during Church events). The playground is outdated and contains equipment in poor condition. Some new equipment was purchased by the Preschool through fundraising efforts, but the majority of the equipment needs to be replaced. The playground is not of the same quality as the classrooms and is not congruent with the overall quality of the Preschool's other facilities. Ideally, the Preschool would have two age-appropriate playgrounds (i.e. one for ages 1 through 5 and one for ages 5 and up). It is estimated that upgrading the playground would cost between \$45,000 and \$80,000. The Task Force identified this as an ideal opportunity for a joint fundraising effort by the Church and Preschool.

The most important topic within the Task Force's discussion on facilities was security. The Director emphasized the critical nature of keeping the Preschool securely separated from other Church activities while the students are at the Preschool. The Director discussed how changes were made to student drop-off and pick-up procedures in recent years to provide clear separation and improved security. Nevertheless, more security could be provided for the classrooms. The Task Force discussed how improved security already is planned for as part of the improvements to be made through the Church's Capital Appeal campaign improvements. These changes could include, but not be limited to, the addition of more secured doors between the education wing and remainder of the Church. The Task Force also discussed the value of training Preschool staff on how to use the recently-installed panic buttons in the Church. Finally, the Task Force discussed potentially adding a panic button in the Director's office.

IX. CHURCH/PRESCHOOL RELATIONS

The relationship between the Church and Preschool was both a singular topic of discussion and a theme that pervaded throughout all the Task Force's meetings. Historically, the relationship has varied depending on the respective leaders of the Church and Preschool. The Task Force agreed that the

current relationship is positive, but there is room for improvement if the Preschool is to become a stronger ministry of the Church.

Beyond providing outstanding educational and social development opportunities to students, the Preschool is a ministry that can grow membership at the Church. In order to achieve this goal, the Church and Preschool leadership need to work together to ensure that the Preschool is incorporating efforts that will promote the Church to the parents of Preschool students. The Task Force discussed how best to ensure that the Preschool is incorporating those efforts. Moreover, the Task Force discussed how to integrate more fully the Preschool into the Church's governance.

The Task Force concluded that a board should be established for overseeing the strategic direction and operation of the Preschool (the "Board").⁸ Board members would be appointed by the Church's Congregation Council. The Board would include four (4) at-large members in addition to the Lead Pastor and Director of Faith Formation and one (1) member from Council. The Board would meet at least quarterly to (i) oversee the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations, (ii) craft and implement a strategic plan for the Preschool, (iii) assist the Church with crafting and implementing policies applicable to the Preschool, (iv) be an advocate for the Preschool and (v) grow the Preschool ministry. The Council member on the Board would serve as a liaison between the Church and Preschool. The Council liaison would be a point of contact for the Preschool Director.

Improving the Preschool and Church relationship is not solely about improving the Preschool as a ministry of the Church. The Task Force is optimistic that if the Church takes a more active role in the Preschool there will be an increase in enrollment at the Preschool. The Church can do better to promote the Preschool to the Congregation. This promotion can include noting Preschool events in the Church's weekly or monthly communications and possibly placing Preschool student art on the art wall in the Gathering Space. The Preschool also offers a wonderful opportunity for benevolence from Congregation members. One Congregation member recently created a scholarship fund for Preschool students. The Church should pursue other opportunities like this.

X. CONCLUSION

It was abundantly clear to the Task Force that the Church is blessed to have a first-rate institution like the Preschool as one of its ministries. This blessing, however, cannot be viewed as an asset that requires little attention. That complacent approach would leave so much potential in the Preschool untapped. The Preschool can be an even stronger ministry. The Preschool can grow into a true Christian early-learning institution that both continues its long history of providing outstanding educational and social development opportunities to students and helps to grow the Church. That growth will be dependent upon commitment from leaders, an embrace of change, and a willingness to collaborate strategically and regularly.

⁸ The Task Force notes that Church Policy No. 1.30.22 provides for the establishment, membership and responsibilities of a Preschool Playgroup Board (see attached at Appendix A). Given that there currently is no Preschool Playgroup Board in place and has not been one for considerable time, the Task Force recommends the Church's Administrative & Personnel Committee revisit and revise Policy No. 1.30.22 consistent with the recommendations set forth in this report.

Appendix A
Policy No 1.30.22

TRINITY LUTHERAN CHURCH
CAMP HILL, PENNSYLVANIA

Number	<u>1.30.22</u>
Subject	<u>Preschool Playgroup</u>
Effective Date	<u>09/09/2013</u>
Administrative Update	<u>06/01/2015</u>
Team	<u>Education Ministry</u>

COMMITTEE/MINISTRY TEAM FUNCTIONS & POLICIES

I. OUR MISSION

Our mission is to provide families with a developmentally appropriate early childhood education program that meets the needs of the “whole child” and encourages children to grow and learn through play.

II. ORGANIZATION

- A. Trinity Preschool Playgroup is a ministry of Trinity Lutheran Church under the supervision of the Education Ministry Team with administrative authority delegated to the Preschool Playgroup Board.
- B. The membership of the Preschool Playgroup Board shall consist of the following: the Director of the Preschool Playgroup; a parent representative from each age level, with preference given to members of Trinity Church; a minimum of one member at large who is a church member in good standing with an interest in pre-school education; one teacher representative; one liaison from the Education Ministry Team; and the Director of Children and Family Ministries, ex-officio. Appointments shall be approved by the Education Ministry Committee.
- C. All preschool staff shall be considered employees of Trinity Lutheran Church and subject to its overall personnel policies.
 - 1. The Director shall be a baptized Christian and have a college degree in education and experience in early childhood education.
 - 2. Lead teachers shall be baptized Christians with a genuine interest in preschool children, and have a minimum of a bachelor's degree in education or education related field with experience in early childhood education.
 - 3. Assistant teachers shall be baptized Christians with an interest in preschool children.
- D. The Board shall meet and elect a president from among its membership excluding the Director of Preschool Playgroup who shall be ineligible to serve in that capacity.
- E. Actions of the Board shall be determined by a simple majority.
- F. The Board shall meet a minimum of two times each year.

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COMMITTEE/MINISTRY TEAM FUNCTIONS & POLICIES

III. RESPONSIBILITIES

- A. Program responsibilities of the Preschool Playgroup Board shall include:
1. Establish policies and procedures as recommended and required for playgroup program.
 2. Periodically review job descriptions for each playgroup staff position and forward recommended changes to Trinity's Administration and Personnel Committee.
 3. Advertise for, interview, recruit and recommend to the Education Ministry Team Facilitator, and to Trinity Lutheran Church Congregation Council a candidate for Director of Preschool Playgroup.
 4. Interview and hire teachers and assistant teachers in consultation with the Director of Preschool Playgroup.
 5. Observe and support the Director of Preschool Playgroup. Assist the Director of Children and Family Ministries in the preparation of an annual evaluation of the Director of Preschool Playgroup in accordance with the procedures as set forth by the Administration and Personnel Committee.
 6. Approve a working budget including tuition, registration fee, salaries, professional expenses and daily expenses.
 7. Approve non-budgeted, unexpected playgroup expenses.
 8. Approve the yearly calendar, including the starting and ending dates for staff and students, snow make-up dates, and in-service dates.
 9. Make recommendations concerning curriculum as needed.
 10. Make recommendations for growth and development of the playgroup.
 11. Approve all fund raising activities in accordance with Trinity Church policy.
- B. Fiscal Responsibilities of the Preschool Playgroup Board shall include:
1. Playgroup's budget, including all receipts and expenditures, shall be contained within Trinity's operating accounts but maintained with separate accounting.
 2. Playgroup's tuition receipts shall be deposited into Trinity Lutheran Church's operating account.

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COMMITTEE/MINISTRY TEAM FUNCTIONS & POLICIES

3. Payroll activities for Preschool Playgroup employees shall be provided by Trinity Lutheran Church.
4. All Preschool Playgroup related expenses, including payroll, shall be written against its own funds through Trinity's regular church receipt and payment process.
5. The Preschool Playgroup shall be included in Trinity's annual financial review according to accepted accounting and auditing principals.

IV. RELATIONSHIPS

Trinity Preschool Playgroup staff shall work in concert and cooperation with Sunday Church School teachers and volunteers in preparing and maintaining order in the space used by each group. The Director of Preschool Playgroup shall work cooperatively with Trinity's Ministry Director for Finance and Property as related to all financial and property matters.