



Dear Families,

Welcome to Light of Christ Early Childhood Center! This Family Handbook was designed to give you an understanding of the policies and procedures at our center. We look forward to working closely with you, as we realize parents are the primary educators of their children. It is our hope that through open communication and ongoing dialogue between our school administration, classroom teachers, and families, we can provide experiences that will nurture each child and foster his/her growth and love of learning.

Light of Christ is a Catholic Early Childhood Center and is part of the Diocese of St. Petersburg Schools and Centers. As a Catholic school, our purpose is to provide a faith-based, developmentally appropriate learning environment for children between the ages of two to five.

Our Parent Handbook, along with additional communications from our school, will give families an overview of our Early Childhood program and of the policies and procedures that are in place for the safety and well-being of all. Parents are asked to carefully read, review and refer to the information enclosed during your time with us.

Parental involvement in our center is welcomed, encouraged and appreciated. There are many opportunities for parents to be part of our ECC program throughout the year. Family involvement is a vital part of Light of Christ ECC and you are encouraged to be part of your child's journey, in a way that will best allow your child to find comfort and security in his/her learning environment.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding these policies, please feel free to meet with me and discuss them. I look forward to working with you and I feel very blessed to have your child in our early childhood program.

God bless you,

Becky Daschbach, Director
Light of Christ Early Childhood Center

August 2014

License number: C850590 e-mail rad@locchurch.org

MISSION STATEMENT

In The Light of Christ Early Childhood Center, our goal is to provide your child with a loving and accepting environment that foster in them a love for God and all His creation as your child grows and learns in a Catholic, Christian Community.

Teach a child to choose the right path and even when he is older he will remain on that path. Proverbs 22:6

PHILOSOPHY

Light of Christ ECC encourages children to be actively involved in their learning process, to experience a variety of developmentally appropriate activities and materials; we also encourage our children to pursue their own interests as members of a Catholic community in God's world.

GOALS OF LIGHT OF CHRIST EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTER

- To create an atmosphere where spiritual values are taught and developed.
- To cultivate in each child: compassion, tolerance and acceptance of other people, in an effort to eliminate prejudice and discrimination of all kinds.
- To know and understand the families we serve.
- To invite and involve our families in the total school program.
- To support families with regard to decisions affecting their children.
- To maintain a stimulating and positive learning environment, that encourages successful academic accomplishments.
- To provide assistance to our families with their children's transitions from year to year and from program to program.
- To provide a non-discriminatory learning environment and leadership opportunities, regardless of gender.
- To cultivate in each child a healthy respect for self and others, including his/her own innate talents.
- To provide a developmentally appropriate curriculum that strives to meet the individual needs of children
- To develop and refine communication skills through the understanding and use of written and spoken language.
- To broaden each child's knowledge of his/her community and the many diverse cultures and peoples within it.
- To develop physical coordination skills.
- To assist each child in exploring, discovering and respecting the environment around her/him and to encourage sensitivity toward all living creatures.
- To provide a multitude of hands-on activities designed to instruct, in a more tangible way, mathematical and scientific concepts.
- To provide daily hands-on opportunities with current technology and computers.
- To support our teaching staff with resources and professional development opportunities that will encourage ongoing growth in the field of early childhood education.

ADMISSION POLICIES

WELCOMING FAMILIES

Light of Christ ECC warmly welcomes new and returning families to our center. Every opportunity is made to welcome visitors and enrolled families. Inquiring families tour our facility, meet our Staff, ask questions and receive pertinent materials to assist with the transition from home to school. Light of Christ ECC is an equal opportunity service provider and will provide its services to children and/or their family without regard to the child or family's race, color, gender or nation origin.

REGISTRATION

Light of Christ offers early childhood programs to children entering between the ages of two to four. Children must be two, three or four on, or before, September 1st of the year for which they are registering. Registration for the upcoming year begins in February. Registration dates and procedures are published in the parish bulletin. Currently enrolled children receive registration information through our center newsletter. A non-refundable registration fee is due at the time of registration.

Families can apply to enroll their child in Light of Christ Early Childhood Center by completing the Enrollment Application and paying the \$140 non-refundable registration fee.

Light of Christ Early Childhood Center reserves the right to dis-enroll any parent or child at any time with or without cause.

Continued enrollment at Light of Christ Early Childhood Center is contingent upon the parents' and child's adherence to the policies and procedures of Light of Christ ECC as outlined in this handbook including, but not limited to, timely payment of fees and tuition.

Families are required to notify Light of Christ Early Childhood Center immediately, should any of the information collected at the time of enrollment or any time thereafter change. Failure to do so may result in dis-enrollment from the program and forfeiture of any deposit

SUMMER PROGRAM

Our Center offers a summer program for children between the ages of *two to eight*. We welcome families from other entities to our summer camp as well as our returning families. A non-refundable registration fee will be due at the time of your enrollment, if your child is not currently enrolled in our program. Spaces are limited, and priority is given to alumni students and to those families enrolled during the regular school year.

RECORDS

Children must have the following forms on file before they may attend the center. Forms are to be updated each year.

1. Record of current physical examination (Valid for 2 yrs.)
2. Certificate of immunization (Current and updated)
3. Release for emergency care –NOTARIZED
4. Emergency record card
5. Handbook agreement form
6. Notarized copy of Shared Parental Responsibility of the Final Judgment of the Disillusion of Marriage (if applicable)
7. Child Identification Record
8. Health Questionnaire
9. Emergency information
10. Photo release form

IMMUNIZATION POLICY

Catholic Schools within the Diocese of St. Petersburg require enrolling students to submit a Florida Department of Health Certificate of Immunization as provided for in Florida Statute 1003.22 as a condition precedent to acceptance. Catholic Schools in the Diocese of St. Petersburg do not recognize a religious objection to this immunization. This policy is effective as of the 2011/2012 school year.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Within Light of Christ Early Childhood Center, confidential and sensitive information will only be shared with employees of Light of Christ who have a “need to know” in order to most appropriately and safely care for your child. Confidential and sensitive information about faculty, other parents and/or children will not be shared with parents as Light of Christ Early Childhood Center strives to protect everyone’s right to privacy.

You may observe children at our center who are disabled or who exhibit behavior that may appear inappropriate (i.e. biting, hitting etc.). You may be curious or concerned about the other child. Our Confidentiality Policy protects every child’s privacy. Employees of Light of Christ Early Childhood Center are strictly prohibited from discussing anything about another child with you.

CUSTODY AGREEMENTS

If you have a custody agreement or legal guardianship, **a copy of these documents must be kept on file in the Center’s office.**

CALENDAR

Copies of our school calendar are available in the preschool office and on our web-site. Please keep the calendar handy for easy reference. Our monthly newsletters also list all holidays and special activities for the month. If there are any changes in the calendar, you will be notified as soon as possible.

SPECIAL NEEDS

All children who enter Light of Christ Early Childhood Center are on a 2-month probationary period pending evaluation of the child's needs. We attempt to meet the educational needs of all children; however, with regard to children with special needs, our center may only be equipped to provide an appropriate environment for those students with mild learning deficits. We are not equipped to care for children with certain special needs; therefore, any such care is conditional upon the consent of the Director. Parents of children with special needs are required to be forthcoming and share all educational evaluation information, disabling conditions, prior specialized placements/identification, and familial issues, which may require special educational programming. The routine probationary period is still in effect, as this will allow the administration and staff the time to determine the appropriateness of placement in our center. In all cases, the child must be able to participate and substantially benefit from our program without risk to him/her or to the other children. We make every attempt to work with children on an individual basis, and it is important for us to know their strengths and weaknesses. If there is anything special we need to know about your child (i.e. hearing or speech difficulties, changes in family structure, history of any behavioral problems), please let your child's teacher know before school starts so she can meet with you. The more we know about your child, the better we will be able to meet his/her needs.

TUITION

Tuition is due on the first of each month, beginning in September and concluding with final payment due May 1st, for our half-day students. For full-time students, tuition is due at the beginning of each week or the first of the month. Tuition for half day students is based on a **yearly fee** which is paid in 9 equal payments for those that do not attend our summer camp. Full day tuition is also a yearly fee based on 50 weeks (which excludes the 2 weeks we are closed each year: the week before school starts, and 1 week at Christmas) and is paid on either a weekly or monthly basis. ***NO ADJUSTMENTS ARE MADE FOR PERSONAL VACATION, ABSENCES OR SCHOOL HOLIDAYS.*** The following late fees will be applied if the tuition is not received by the FIFTH of each month.

1. \$10 – 2 day classes
2. \$15 – 3 day classes
3. \$20 – 5 day classes

Tuition can be paid by check, made out to Light of Christ Early Childhood Center. **Parents are asked not to send payments in their child's backpack or lunchbox.** Please bring them to the preschool office, send them by mail or electronic payment through your bank or give them to your child's teacher. A fee of \$20.00 will be added for any returned checks.

VOLUNTARY PRE-KINDERGARTEN

Light of Christ ECC participates in the States Voluntary Pre-Kindergarten Program. Families with eligible four-year olds are welcome to enroll in our program, and are expected to abide by all the policies and procedures of Light of Christ ECC.

EXTENDED CARE FEES

Early Birds, Lunch Bunch and After Care are our extended care programs for children enrolled in our half -day program. They can be used on a regular or as needed basis. Please give us at least 24 hours notice that your child is staying. *Lunch Bunch is first come first served, limited to fifteen children. Children must be potty trained to attend Lunch Bunch. We will offer Lunch Bunch if there is sufficient interest or need.*

Fees for our extended care programs must be made beforehand. No refunds will be given for illness and days cannot be switched. If we are full other arrangements will have to be made.

Early Birds – 7:30-9:00 - \$10.00 per/day

Lunch Bunch – 12:00 – 2:00 - \$12 per/day

After Care – 12:00-6:00 - \$40.00 per/day

ARRIVAL AND DISMISSAL

The parent or adult who brings the child to school is required to walk the child into their classroom and wait with the child until the teacher has marked them present on the class attendance sheet.

For your child's sake, it is very important that you arrive on time and pick up your child promptly. If an emergency does arise, and you will be late picking up your child, please call the office to let us know.

LATE FEES

A Late fee of \$1 per minute will be assessed for every minute past the pick up times of 12:00 & 6:00 p.m. **This policy is strictly enforced.** If you have an emergency and will be late picking up your child, please call the Center's Office immediately.

CAMPUS SECURITY

Our campus is equipped with state-of-the-art security equipment. We have 12 surveillance cameras at strategic spots that record 24 hours a day. Each person receiving a key card, (two per family are complimentary, extra cards can be purchased for \$10 in the preschool office) must submit a copy of their driver's license for the office staff to process. After your information has been entered and you have been cleared, you will be issued a magnetic key card that will allow you to enter through the front gate electronically.

If you do not have your key card with you, you will have to ring the buzzer at the front gate, and a staff member will let you into the building. If you lose your key card, please **report the loss immediately to the office staff.** Another one can be purchased for a nominal fee. However, **campus security is everyone's responsibility** so we ask that you do not hold the door open for other parents. Each parent must swipe their card each time so that we can keep track of the date and time of each child's arrival and departure.

Every person who has your permission to pick up your child must be named on your child's identification form. That person must first come to the office and produce a valid photo ID to the office personnel. **Do not give them your magnetic key. By doing so, your key will be invalidated and none will be re-issued for the remainder of the school year.** Once the office staff has determined the person is on your child's identification form, your child will be released to their care.

CELL PHONE USAGE

We ask that you keep your cell phone usage to a minimum while dropping off or picking up your child. This is an important time to interact with your child and the child's teacher, and to check the Information Station for any upcoming events or important news you should be aware of. Your cooperation in this matter is greatly appreciated.

SMOKING

For the health of all employees, children and associates, smoking is prohibited anywhere on Parish property. Parents are prohibited from smoking in the building, on the grounds and in the parking lot of Light of Christ Early Childhood Center. Parents who are smoking in their cars must dispose of the cigarette prior to entering the parking lot.

ABSENCES/ILLNESS

Whenever your child is absent, please call the preschool office or send a note with him/her upon return, explaining the absence. If your child has a contagious disease (chicken pox, strep throat, conjunctivitis, etc.) PLEASE INFORM THE OFFICE IMMEDIATELY! Your child must be symptom free (including fever) for 24 hours before returning to school. **Do not send your child to school with signs of illness (including, but not limited to fever, rash, diarrhea, vomiting, runny nose, cough, and pink eye).** If you plan to take your child out of school for any period of time, please inform the office. Your tuition will not be prorated for any absences. ***It is extremely important for the health and welfare of our students and staff that these rules are strictly adhered to.***

If your child becomes ill at school, the staff will contact the family to come to school to pick up the child. If the child needs to be separated from the group, he/she will be brought to the office to rest comfortably until the family member arrives.

ACCIDENT/INCIDENT REPORTS

In the event of an accident or unusual incident, parents will receive, in written form, an accounting of the event. The Pinellas County License Board requires a parent signature on all accident/incident reports.

HEAD LICE

If a child is suspected of having head lice, they will be brought to the office. Two staff members will check the child. If it is determined that the child has lice, the parents or guardian will be notified, and the child should be picked up from school as soon as possible. The child may return to school after treatment, when the child's hair is **nit free.** When the child returns to school, parents will need to be present while a staff member check's the hair for nits. If nits are found, the parent will have to take the child home.

MEDICATIONS

Light of Christ Early Childhood Center will only dispense over-the-counter and/or prescription medications that are in original, labeled containers, *and are accompanied by a doctor's note*. Light of Christ ECC will only give medication to the child for whom the doctor's note is written and for whom the medication container is labeled. A parent authorization form **MUST** be signed whenever you wish the school to administer such medication to your child. Please come to the office and sign the form **–DO NOT GIVE THE MEDICATION TO THE TEACHER or PUT THE MEDICATION IN YOUR CHILD'S LUNCH BOX**. Any type of topical cream or lotion, such as cortisone cream, sunscreen or diaper cream is considered a medication by the License Board and will need a parent authorization form and a doctor's note.

If you desire your child to use sun protection, we ask that you apply an "All Day" sunscreen to him/her before they arrive at school.

SEVERE WEATHER/EMERGENCY SITUATIONS

In the event of an emergency closing of our school, please watch your local news station for information. The Office of Catholic Schools and Centers will provide a list of schools in the Dioceses that are closing, to the local media. A 3:00 p.m. deadline was selected in order to allow the Pastor and Director ample time to provide you with written notification of the decision, and to give the Office of Communications enough time to meet the media's deadline for the evening news. You can also call the Center's office at (727) 442-4797 to hear a detailed message on the voicemail regarding our status during emergency closings.

EMERGENCY EVACUATION PLAN

In the event that a hurricane, tornado or other catastrophe strikes our building, all of the children will be moved to room Classroom #5, which is a Hurricane rated "Safe Room". If the children need to be evacuated from the building, the staff will accompany the children to the Parish Hall. Parents coming to the church grounds in the event of an emergency should wait for traffic directions from emergency personnel so as not to interfere with emergency vehicles. This emergency evacuation plan is designed as a preventive and informative statement to all concerned. School Crisis plans are in place and posted in all classrooms and the preschool office.

FIRE/LOCKDOWN/TORNADO DRILLS

Emergency fire drills are held once a month. This may make quite an impression on your child the first time s/he experiences it. Teachers will practice lockdown procedures with their classes. Tornado drills are practiced within each child's classroom throughout the year.

TOILET TRAINING

If your child is not yet toilet trained, you are required to bring a supply of disposable diapers and wipes to your child's teacher. When you feel that your child is ready to be toilet trained, please discuss this with us so we can work with you to train your child. Toilet training should be a positive experience with lots of praise given for doing well. Accidents are expected and are a normal part of the potty training process. For safety and health reasons, children will remain in pull-ups throughout the potty training process. When your child is able to attend to their own bathroom needs for two complete weeks, without an accident, we will consider them potty trained and they may come to school in regular underwear.

If your child should have a set back in potty training and has more than two accidents in a week's time, the child will be put back in pull-ups at school until they are able to remain accident free for two weeks.

Until your child is completely potty trained you will be charged the 2 year old rate for tuition if your child is in the three's or VPK.

PERSONAL BELONGINGS

The following items are required the first day of school:

1. A complete set of **LABELED** clothes (including underwear and socks)
Placed in a zip lock bag marked with your child's name.
2. A box of tissues
3. A box of zip lock baggies
4. A labeled bookbag or backpack (to fit in your child's cubby)

Please do not allow your child to bring any toys, excess jewelry, or money to the center unless requested by the teachers. At no time will we permit the children to bring "weapons" to school (e.g. swords, squirt guns, magic wands, etc.)

If your child is enrolled in our All Day Program, please include an extra set of labeled clothes to be kept in the After-Care room. If he/she is not yet potty-trained, please provide disposable diapers and wipes to be used in after care. Also, if a special blanket or stuffed animal is needed for your child to be comfortable at naptime, they may bring them in their backpack to be used for rest-time only. We do provide sheets and blankets for our children that stay all day.

CLOTHING/APPROPRIATE DRESS

Children should come dressed for action! We recommend washable, comfortable play clothes. Sometimes play is messy, so please remember to dress you child in an outfit that you would not mind him/her accidentally getting paint on or soiled. Tennis shoes or other soft-soled shoes are the safest, whereas sandals or hard- heeled boots or dress shoes can lead to injured toes. For safety reasons, thongs, sandals, boots and other footwear that does not fit securely on the foot are prohibited. If your child comes to school wearing footwear that is unacceptable, they will not be permitted to play on the climbing equipment that day. Weather permitting, the children go outside on a daily basis and we ask that you dress them accordingly. If a coat or sweater is necessary, ***please label it with your child's name.***

NUTRITION

The children will take turns bringing in a snack in the morning for the entire class. Teachers will be giving out snack calendars at the beginning of each month. ***Due to Health Department Regulations, ONLY store bought snacks will be allowed.*** Please provide a nutritious snack and drink for the number of children in the class when it is your turn. We suggest that you try to involve your child in the selection of the snack. Please avoid sending snacks notable for choking, particularly for the younger children (i.e. grapes, popcorn and peanuts). We ask that sugar be kept to a minimum and that *drinks be 100% pasteurized fruit juice or milk.* Special exceptions will be made on birthdays when the child may bring a special snack for the children to share.

CONTACTING THE CENTER

The Center's office number is (727) 442-4797. If there is no one in the office, you can call the Center's cell phone at (727) 366-2790 or you may leave a message on the answering machine. Messages are checked regularly. ***If your call is an emergency or needs immediate attention,*** please call the church office at (727) 441-4545. They will be able to contact us on the walkie-talkie ***or*** they will walk over to the center to deliver the message.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Since Light of Christ Early Childhood Center program emphasizes a family participation, we will have various activities throughout the year to involve our families. You will be kept updated through our newsletter on all programs offered throughout the year.

VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers help to enhance our program. Many parents have special talents and gifts to share with our children. We encourage parents to volunteer in an area suited to their talents and convenient to their schedules. A "Volunteer Reference Check Form" must be on file prior to your participation in any center activity. The Diocese requires that three references are obtained for all volunteers, and the volunteers must complete the Diocesan mandated Safe Environment Training. This training will be offered by Light of Christ and other churches in the area.

PETS

Animals that may come in contact with children and staff members must be in good health and must have documentation from a veterinarian or an animal shelter that the animal is fully immunized and that the animal is suitable for contact with children and staff. Parents are asked to contact the preschool office before planning to bring any animals into the school environment.

DISCIPLINE POLICY

Light of Christ Early Childhood Center strives to discourage all forms of unacceptable behavior by maintaining an appropriate classroom environment. We embrace a philosophy of positive reinforcement, re-direction to appropriate behavior, addressing actions rather than children, and giving children a clear understanding of the consequences of unacceptable behavior. The teacher will handle discipline by various methods of communication and, if necessary, removal of the child from the activity. The teacher and the director will contact the parent for a conference about any negative behavior is not corrected by this type of communication. Parents are encouraged to discuss the needs of their child with the teacher, so that we can know how to best work with your child.

BITING AND UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOR

The safety of the children in our care is our first priority. Biting and other unacceptable behaviors that jeopardize the well-being of the other children are handled accordingly. A note is sent home to the misbehaving child's parents reporting the first incident resulting. If the same incident occurs again the parent or guardian will be called to take the child home. After these actions have been taken, 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 family continues to act against ECC policies as explained in this Family Handbook.
- The Director's judges that the child can no longer function effectively in the program and/or the program cannot meet the child's needs.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR CHILDREN

As mandated by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, for the protection of young children, all schools and centers in the Diocese of St. Petersburg participate in the Safe Environment Program. The following practices are in place at Light of Christ as part of the Safe Environment Program:

- All persons with direct supervision of children (all employees, including substitute staff); have completed the diocesan mandated Safe Environment training program, which includes initial and on-going background screenings.
- Our ECC program weaves the various age appropriate Safe Environment Curriculum Standards into our program's daily classroom life through the use of our religion program, the Peacemaker Program (4 year olds) and additional stories, games, songs and learning experiences. These life skills serve to empower the children to protect themselves and to respect others and the environment.

- Volunteers are encouraged to complete the Safe Environment Training Course offered at local parishes in our diocese. Background screenings are required. Volunteers at Light of Christ ECC are never in a supervisory role with children, per our licensing and diocesan standards. As such, they are not required to complete the SEP training, but Light of Christ strongly recommends, parents and volunteers participate in this training, as it is very beneficial their roles as parents and volunteers.

HARASSMENT POLICY

Light of Christ Early Childhood Center strives to establish a Christian, professional and supportive educational community for administrators, faculty and staff, parents and students. The Diocese of St. Petersburg has adopted and promulgated a harassment policy for its schools' mission. All staff members of Light of Christ ECC according to Diocesan policy have participated in the safe environment and harassment training. We at Light of Christ condemn any form of harassment and will address all credible allegations in accord with the diocesan policy. Concerns should be reported directly to the Director. All staff, according to Diocesan policy has participated in safe environment & harassment training.

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE REQUIRED

After reading this Parent Handbook, please sign below and return this form to the office.

OUR PAROCHIAL ADMINISTRATOR, FR. BILL WILSON, HAS APPROVED THIS PARENT HANDBOOK.

I understand the Center's policies and procedures and agree to them.

Parent/Guardian's signature