Guidelines for Weekday Preschool Ministry Programs in United Methodist Churches

“God begins his work in children” – John Wesley

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“Embracing outreach as part of a weekday ministry program follows our (United Methodist) traditional roots of caring for the needs of the community. As a congregation responds to the needs of people in the community through weekday ministry, the community and the congregation discover many blessings.”

- Book of Resolutions 2008 - “Child Care and the Church”

Guidelines for Weekday Preschool Ministry Programs

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# Guidelines for Weekday Preschool Ministry Programs

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Purpose of Guidelines

The purpose of these guidelines is to connect and support Early Childhood programs within the United Methodist Church and to maintain high educational and ethical standards that are consistent across United Methodist Weekday Preschool Ministry Programs.\textsuperscript{i} We further recommend that each program becomes familiar with the local licensing standards and make every effort to meet and exceed them.

We encourage you to use these guidelines to complete a self-study. Strive to meet these guidelines fully and use them as goals for your Weekday Preschool Ministry Program. As a denomination, we believe that “Churches should follow some process of self-study for their childcare programs on a regular basis”\textsuperscript{ii}.

In order to evaluate your school, please rate your program using the following scale on this document:

- 1= Completed
- 2= In Process
- 3= Not Launched
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**Philosophy**

— A published statement of the Weekday Preschool Ministry Program’s philosophy/mission is available. It should be compliant with the United Methodist Church’s statement of ministry to young children as found in the document *Child Care and the Church*.

— Children learn Christianity best by having it modeled for them. Director, teachers and caregivers practice Christian values through their love, care and concern for everyone, and model what it means to be a follower of Christ.

— The Weekday Preschool Ministry Program has a written policy with the church regarding *Safe Sanctuaries* and staff members are familiar with the policy and incorporate it into their daily routine.
**Administrative**

The Weekday Preschool Ministry Program has an Advisory Board. The majority of the members are church members nominated and approved annually at Charge Conference. The Advisory Board should be comprised of six to nine voting members, including a certified teacher, an attorney, an accountant, and parents/guardians of young children. These should include members and non-members of the church. Ex-Officio members of the Advisory Board should include the Preschool Director, the Christian Education Director, the Pastor, the Church Business Administrator, the Church Finance Committee Chairperson, the Board of Trustees Chairperson, and a representative from the Staff/Parish Relations Committee.

- The Advisory Board has a written purpose and written, defined roles regarding the board’s responsibilities and decision making ability. For example, it is possible that personnel matters may not be a responsibility of the Board, but that of the Staff Parish Relations Committee of the Church. Personnel changes may be reported to the Board, but no decision making power regarding personnel would be a responsibility of the Advisory Board.

- The Advisory Board meets regularly with the Weekday Preschool Ministry Director and designated church staff member in an advisory capacity keeping in mind that state and local requirements and church policy take precedence.

- Board members are a real link between the committees they represent and the Advisory Committee/Board, so they are able to share information as well as to advocate for the Weekday Preschool Ministry Programs.

“A manager is focused on the people, problems, and tasks at hand, using technical skills to address them. Beyond that, working with a vision requires developing oneself into a leader who inspires others to participate in and expand the vision.” - from The Visionary Director, Margie Carter and Deb Curtis [p. 22]
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— The program has written policies defining the roles and responsibilities of board members and staff.

— The program has written policies for operating.
  - A parent handbook that includes program expectations, payment and fees, refunds, and a discipline policy.
  - A staff handbook that includes all policies relating to staff, including staff compensation, staff expectations, and training requirements.
  - Nondiscriminatory hiring practices.
  - A signed agreement that the handbooks have been read, understood, and agreed upon.

— A written fiscal relationship with the church is agreed upon by both the Weekday Preschool Ministry Program and the church administration.

— Fiscal records are kept with evidence of long-range budgeting and sound financial planning.

— Operating budgets are prepared annually and approved by the Advisory Board and/or the Finance Committee of the church.

— At least quarterly the budget is reviewed and expenses are reconciled. The program may work in conjunction with the church finance committee as dictated by church administration. Reports to the finance committee of the church on a regular basis are strongly recommended.

— Special funds such as a reserve or scholarship fund is collected, managed and dispersed according to written procedures which are approved by the Advisory Board and/or Finance Committee of the church.

Staff

Recommended Staff Qualifications

— The director and assistant director must be at least twenty-one (21) years of age with a high school diploma or GED and meet all state and local government educational, credentialing and training requirements. Directors are encouraged to complete a minimum of a 2-year degree in early childhood education or related field.
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— Each teacher and assistant teacher must be at least eighteen (18) years of age with a high school diploma or GED and meet the state and local government educational, credentialing and training requirements. Teachers and Assistant Teachers are encouraged to complete the minimum of a CDA.

— Each Teacher Aide and Caregiver must be at least eighteen (18) years of age and meet the state and local government educational, credentialing, and training requirements. Teacher Aides and Caregivers are encouraged to complete a CDA.

— Staff members are committed and willing to support the Christian faith, and the vision and mission of the United Methodist Church.

— All Staff are trained annually in Safe Sanctuaries.

Qualities of Early Childhood Staff

— Sense of responsibility for the ongoing development of children

— Manifests a concern and love for children and their families

— Developing a mature faith and able to articulate Christian values to young children in terms of a young child’s experience and developmental level of understanding

— Flexible – The ability to adjust and use teachable moments is a must. Too much structure in the daily classroom is not effective

— Enjoys working with children, has a sense of humor, a friendly personality, and a relaxed nature

— Practices healthy living - physically and emotionally

— Knowledgeable of when a child’s learning is at its optimum, based on brain development research

— Knows and uses Developmentally Appropriate Practice teaching and learning strategies

— Trained in parent relations and can effectively communicate with parents to ensure a positive rapport and active support

— Seeks resources and available services within the church and community to meet the needs of children and their families

— Gets along well with other staff members, while growing through teamwork and shared leadership
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— Supports the purpose, philosophy, and Safe Sanctuaries mandates of the church and Weekday Preschool Ministry Program
— Committed to pursuing continued training in the field of early childhood as a part of continuing professional development

Management

— Fair wages and benefit packages for full-time staff include paid leave [annual, sick, jury duty, and personal], medical insurance, and retirement options. Benefits for part-time staff are available on a pro-rated basis. Providing these benefits is supported by the Social Principles of the United Methodist Church.¹
— The administration and staff have the opportunity to evaluate themselves and the program. [Appendix 2-3]
— The director evaluates staff on an ongoing basis. Classroom observations and visits are frequent. Classroom observations are documented, written evaluations are completed annually, and both are kept on file. [Appendix 3]
— Conferences are scheduled with the director for each staff member. The director offers positive, constructive suggestions.
— Staff complete state required training and other training that enable professional and spiritual development.
— Lead Teacher meetings are held weekly and staff meetings are held at least every two months. At this time the director may have teachers and staff share ideas, concerns, and expectations keeping in mind the obligation to respect confidentiality issues of families and staff.
— Provide a Staff/Employee Handbook for each staff member.

Church and Weekday Preschool Ministries Relationship

— The Church and Weekday Preschool Ministry Program see the preschool as a ministry and as a part of Christian Education in the Church.
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— The Church and Weekday Preschool Ministry Program have entered into a covenant agreement. [Appendix 4]

— The Weekday Preschool Ministry Program has an Advisory Board to set policies, and oversee matters of the budget, personnel, space, and program regulations. [Appendix 5]

— The Weekday Preschool Ministry Program has developed a strong and healthy relationship with the church and the pastor resulting in open communication and cooperation. [Appendix 6]

  o Support and integration of the Church and Weekday Preschool Ministry’s programming.

  o Support and provide opportunities for the integration of parents and church members into preschool and church activities and ministries.

  o When things are going well, you are thinking of ways to make things better.

  o When difficulties are encountered, the director, staff, and church committees work together constructively and respectfully to resolve problems.

  o The Preschool Director is proactive in giving reports to appropriate church committees.

  o The Preschool Staff and Church Education Department work together respectfully, recognizing that space and materials need to be shared and mutually cared for. Shared space issues should be addressed in the covenant agreement. vi [Appendix 7]

  o Preschool and other ministries of the church work cooperatively to insure that all programs and ministries receive needed consideration of resources and space.

  o Children are taught respect for God’s house and the property of others.

  o The congregation and the Weekday Preschool Ministry Program follow Safe Sanctuaries Policies, and are protected legally vii
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Children

“People were bringing little children to him in order that he might touch them; and the disciples spoke sternly to them. But when Jesus saw this, he was indignant and said to them, ‘Let the little children come to me; do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.’ And he took them up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them”. -Mark 10. 13-16 [NRSV]

— Registration form contains name, address, date of birth, contact information, emergency contacts, special health care needs, adults authorized for pick-up, and other pertinent information that protect the best interest of the child.

— All personal information is treated as confidential and kept secure. Information is shared only with written permission of the custodial parent and/or caregiver.

— The program policy regarding the enrollment and termination of children’s enrollment protect children’s rights as outlined in the “Childcare Centers and the Americans with Disabilities Act.”

— The program is designed to be inclusive of all children regardless of race, religion, creed, culture, and ethnicity including children with identified disabilities and special learning and developmental needs. A child with special needs is defined as someone who is physically, socially, emotionally or behaviorally challenged, and may require modification in a typical classroom.

— A policy is in place regarding children with special needs and efforts are made to make reasonable modifications in the classroom, to address this issue with the parents and to provide information regarding referrals in the county in which the child lives.
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Partnering With Parents

The word “parents” refers to all legal custodial caregivers

— A parent orientation meeting occurs at the beginning of the year. Information regarding church worship services, ministries, and programs should be included. An invitation to visit the church should be extended to the parents preferably by the pastor. Keep in mind that your Weekday Preschool Ministry Program may be the only connection families have to a faith-based community.

— A parent handbook is recommended. Include information regarding school policies, schedule and calendar, payment of fees and refunds, and all information pertinent to your context. It is recommended that a form is included to be signed and returned that the book has been read, understood and agreed upon.

— Parent/child visits to the classrooms occur before the school year begins.

— Program policy states and it is practiced that parents are welcome and encouraged to visit classrooms.

— Parents are provided the opportunity to indicate in which areas of the program they would like to volunteer to be involved.

— A parent organization exists which allows parents to take on leadership within the program and to assist in making decisions within the program.

— Confidentiality is maintained concerning all personal and private information regarding each family.

— Annually, parents sign a form giving permission for their children's pictures to be taken and used by the school for publicity and/or community information in printed form and/or online.

— Honest, open, communication with parents is a top priority and occurs on a daily basis. Examples of communication could include: newsletters, notes, phone calls, text messages, written accident reports, e-mails, home visits, Open House and volunteer opportunities.

— At least annually, parents complete a form stating how they wish to be contacted and provide that information, i.e. cell phone, text message, email, facebook, etc. This may be part of the child's enrollment form.
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— There should be many opportunities for the teacher and the parent to communicate concerning the child and his/her needs and progress. These meetings may be formal or informal.
— Formal parent/teacher conferences are held at least once per school year in order to discuss the child’s progress, concerns, and plans for the child’s individual development.
— Information and educational programming for parents dealing with family and child issues are offered. A faith perspective should be included.
— Parents have an opportunity to evaluate the Weekday Preschool Ministry Program annually through a written survey. [Appendix 8]

Classroom Management

Recommended Ratios/Class size:

- Infants: 1:4 Max 8
- Toddlers: 1:5 Max 10
- Twos: 1:6 Max 12
- Threes: 1:8 Max 18
- Fours/Fives: 1:10 Max 20

If your local or state licensing agency ratio is lower, you should meet the lower ratio

Staff Interactions

Staff to Child

— Program staff treats children with respect. Keep in mind “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
— Program staff uses positive discipline to teach children right from wrong, which behaviors are acceptable and which are not and how to respect the rights of others. Discipline is never
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punishment. Discipline is teaching, done positively and with respect and is appropriate to the situation and age of the child.

— The program staff does not use corporal punishment or humiliating or frightening discipline techniques. Food or beverage is never withheld as a form of discipline.

— Program staff is aware that children may display a variety of emotions. Staff helps children indentify these emotions and teaches them appropriate ways to express them.

— The program staff speaks with children in a friendly, positive and courteous manner. Staff speaks to children directly and at their eye level. Communications that are social and informational in nature are used more than maintenance communications. (i.e., “sit down”, “line up” etc.)

— The program staff encourages children's development of independent functioning as appropriate. Routine tasks are incorporated into the program as a means of furthering children's learning, self-help, and social skills.

— The program staff builds a trusting relationship with each child that provides both emotional and physical security.

— Program staff model and encourage social behavior such as helping, sharing and cooperating.

— The program staff is flexible enough to change planned or routine activities according to the needs and interests of the children.

— Program staff offer guidance and encourage communication during problem solving and conflict resolution.

Staff to Parents

— Program staff understands and respects the diversity of the children and their families. Each child and family is loved as children of God.

— Program staff is professional and respectful when communicating with families to create an open dialogue. A strong relationship developed early in the year often helps when dealing with issues that arise later.

— Program staff works with families on shared care-giving issues such as separation, potty training, special needs, food allergies, etc.
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Staff to Staff

— Staff is professional when discussing children and families with other staff.
— Staff model appropriate emotional responses for children when communicating with other staff.

Christian Education

Make Intentional God Connections

We share our faith with children as we help them see themselves as persons of worth.

— When we use positive reinforcement we help them to see themselves as persons of worth. “Jesus loves me this I know” make the God connection.

We share our faith with children when we provide opportunities for children to make choices.

— As we offer children choices which are within their ability to make, we affirm the faith God has in us, and help children learn to use this gift. Offer a prayer for the child to make a good choice. Make the God connection that we can choose to do things that make us sad or things that make us happy. God wants us to be happy.

We share our faith with children as we help them become better stewards of God’s creation.

— Learning rules of health and safety which helps us care for our own bodies – hand washing. Make the God connection that God wants us to take care of our bodies and be happy and healthy.
— Taking care of the earth’s resources, sharing and not hoarding more than we can use. Make the God connection that God is happy when we recycle, share food, and take care of the earth.
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We share our faith with children when we help them practice the rule of love in all attitudes and relationships.

— How to treat one another and learn to handle disagreements, differences, and feelings, using words, kind hands. Let children help one another with boo boos, pour juice, age appropriate service/mission projects. Make the God connection that God wants us to love one another.

We share our faith with children as we provide opportunities for them to be involved with the natural world.

— Explore God’s world and its wonder. Bugs, weather, changing of seasons, through these they experience awe and wonder which are basic to worship. Make the God connection that God gave us all of creation: the plants, animals, ocean, earth, and sky and we must take care of it.

We share our faith with children as we provide opportunities for children to create instead of copy.

— God created us to love God and one another and to create expressions of that love. We encourage this creativity by providing opportunities for children to paint, sculpt, sing, dance, play, pretend, build, glue, cut with scissors and imagine. Make the God connection that God gave us our minds, hands, eyes, voices, and ears to create. [Appendix 9] Post in your centers on an index card to help remind you and other adults who may be in your room to make intentional verbal God connections.

We share our faith with children when we provide opportunities for them to be involved with many other people.

— Community helpers, the custodian, church office staff, senior church members who may volunteer at your school are people the children come to know and experience how we are all interdependent. Make the God connection that we are all part of God’s family and we all have special things we can do that helps others.

We share our faith with children as we use the language of faith in interpreting experiences.

— Use biblically based story books to share stories of faith.
Guidelines for Weekday Preschool Ministry Programs

— Use children’s story bibles, and also adult or youth bibles when telling a bible story and/or sharing scripture in your own words. Using bibles in your classroom helps make the verbal connections between activities, actions, ideas, feelings, and scripture.

**We share our faith with children** when we admit there are things we do not know but are willing to trust God for.

— Make the God connection that we can be sure that God is always with us and wants us to be safe.

**We share our faith with children** when we live it out with them.

— Make the God connection that God loves us and wants us to love one another.
— Children and staff participate in age appropriate worship through weekly *Sacred Circle Time* [Appendix 1] or Chapel Time.

**We share our faith with children** when we are willing to live with them, sharing the richness of everyday living, the hurts, the joy, the needs and the fulfillments offering hope in honest and open ways.

— Children learn to respond in the same ways they have seen us behave. We are not perfect creatures and we share our faith as we share our own growing pains. Make the God connection that God loves us even we have a bad day, are angry, hurt someone, etc.

*You have made a God connection intentionally!*

“When you make intentional use of the bible and bible stories, as well as moral lesson stories, you are not only sharing your faith and making a God connection; you are laying a foundation for your students to use the bible for guidance and information. They will become familiar, respectful, and comfortable with the bible as a tool and guide that they can use as they grow and develop their faith”. – Lynne Paredes, Intentional God-Connection Workshops
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Curriculum

— The program has adopted a written curriculum based on appropriate practice in early childhood. The curriculum may be commercially obtained, created internally, or borrowed from a variety of sources. The program’s philosophy and goals are reflected in the curriculum. [Appendix 1]

— Goals within the curriculum include all the areas of a child’s development.
  o Language & Literacy
  o Cognitive
  o Social/Emotional
  o Physical
  o Spiritual

— Staff members are familiar and intentional when implementing the goals of the curriculum.

— Reports to parents include progress toward those goals.

— The curriculum supports a daily posted schedule which incorporates a variety of activities.
  o Child and teacher initiated activities
  o Large and small group interaction
  o Alternating periods of quiet and active play
  o Daily outdoor experiences, weather permitting
  o Music and movement
  o Development of age appropriate spiritual concepts [Appendix 14]xi

— Staff interact with the children on the playground, and plan activities that children may choose

— Developmentally appropriate activities and materials are used.xi

“You are an important part of the Christian Education ministry of the church if for no other reason than you come to a church each day to do your job. As such, you are called to not only be an educator, but also teach young children how to be in relationship with God and one another. Your students’ faith formation is accomplished by providing opportunities for them to serve, to pray, to worship, to explore scripture in an age appropriate way, and to begin, with guidance, to make the God connections for themselves. All of these opportunities and more help the children experience God’s love through you. It is not what we teach, but how we teach and why we teach that makes the difference.” - But What Makes it Christian by Gloria V. Thomas
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**Health and Safety**

— The preschool and its staff are responsible for each child from the time the child arrives at school until the time the child is picked up at school. Each school has written policies that cover each safety issue readily available to parents and staff in the form of parent and staff handbooks.

— As situations arise there are clear guidelines to follow. Safety policies and procedures are approved by the board of the school and reviewed each year by the staff. The preschool has a policy statement regarding the following safety issues. These policies are well known to staff and implemented throughout the school.

— An operating license and any certificates of inspection relating to health and safety from the state as well as any that the local county or city requires, are posted.

— If you are an unlicensed facility, it is recommended that you be familiar with and strive to meet or exceed the minimum state requirements for a licensed facility.

— **Safe Sanctuaries** Policy protecting children is accepted, implemented, and publicized to both the congregation and parents. All church and preschool staff have attended sexual abuse/neglect training and have signed the church policy concerning child protection.

— Church counseling service [when available] and pastoral care ministries are accessible to Weekday Preschool Ministry Program families and staff.

**Physical Facility/Environment**

**Insurance**

— Appropriate liability and child accident insurance must be currently in effect.

**Outdoor Play Space**

— Children are given opportunities to explore the wonder of God’s world. Children experience awe and wonder which are basic to worship through exploration of creatures, weather and changing seasons, etc.
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— The playground is safe and includes opportunities for pushing, pulling, climbing, crawling, pedaling, throwing, catching, sand play, balancing, running, quiet place.
— The preschool follows the Public Playground Safety Checklist from www.cpsc.gov,\textsuperscript{xiv}
— The preschool follows The Dirty Dozen Checklist found at www.nrpa.org,\textsuperscript{xv}

**Indoor Space**

— Safe indoor space is available for large motor activities.
— Ample space that allows children and adults to move easily is required. Follow local licensing requirements for square footage in your area.
— The facility is in compliance with the local fire marshal requirements.
— Windows allow for natural lighting and some ventilation.
— Walls and other surfaces are in good condition. Paint is lead free.
— Equipment or shelves hung from walls are securely mounted.
— It is recommended that furnishings and all spaces meet guidelines specified in the 2010 Americans with Disabilities Administration \textit{Standards for Accessible Design},\textsuperscript{xvi} to be accessible to parents and children with disabilities.
— Spaces are kept clean, uncluttered and trash is removed as needed.
— Bathrooms are easily supervised and accessible. Provisions such as steps, handrails and other toileting supplies are readily available.

**Indoor Administrative and Storage Space**

— An office is set aside for the preschool administrator that includes a desk, chairs, computer and phone.
— The preschool office provides secure storage for confidential files and records as well as a private location for conversations with staff and parents. If the office is used for conversations with children, the door has a window or remains open. [see \textit{Safe Sanctuaries} policies]
— Storage for extra classroom materials, equipment and furniture are available and easily accessible.
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Classroom Space

— Furniture is age and size appropriate. Adaptive furniture allows for inclusion of children with disabilities.
— A place is set aside and labeled for each child to place his/her belongings.
— Classroom is designed with well defined centers that are easily supervised. Centers include but are not limited to:
  o worship space
  o quiet space
  o blocks
  o dramatic play/housekeeping
  o art
  o discovery/science
  o manipulatives/math
  o reading center/library [include books with Christian values]
  o music
  o sand/water/sensory
— Children's work is respectfully displayed at children's eye level.
— Lesson plans and schedule should be posted in classroom for parents.
— Each classroom is a clean and safe environment
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6. Healthy Church Preschool Checklist
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9. Scripture for Learning Centers
10. Playground Safety
11. Managing Risk in Child Care Centers
12. Screening Workers
13. Weekday Preschool Booklist
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Bibliography

i Weekday Preschool Ministry Programs are defined as any licensed or unlicensed program that works with birth through pre-kindergarten age children. This includes Parents’ Day Out, Part-time and Full-time childcare programs.


vii “Shared Space”, Melanie Gordon, General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church.


xii “What Children Need to Know”. General Board of Discipleship of the United Methodist Church. Available August 2011
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