

2020-2021

THE FALCON'S NEST HANDBOOK

**St. Mary Catholic
School
Preschool**

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**ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE IN A SETTING OF CATHOLIC CHRISTIAN VALUES
SINCE 1869**

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This handbook and the policies stated in it are intended as a guide to student activities and discipline. Since it is impossible to foresee all situations that may arise, the administration reserves the right to set and/or revise policy as needed throughout the 2020-21 school year. New policies and revisions will be communicated to parents. Parents and students are bound by the policies contained in this handbook and the procedures set forth by teachers.

MISSION, PHILOSOPHY, and GOALS

MISSION

The mission of the St. Mary Preschool is to ensure learning for all our students within the framework of Catholic Christian Values.

St. Mary Preschool Philosophy

St. Mary Catholic Preschool understands that an appropriate preschool experience offers a nurturing environment where children have the freedom to play, learn, and interact with one another, discovering the wonders of God's world in the course of a child-oriented day. The St. Mary Preschool provides children opportunities to form relationships - with God, teachers, and peers - and to grow in trust and respect while recognizing the worth of every individual. We recognize that young children learn effectively through discovery and exploration. Simultaneously, we extend children's thinking and knowledge by providing activities and resources based on developmentally appropriate learning goals. Children develop self-confidence in a learning environment that affords opportunities for success and provides the freedom to fail without fear.

GOALS

- To meet the individual needs of the young child by allotting time and opportunity in a planned Catholic educational environment for the spiritual, social, intellectual, emotional, and physical growth of the child.
- To give each child ample opportunity to work and play independently, to learn to live effectively with himself and others, to develop a sense of identity and worth, to experience success, and to enrich and broaden all areas of the child's development.
- To provide a religious education program and faith experiences that will nurture the young child's growth in the love and knowledge of Christ.

ADMISSIONS

Applicants are accepted on the basis of the family's sincere interest in the St. Mary Catholic Preschool program, a willingness to support and cooperate with school policies and philosophy, and the ability to develop and thrive in the academic and spiritual environment. As the child's primary educators, parents are required to support their child's academic efforts and be active participants in their child's moral and social development at school. Parental encouragement and involvement are vital to the child's success.

St. Mary Catholic School welcomes boys and girls of all races, religions, and ethnic origins. In the admissions process, preference is given to siblings of students presently enrolled in Kindergarten through 8th grade and active members of St. Mary Parish and all Catholic parishes, including families from out-of-town parishes. Admissions are processed according to the following priority:

1. Siblings of St. Mary Catholic School (K-8) or Preschool Program
2. Registered and active parishioners of St. Mary Catholic Parish
3. Registered and active parishioners of other Catholic parishes
4. Non-Catholics and Non-participating Catholics

Applicants are invited to visit the school and to meet the principal and other members of the staff and student body. Previous academic records of the child may be reviewed, and parents are asked to provide as much information as possible regarding their child's educational experience, needs, and interests. In order to understand the child's educational background more clearly, the administration may contact the child's previous teachers and/or principal. Every effort is made to meet the needs of children of all learning styles and abilities.

St. Mary Catholic School is limited in its resources to provide individual programs or staff for exceptional students.

The admissions process includes registration forms, payment of registration/educational materials fees, and arrangements for the payment of tuition. The principal makes final decisions on admissions.

DISTANCE LEARNING

St. Mary Catholic School has a plan for transitioning to distance learning strategies in the event of a natural disaster, disease outbreak, or any other circumstances that make it unsafe or imprudent to continue on-campus education. The judgment of the school administration, in consultation with our pastor, and in conjunction with the Catholic Schools Office of the Catholic Diocese of Raleigh, will determine when the change to our school's normal instructional model warrants the transition to distance learning. The strategies used for distance learning will be developed by the school administration and faculty.

In the case of a public health crisis/pandemic situation, guidance from public health experts (i.e. NCDHHS and/or CDC) shall be incorporated into St. Mary Catholic School's plan for prudent precautions for student/faculty health. This plan may be modified as necessary. Parents accept and assume all risk of returning their child to school.

REGISTRATION, TUITION, and FEES

PreK Program

- PreK3 - Child must be 3 years old by August 31, 2020 and potty-trained.
- PreK4 - Child must be 4 years old by August 31, 2020 and potty-trained.
- A copy of each child's latest health evaluation (including immunization record) is due in the school office before the first day of school.
- A NON-REFUNDABLE Registration/Educational Materials fee of \$275 per student is due at the time of registration.
- Tuition payment arrangements must be made at the time of registration.
- Tuition: Morning Program - \$3170
Full Day Program - \$5300
- Parents/Guardians are financially responsible for payment of the full amount of tuition agreed upon by the school and the parent/guardian. Tuition may be paid in full or with 10 monthly payments (July through April) through FACTS Tuition Management.
- For children staying a full day, they may order hot lunch from My Hot Lunch Box.
- In the case of a delinquent tuition payment without a change-of-status agreement with the school, the student may be denied admission to the classroom until a new agreement is established.
- For any items paid by check, there is a returned check fee of \$25.00.
- Continued payment of tuition is required when children are ill or away on family vacations.
- Notice of the withdrawal of a student should be made by the parent in writing to the principal in advance of the withdrawal date. This enables the school to prepare the necessary information and settle accounts. As mentioned above, registration fees are non-refundable. Students who withdraw after the first quarter begins, but before the end of the first quarter, owe $\frac{1}{4}$ of the year's tuition. If a student withdraws after the beginning of a quarter, tuition will be owed for that quarter and any previous quarters of the school year. If a student enrolls/reenrolls and pays the \$275 Registration Fee and withdraws prior to the start of school, they will be obligated to pay the 1st quarter tuition in full.
- All funds designated for the school are to be placed in a marked envelope. The envelope should include the student's name, teacher's name, and an indication of the purpose of the funds.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

We welcome parent involvement at St. Mary School. There are many volunteer opportunities in the St. Mary Catholic School Preschool Program, and we enjoy involving our parents as much as possible. Please do not hesitate to call your child's teacher and/or the Home School Association if you wish to volunteer. It is essential to make sure we are all working together as efficiently as possible. See COVID-19 Appendix.

If you would like to conference with your child's teacher, please make an appointment by note, email, or through the school office. It is not appropriate to conference with your child's teacher at drop-off and pick-up. Please remember that during school hours the teacher's priority is the needs of the children.

Forgotten items delivered to the school must be left in the school office. This avoids unnecessary interruptions while class is in session and provides greater safety for all of our children.

All volunteers and visitors to the school are required to have completed a Personal Information Form that will be issued by and kept on file in the school office. See COVID-19 Appendix.

COMMUNICATIONS

A weekly school newsletter with important school news and notes is sent to parents via email or in print, if preferred. Teachers will establish a consistent communication system that best suits their individual classes. Please keep your contact information current with the school office to ensure that you receive all correspondence. It is important that parents read all communication, especially since some announcements may require immediate attention.

The St. Mary Parish Bulletin contains a School News page which features school events, and the St. Mary School website and FACTS SIS (formerly RenWeb) contain a wealth of current information about school activities.

SCHEDULE

Office: 7:45 am - 3:30 pm daily

Students: Morning Program 8:15 - 12:00 noon, Full Day 8:15 - 2:45 pm,

MORNING DROP OFF PROCEDURES -- RAIN OR SHINE

PreK students will enter the building through the front door of the Lower School where they will be met by the teacher. If the PreK child has an older Lower School sibling, they may come in with their sibling from 7:45 - 8:00 at the front entrance. PreK children who do not have a Lower School sibling should be dropped off by their parents at 8:00 am at the front door of the Lower School. Please do not park at the curb closer to the Lower School between 7:30 and 8:00. This is our “drop-and-go” lane.

LATE ARRIVAL

One of the primary ways we build community is through morning meetings, and we expect ALL children to arrive at school on time so as not to interrupt this important part of the day. In our school, instructional time is viewed as a precious resource. Consequently, we view chronic tardiness as a serious problem. We encourage you to have your child on time each day to promote a consistent routine for your child and for the other children in class.

Should you arrive late, please take your child to the main entrance of the Lower School at 217 S. Fourth St. and check in at the office where your child will receive a late slip. A staff member will escort your child to the classroom.

DISMISSAL - RAIN OR SHINE

PreK students will be dismissed each day from the classroom doors on the courtyard side of the building - at 12:00 pm for “Morning Program” students, and 2:45 pm for “Full Day” students. PreK students with older siblings in the lower school, may be picked up in the car line at the rear entrance to the lower school.

Parents should park on the street and enter the courtyard for pick-up.

“Full Day” students must be picked up at 3:00 pm. There is no program for Preschoolers beyond 3:00 pm. Our teachers have other important afternoon responsibilities. Five (5) late pick-ups are considered excessive. There will be communication from the principal.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Absence: If a child will be absent from school for any reason, the parent must notify the office (linns@thestmaryparish.org) and the teacher. You may leave a voicemail.

Accidents: Parents will be informed of any accidents or injuries sustained by their child during the school day. Should a child experience a medical emergency, an attempt will be made to notify the parents. Depending on the severity of the problem, emergency personnel may be contacted and the child may be transported to the hospital.

Birthdays: Your child's teacher will inform you on the procedure for celebrating birthdays in the classroom.

Child Abuse: St. Mary Catholic School and Preschool abide by the Child Abuse laws of the State of North Carolina. The law mandates that all cases of suspected abuse and/or neglect be reported to Child Protective Services.

Clothing: Children should be dressed in clothing suitable for active play. All removable garments (hats, coats, sweaters, mittens) should be labeled with the child's name. Assume children will be spending some time outdoors each day and dress them appropriately for the weather. For safety, sneakers with laces and/or Velcro are required. No slip-on shoes, Crocs, sandals, or open-toed shoes are permitted. We request that children wear elastic-waist pants with no belts, no pull-ups, and no diapers. Please do not permit your child to wear graphic t-shirts, tutus, cowboy/cowgirl boots, or costumes of any kind. During the school year, costumes may be necessary for special events, and the teachers will notify you.

PreK Tote Bag: Parents are required to purchase the blue pre-school tote bag. Backpacks and rolling bags are not permitted.

Crisis Plan: St. Mary School has a Crisis Plan in place to respond to various types of emergencies (lockdown, severe weather, evacuation). Teachers and staff are trained and practice procedures that are designed to keep children safe. In the event of an emergency, the school will attempt to notify you through the ALERT NOW emergency communication system.

Discipline: Teachers use a variety of techniques in the classroom to support children's development, self-discipline, and social skills. Class rules and routines are discussed with the children early in the school year to ensure that behavioral expectations are clear and consistent. Teachers model and reinforce appropriate behavior, redirect inappropriate behavior, and encourage positive strategies for resolving conflict. When necessary, the teacher may provide the child with a short time away from a group activity to reflect on his/her behavior and to encourage self-control. Parents will be contacted if a child is experiencing behavioral or social difficulties in the classroom. Corporal punishment is never permitted.

Emergency Drills: Children participate in monthly fire drills. Tornado drills are conducted during the month of February.

Enrollment Termination: St. Mary School Preschool has the right to dismiss any child whose needs are not being served by our program and/or whose behavior seriously affects the welfare of others. Prior to dismissal, parents will have been informed of these concerns and efforts to resolve them will have been made.

Full Day Rest Time: Full Day students purchase a rest mat for \$10.00.

Health Concerns: Parents must inform the St. Mary administration and the classroom teacher of any medical conditions that may require emergency medical treatment. If emergency supplies are necessary (i.e. epi pen, nebulizer), it is the parent's responsibility to provide these to the office along with a completed Student Medication Authorization form that has been signed by the child's physician.

Illness: Please keep your child home if she/he has a contagious disease or shows symptoms of illness including fever, vomiting, diarrhea, conjunctivitis (pinkeye), persistent coughing, heavy nasal discharge, or evidence of contagious infestation (lice). Children must be fever-free, without the use of fever-reducing medications, for 24 hours before returning to school. See COVID-19 Appendix.

Inclement Weather: St. Mary School follows the decisions made by New Hanover County Schools on all school closings regarding weather, including early dismissals and delayed openings. Please listen to the local radio and television news reports for the announcements and follow the announcement for New Hanover County Schools. If NHCS are not in school, there will be a St. Mary School notice on WECT.

Playground: The playground is for use by St. Mary Catholic School students and staff only during school hours.

Safe Environment: To ensure the safety of all St. Mary students, background checks are completed on all staff members. In addition, all staff and volunteers must complete a Personal Information Form annually.

Snacks and Lunch: Snacks and lunches brought from home should consist of healthy finger foods (candy is not considered a healthy finger-food) packed in tupperware-type containers or ziplock bags labeled with your child's name. Water should be in spill-proof, refillable bottles. Please do not send in applesauce, yogurt, jello, or other liquid snacks in insulated lunch bags or boxes. Any fruit should be peeled and cut - ready to eat.

All Full Day students have the option of bringing a lunch from home or ordering lunch from My Hot Lunchbox.com. Orders need to be placed and paid for online by noon of the previous day.

Special Needs: A child's successful adjustment in the classroom may be affected by his/her special needs. Teachers will consult with parents in these circumstances, and outside professional consultation can be made available. The goal of intervention is the child's successful adjustment to the classroom. Classroom modifications can be made as long as the needs of all students can be reasonably met. If modifications and interventions are ineffective in helping a child to successfully assimilate into a classroom, St. Mary staff will be

available to work with parents in finding appropriate and beneficial alternatives for the child.

Violent/Aggressive Behavior: St. Mary provides a safe, courteous, and orderly learning environment that respects the dignity of all students. Violence directed at self, other children, or adults will not be tolerated. Should a child engage in any form of violently aggressive behavior, the child's parent will be contacted immediately to remove the child from school that day. Dismissal from St. Mary is warranted if a child is sent home for continued aggressive behavior.

FAMILY CUSTODIAL RECORD

St. Mary Catholic School is finding an increasing number of families experiencing transitions in parental custodial relationships. For this reason, we find it necessary to clarify and restate the usual procedures followed by the administration and faculty in dealing with parents in such situations.

In two-parent families, it is assumed that both parents are living at the same address unless we have been notified otherwise. St. Mary Catholic School personnel will therefore send notices, communications, etc. with the child. It is assumed that both parents are communicating regarding the child and that all information is shared by and between the parents. This information includes, but is not limited to, conference appointments, report cards, interim reports, discussions with school personnel, and tuition statements.

In families experiencing separation of parents or pending divorce, the above information will be sent home with the child to the parent who currently has care of the child. It is assumed that this information is shared by the parents and between the parents. Since this situation frequently impacts a child's achievement and interactions at school, parents are asked to inform both the principal and the teacher so that appropriate support can be given to the child. St. Mary Catholic School personnel cannot proceed on hearsay, rumors, or demands of a parent, but only with the appropriate documentation detailed below.

In cases of an actual divorce decree involving clear custody by one parent, the principal is to be informed by the custodial parent of this fact. A copy of the decree bearing the case number, the pages referring to custody and the relationship with the school, and the final page bearing the judge's signature are to be submitted to the principal. Unless the decree indicates otherwise, school communications will be sent home to the custodial parent*. Custodial parents should understand, however, that unless the divorce decree specifically limits the non-custodial parent's right to access the records, the non-custodial parent** has a right to the same access as the custodial parent.

We will, unless instructed by a Court Order, release such records upon request to the non-custodial parent. “Records” includes official transcripts, report cards, health records, referrals for special services, and communications regarding major disciplinary actions. It does not include daily classwork and papers or routine communications sent through the children to the home or residence. In these cases, the custodial parent is asked to cooperate with the school and share this information directly with the non-custodial parent. This avoids time-consuming duplication of services. Further, you should realize that unless restricted by Court Order, any non-custodial parent has the right to attend any school activity of their child, which includes sports activities and class programs. Parents should keep each other informed as to these activities to avoid duplication of communications and to allow the school to better attend to the duty of teaching your children.

In cases of “joint custody” (shared parenting agreements), entitling both parents’ access to school personnel and activities, it is assumed that one copy of communications and information will be sent home with the child and that this will be shared by and between the parents.

Regarding parent conferences in all custody situations: it is preferred and will be the general procedure that one conference appointment be scheduled “jointly” if both parents wish to be present. It is assumed that parents are able to set aside differences and to come together on behalf of their child for this time. A joint conference further ensures that both parents are given the same information at the same time, thereby avoiding misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

In cases where joint conferences are clearly neither possible nor desirable by all parties involved, alternate arrangements may be discussed with the principal, subject to the approval of both parents, and further reviewed by St. Mary Catholic School’s legal counsel. Every effort will be made to keep communication open with both parents while at the same time avoiding duplication of services and excessive demands on the teacher’s time.

Visitation should generally begin at the home of one of the parents and not at school. It is hoped that visitation arrangements would reflect the sensitivity of both parents to the consistency and routines that foster security in a child and allow for the school responsibilities and homework to be taken care of during the school week.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. If you have any questions concerning these procedures, or circumstances you feel necessitate other arrangements, please contact the principal or pastor personally.

*The custodial parent is understood to mean the parent with whom the child resides.

** The non-custodial parent is understood to mean the parent with whom the child does not reside.