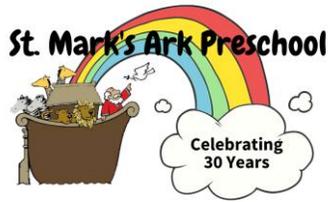


May 9, 2022



**St. Mark's Evangelical
Lutheran Church &
St. Mark's Ark Preschool**

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*"...Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them,
for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." — Mark 10:14*

Dear Parents,

Grace and peace to you and your families during this Easter season. We are deeply grateful to you for entrusting your child into our care, and it is our humble privilege to teach, form, and nurture your child. Thank you.

For more than 30 years, St. Mark's Ark has been an important part of the church's mission. In February 2021, after a 6-month suspension of operations, we made the bold and faith-filled decision to reopen our beloved preschool. We knew that restarting this ministry during a pandemic would be risky and challenging. One year later, we are blessed to continue to serve you and your families as we plan for our future.

The last year has presented significant challenges in the childcare industry, and St. Mark's Ark is not exempt. Preschools within our community, as well as nationwide, are facing significant staffing shortages. These shortages have caused many schools to fall out of compliance for classroom ratios and forced others to adjust their hours of operation to prevent overtime and teacher burnout.

At St. Mark's Ark, we are proud to say that we continue to receive perfect inspection reports from DCF, and our classrooms remain in compliance. Your child's safety and education are our top priority. St. Mark's Ark is thinly staffed, which means that honoring our employee's PTO requests is very challenging. In fact, our director, Tiffany, is regularly filling in a classroom. This situation with the hiring market requires us to be creative in meeting our current needs and put our growth plans on hold.

Without question, our teachers are the foundation of our wonderful school, and they are vital to the success of this ministry. St. Mark's Ark is incredibly blessed to have an experienced, highly qualified, and dedicated staff of teachers. However, at this moment, losing even one teacher to burnout or fatigue would, at best, place the ministry at risk of citation, and at worst, result in a more difficult conversation about viability.

Therefore, while we continue our efforts in hiring and honoring time-off requests, the St. Mark's Ark Advisory Committee has made the decision to adjust our preschool's operational schedule for the summer session, starting the week of June 6. This adjustment will grant our teachers a much needed and well-deserved rest, which is an opportunity for them to care for themselves, their health, and their families.

For nine weeks, starting the week of June 6, we will reduce our days of operation from 5 days a week (M-F) to 4 days a week (M-Th). The one exception to this decision is the week of July 4th, when we are closed Monday for the holiday, but will be open on Friday, July 8 (see schedule below). Additionally, each classroom will rotate to a week of early release, closing at 5 p.m. This decision helps reduce the number of staff needed each afternoon for us to stay in compliance. The schedule is below.

Please know that this was not an easy decision to make. We understand changes in the schedule for your child's care may put a burden on you. Our goal continues to be an excellent provider for your children and our community, and to do so we must also provide excellent care for our staff. This adjustment to our summer session will set us all up for success as we begin a new school year this Fall. We ask for your patience, understanding and prayers for us and all childcare centers in our community and our country.

2022 Summer Session schedule is as follows:

Week of 6/6 — closed Friday 6/10/22. Lambs class closes at 5 p.m. for the week.
Week of 6/13 — closed Friday 6/17/22. Kangaroos class closes at 5 p.m. for the week.
Week of 6/20 — closed Friday 6/24/22. Polars class closes at 5 p.m. for the week.
Week of 6/27 — closed Friday 7/1/22. Turtles class closes at 5 p.m. for the week.
**Week of 7/4 — closed Monday 7/4/22. Lambs class closes at 5 p.m. for the week. (Open 7/8)*
Week of 7/11 — closed Friday 7/15/22. Kangaroos class closes at 5 p.m. for the week.
Week of 7/18 — closed Friday 7/22/22. Polars class closes at 5 p.m. for the week.
Week of 7/25 — closed Friday 7/29/22. Turtles class closes at 5 p.m. for the week.
Week of 8/1 — closed Friday 8/5/22. Lambs class closes at 5 p.m. for the week.

Please see the attached FAQ sheet.

Sincerely,

Bridget Pudimat
Chair, St. Mark's Ark Advisory Committee

Ray Booth
President, St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Rev. Daniel Locke
Pastor, St. Mark's Lutheran Church

Summer Session Announcement FAQs

Does my weekly tuition change?

No. Your weekly tuition rates will remain the same during the summer session. This is necessary to ensure no loss in compensation to our staff, maintain facility contracts, and pay for regular utilities.

Will teacher compensation be affected by summer session schedule?

No. All staff will be compensated for the days we are closed. They will be compensated for the hours they would typically be scheduled to work. However, there is no obligation for teachers to work on these days. They may use the time as best they see fit.

Is this decision a sign of the preschool closing?

Absolutely not. St. Mark's Church Council, as well as our Ark Advisory Committee, remain committed to the ministry of St. Mark's Ark. We continue to plan for the new school year, and we are working tirelessly and creatively to resolve staffing needs.

Will St. Mark's Ark offer VPK this Fall?

Yes. Our Director, Tiffany, is currently working with the Early Learning Coalition to renew our VPK certificate. Tiffany will be in contact with all eligible families in the coming weeks regarding VPK registration.

What can I do to help?

Thank you for asking! First, as a faith-based preschool, we invite you to join us in prayer. Each week in worship, our community of faith prays for the school, the staff, and you – our precious families.

Second, shower our teachers with love, support, praise, and, if inclined, gifts or treats. If you would like to provide a meal or gift for our teachers, please contact Tiffany Bell to arrange the details.

Third, please help us recruit. If you know anyone who has a love and passion for children and is seeking employment, please refer them to Tiffany Bell.

Finally, we intend to implement opportunities for volunteering this Fall. When the time comes, we invite you to consider giving of your time to support our staff in a variety of ways.