

Rector's Report on St. Gregory's Episcopal Preschool
April 18, 2010

When I gave my Report on the Spiritual Condition of the Parish last January at our Annual Meeting, I said this about our Preschool:

"Although it is a small program, it is paying its own way and has a healthy net worth balance of over \$15,000."

While that description was accurate from one perspective, several parishioners rightly objected that from other perspectives it failed to give the parish a complete picture of the Preschool's current situation.

When I said that the Preschool is "paying its own way," I included the Preschool's two major funding sources, tuitions and the annual Preschool Auction. It is also true that the Preschool is "paying its own way" because it doesn't draw any of its funds from our Operating Budget.

However, I readily concede the point that ultimately "paying its own way" means that Preschool tuitions are sufficient to cover Preschool expenses without an annual infusion of funds from the Preschool Auction.

Unfortunately, progress toward that ultimate goal of "paying its own way" has suffered a reverse this year. After three years of slow growth in enrollment, this year's enrollment fell from 16 students last year to 12 students this year.

Here is a summary of Preschool enrollment figures from our first academic year to our current academic year. The timing of half-day Kindergarten assignments in the public schools is the primary reason we gain new students over the course of the year:

School Year	Beginning Enrollment	Ending Enrollment
2006-2007	4	8 (plus 4 non-paying parishioners)
2007-2008	8	13
2008-2009	11	16
2009-2010	10	12
2010-2011	12*	

* includes 6 new students whose registration fees are paid, 3 new students whose parents have made verbal commitments, and 3 returning students. In addition, 2 more children will enroll during the fall after their 3rd birthdays.

6 of the 12 students are parishioners, and the additional 2 are also parishioners.

Notwithstanding a brighter outlook for our Preschool's next academic year, this year's reduced Preschool enrollment, coupled with this year's reduced parish Operating Budget, has led some parishioners to ask the Vestry whether the Preschool should continue, and whether the money raised by our annual Auction should go to other parish needs.

Let me offer a brief history of our Preschool to set the context for the current situation.

In the fall of 2004 we conducted a Parish Survey for the 2005 Stewardship Campaign. The fourth question was: "What new program or activity would you like St. Gregory's to offer our community?" Suggestions included opening a "pre-school."

In January 2005, the Vestry formed a Blue Ribbon Commission to answer the question “Can we develop our property to provide income for our parish’s mission and ministry and to serve the needs of the Deerfield community?” The Commission considered many ideas, among them the idea of a preschool.

In early 2006, Jim Swarthout approached me with a proposal to begin a Preschool. Jim had served on our staff during 2002 as part of his transition from being a Roman Catholic priest to being an Episcopal priest. Jim had the credentials and certifications necessary to be the Preschool’s Director, and he made presentations to the Wardens and then to the Vestry.

On March 14, 2006, the Vestry voted unanimously to investigate the possibility of having a preschool, and to raise the additional funds necessary to hire Jim and cover other start-up costs. By the following Sunday the Vestry alone had committed over \$15,000 toward those costs, provided that the rest of the parish match their commitment for a total of at least \$30,000.

The money was raised, and in record time we successfully received approvals from the Village of Deerfield’s Plan Commission and the Department of Children and Family Services, hired our current staff, and opened for the 2006-2007 academic year.

Our hopes for enrollment were not realized, and we didn’t have the income to keep Jim as our Preschool Director. Fortunately, he had hired a teacher who was also qualified to be the Director, and so Debbie Ham-Bolger succeeded Jim. She and teacher Sara Lemrise kept the Preschool going.

When I gave my Report on the Spiritual Condition of the Parish at the Annual Meeting in January 2007 I outlined four challenges, including “Challenge Number Four: to decide the immediate future of our Preschool”:

“As of this morning we have twelve children enrolled in our preschool: eight are paying tuition (including one parishioner), and four are parishioners who responded to our invitation to add to the number of children prospective parents see when visiting the classroom. Of these twelve, only five are eligible and likely to enroll for the 2007-2008 academic year. And so far no one has enrolled for next fall.

“This is our current situation despite the fact that we have begun to generate positive word-of-mouth publicity, and that we tried an extensive advertising campaign

“We will be able to keep our Preschool going through February, but unless our current situation significantly improves we will have no choice but to bring an end to this chapter in our history. . . .

“Somehow, and eventually, I am sure we will find a way forward, either to keep our Preschool going or to bring it back to life sometime in the future, and that the time will come when all the hopes that originally excited us will be realized and we will be able to repay our investments and make positive contributions to our life as a parish and to our community.”

A year later at the 2008 Annual Meeting I reported that “We did decide to keep our Preschool open, and this year has seen a larger attendance and stronger financial base. The Preschool is still reliant on a successful Auction and Taste of Deerfield™.”

When Jim Swarthout left the Preschool at the end of 2006, we lost his entrepreneurial spirit and skills, and his ability to devote the time it takes to promote any new venture. Neither Debbie Ham-Bolger nor I have Jim's gifts, nor do Debbie and I have the time to promote the Preschool with our respective responsibilities in the Preschool and in the Parish. On the other hand, Debbie Ham-Bolger has the organizing skills which Jim lacked, and these skills have served us well. Last year we successfully renewed our license with DCFS. Debbie is also an excellent teacher, and so is Sara. Together they have built a quality program.

In the meantime, the Parish necessarily turned its attention to other pressing concerns. After some parishioners raised important questions at our 2008 Annual Meeting about our financial situation, I decided to chair the Finance Committee. Subsequently, I called a Special Parish Meeting on Palm Sunday. We presented the results of the Finance Committee's work, reset our financial position, and announced the need to raise our giving or cut our budget. As a result, we finished 2008 with a balanced budget, and set in motion the new policies which culminated successfully when we closed our books on December 31, 2009.

At the same time we were addressing our financial health, we began working to develop a Sabbatical proposal and a Master Plan.

Throughout 2009 we worked on the Master Plan, which we approved at January's Annual Meeting. We also prepared for and experienced our separate Sabbatical times. On my return we turned our attention to the Parish Office, the Buildings and Grounds Management Team, and the Missions Board.

Now we need to turn our attention to the Preschool, even as we take the necessary steps to preserve our parish's hard-won financial health.

The first step is to reconstitute St. Gregory's Preschool Board, and this is underway. Art Bielski, Jon Dutcher, Catherine Martin, and David Schaper have agreed to continue as At-Large members, and Marty Esgar and Mike Hill have agreed to serve as two of the three Vestry members on the Board.

The first meeting of the Preschool Board will be within the next two weeks.

The second step will be for the Preschool Board to recommend to the Vestry a set of objectives to achieve the Preschool's original three goals:

1. an outreach to the community,
2. a self-supporting ministry which contributes to our Operating Budget for its share of space and utilities, and
3. a source of new members for our parish.¹

Along with this set of objectives, the Preschool Board will recommend benchmarks to assess progress toward these objectives, and, if those benchmarks are not reached, an orderly process for bringing our Preschool venture to a close without abandoning its last students.

The final step will be for the Vestry to report back to the October Quarterly Meeting.

¹ This year we welcomed the first new family to join our parish based on their experience in our Preschool.

I hope we all agree that it would be better for our Preschool to succeed than to fail, and there are reasons to think that by giving our Preschool the attention it deserves we may yet realize its founding promise.

First, let's review the Preschool's Operating Budget history with a summary of its income and expenses. A more detailed summary follows this report, and complete financial reports are available.

	2006-2007	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010 (ao 3/31)
Income	\$46,137	\$42,009	\$51,195	\$36,499
Expense	\$48,134	\$37,485	\$42,270	\$34,737
Total	\$(1,997)	\$ 4,524	\$ 8,924	\$ 1,763

The 2008-2009 Expense figure excludes a pension payment for Jim Swarthout that was made in December 2008 but accrued in the Preschool's first year. Just a year ago, the Preschool was only two 2-Day Kindergarten Enrichment students shy of "paying its own way" without any Auction funds. With an anticipated fall enrollment of 14 students already for 2010-2011, it is possible that we might "pay our own way" next year.

Second, there is reason to think that many of our parishioners continue to support the Preschool and would welcome our renewed attention to its success. Three years ago during the "Visioning our Future" exercise in conjunction with our Giving Campaign, the Preschool was mentioned several times, including this comment: "The Preschool represents something larger to this parish than serving preschoolers."

Last year's Church Assessment Tool had three supplementary questions, one of which asked parishioners to respond to this statement: "The preschool is an important ministry of our church that we should continue to support financially." Out of 115 responses, 25 tended to agree; 28 agreed; and 40 strongly agreed.²

Third, we are slowly but definitely building an excellent reputation, not only through the parents of our students, but also at Wilmot Elementary School. Debbie and Sara have developed good working relationships with Wilmot's kindergarten teachers and staff. This year the teachers referred a Wilmot student with special needs to us by teachers at the school, providing tuition assistance from the Deerfield Emergency Fund and the Wilmot PTO. The teachers at Wilmot are extremely pleased with the child's progress since enrolling in our Preschool.

At the end of each school year a 10 question survey is given to the parents. Most of the parents return the survey. Our average satisfaction rating is 4.9 out of 5. Parents also comment, and each academic year's surveys are available for review. A sample of their comments follow this report.

² Here are the other responses: 6 didn't know; 9 tended to disagree; 2 disagreed; and 5 strongly disagreed. In sum, 81% of parishioners agreed that we should continue to support our Preschool. Two parishioners mentioned the Preschool in the Open-ended Responses section: "Make ecumenical initiatives to broaden the base of our preschool; for example, connecting with Holy Cross, which has no preschool, to promote ours." and support "Activities that non members would be interested in attending— like the Troop Package program and Preschool."

Finally, the Preschool Board will not need to start from scratch in developing plans for strengthening our Preschool so it can achieve its goals. Early last month while Debbie and Ida Butler were talking about the Preschool, Debbie realized that Ida has a lot of experience from her previous work as an early child care and education teacher and consultant.³ Debbie asked me if she and Ida could work up some proposals, and of course I agreed.

Here are three ideas that they will present for the Preschool Board's consideration:

1. Begin a Mom-and-Tot program as a feeder into the Preschool program.
2. Expand our 3 Day Preschool and Kindergarten Enrichment programs to 5 Days.
3. Offer full-day private Kindergarten beginning in the 2011-2012 academic year.

Debbie recently emailed past and present Preschool parents regarding these ideas, and their responses will be given to the Preschool Board for their review.

Debbie also spoke to Mrs. Michelle Whelan, a Kindergarten teacher at Wilmot. She told Debbie that there won't be a full-day kindergarten in District 109 for the foreseeable future. She feels that a 5 day kindergarten or 5 day kindergarten enrichment program are necessary in the community for working parents who do not want their kids bused to Day Care. She told us to "go for it."

³ Ida has over 19 years of experience in educational administration that include directing a private school, owning and operating a family child care program, and providing leadership and training to early care and education professionals through Illinois Action for Children, and the Illinois Network of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies.

She has served as the board president and executive director for the Illinois Association for Family Child Care; business manager for the McCormick Tribune Center for Early Childhood Leadership at National-Louis University; and a teacher at the Oakton Community College Early Childhood Education Demonstration Center.

As a frequent presenter at local, state, and national early care and education conferences, Ida trained providers and teachers on starting and managing child care businesses and creating high-quality learning environments.

She has been certified to train on Creative Curriculum for Preschool, Level 1 Credential, Child Development Overview, Environment Rating Scales (ERS), Standard First Aid, and Adult, Child, and Infant CPR. Ida also served as a Child Development Associate (CDA) Advisor.

As an advocate for excellence in early care and education, Ida served on the National Association for Family Child Care Presidents' Council; the Illinois Department of Human Services Child Care and Development Advisory Council; the Illinois Gateways to Opportunity Professional Development Advisory Council; the Illinois Early Learning Council Infant Toddler Committee and Oversight and Coordination Committee; the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services Day Care Licensing Committee; and the Illinois State University Leadership to Integrate the Learning Continuum (LINC) Advisory Committee.

Sample of Preschool Survey Results

At the end of each school year a 10 question survey is given to the parents. Most of the parents return the survey. Our average satisfaction rating is 4.9 out of 5. Parents also comment. The following are some survey comments and notes parents have sent. The entire file of surveys is available for review. Initials replace names for privacy.

1. The program was wonderful!
2. A. and H. have enjoyed 2 years at St. Gregory's. They have thrived in Mrs. Bolger's and Mrs. Lemrise's loving and educational environment. Both girls are well prepared for 1st grade. Thank you, St. Gregory's for providing Deerfield with a wonderful early educational program.
3. C. has had a fantastic experience at St. Greg's!! I would recommend this enrichment program to anyone looking for an educational environment that is also loving, fun and provides a variety of learning experiences. It is apparent that both teachers and helpers truly care for, and respect the children. Both C. and I are sad that we are saying "goodbye"- but we will be back to visit. This is an outstanding program!!
4. Perfect!
5. T. loves coming to school and her development these past 8 months has been incredible! You offer such a compliment to her at home environment!
6. I feel J. is in an environment that encourages positive learning in all aspects of his life as well as academics. I hope St. Gregory's will continue the program for the Fall.
7. The program has been excellent, balancing the curriculum at school, as well as providing a really fun, nurturing educational experience. I have absolutely no negative feedback. All positive... Wish I would have been able to keep them here longer.
8. My daughter is thriving in St. Gregory's Preschool. The small class size creates a quieter atmosphere and allows for more meaningful contact with teachers and peers. This is the type of environment in which she does best. It has been a welcome change from the frantic pace of the other preschool.
9. When P. started at Bannockburn School, his kindergarten teacher commented on how much he already knew and said that he must have been in a great preschool program. Of course, we agreed and told her about St. Gregory's. We've also told many friends and neighbors about St. Gregory's Preschool. We can't say enough wonderful things about your program. P. liked it so much that whenever anyone asks him what he's going to be when he grows up, he tells them he's going to teach preschool at St. Gregory's!

Income	9/06-8/07	9/07-8/08	9/08-8/09 incl JS Pension	9/08-8/09 excl JS Pension	9/09-8/10 as of 3/31
Registration Fees	\$ 1,420	\$ 800	\$ 250	\$ 250	\$ 1,155
Tuition	\$ 9,665	\$ 18,172	\$ 27,645	\$ 27,645	\$ 16,385
Fund-Raising	\$ 11,891	\$ 11,693	\$ 15,373	\$ 15,373	\$ 13,843
Other Income	\$ 23,161	\$ 11,344	\$ 7,927	\$ 7,927	\$ 5,116
Total Income	\$ 46,137	\$ 42,009	\$ 51,195	\$ 51,195	\$ 36,499
Expenses					
Preschool Promotion	\$ 3,039	\$ 929	\$ 3,301	\$ 3,301	\$ 3,490
Director	\$ 10,480	\$ 0	\$ 3,776		\$ 0
Assistant Director	\$ 13,456	\$ 16,472	\$ 17,374	\$ 17,374	\$ 14,017
Teachers	\$ 9,705	\$ 12,600	\$ 13,276	\$ 13,276	\$ 11,067
Other Expenses	\$ 11,454	\$ 7,483	\$ 8,319	\$ 8,319	\$ 6,163
Total Expenses	\$ 48,134	\$ 37,485	\$ 46,046	\$ 42,270	\$ 34,737
Overall Total	\$ (1,997)	\$ 4,524	\$ 5,148	\$ 8,924	\$ 1,763

The Preschool's Net Worth as of January 31, 2010 is \$18,018.86.