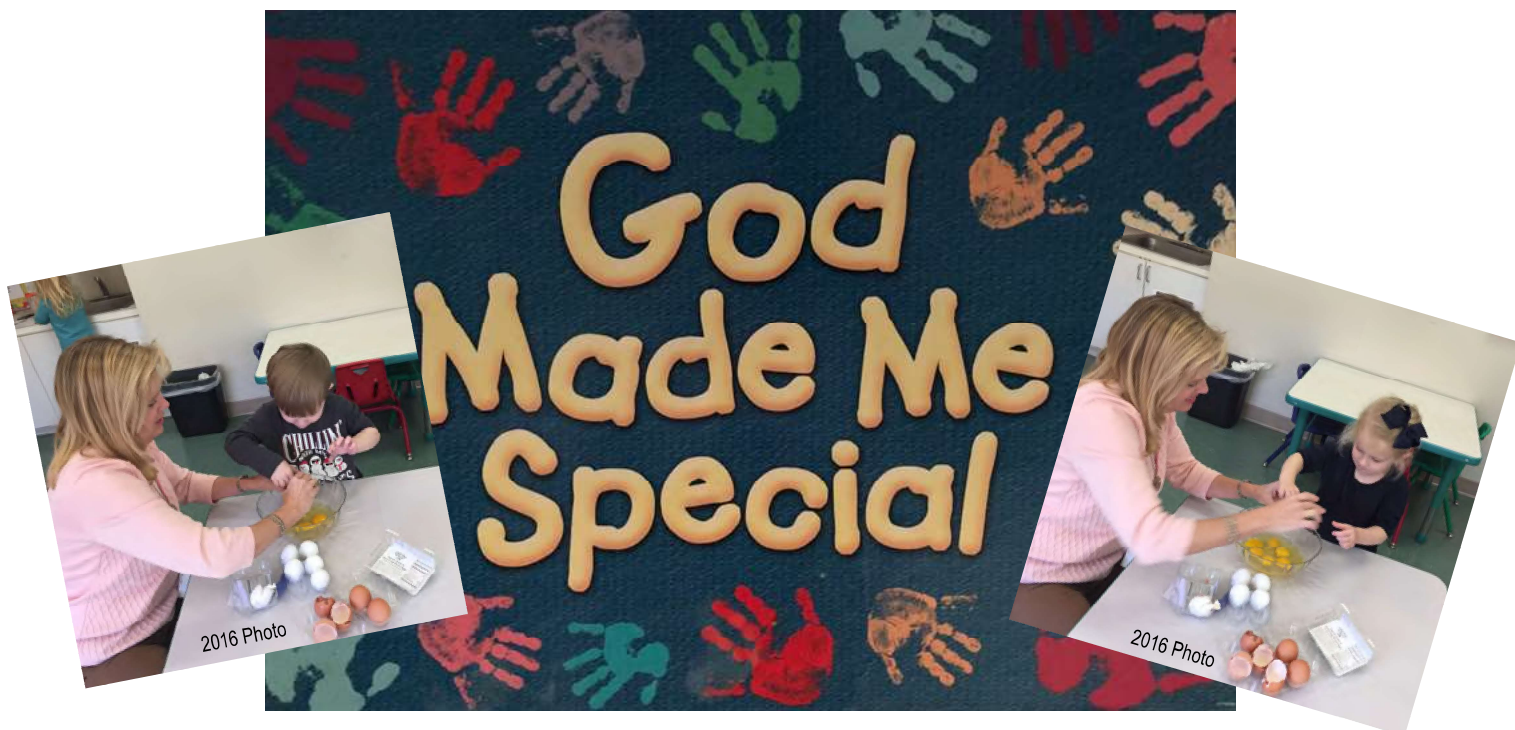


# EDUCATION MINISTRIES

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*"Therefore welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you, for the glory of God."* Romans 15:7

As our nation prepares to observe Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, I am reminded how important it is for our children to learn tolerance, patience, and empathy for others. This is especially true given the social unrest which has plagued our country in recent months.

As preschool educators, I feel that we play a key role in helping to instill these "welcoming" and inclusive values because we are lucky enough to have the children with us at the beginning of their educational journeys. They come to us without prejudices, grudges, or harsh opinions of others. They are open to the newness of being at preschool and all of the experiences that await them, including making new friends.

In preschool we can plant the seeds of acceptance and nurture embracing others whether they are similar to us or not. We can explore the uniqueness of differences while emphasizing the richness of diversity. Initiating and building friendships with those around us is one of the hallmarks of an early childhood education. We teach recognition of our

differences, often starting with physical appearances, as these are generally the easiest and most concrete examples. We help the children learn to appreciate the uniqueness and specialness of each one of them. As Catholic educators, we are able to strengthen this appreciation with emphasis on God making all of us in His image. God created us and loves each one of us as we are; we are called to do the same as followers of Him. It doesn't matter if we have blue eyes or brown or if we can kick a ball farther or ride a bike faster than someone else. Some of us have purple hair, new shoes, crazy socks, or use a wheelchair. We are all considered special in the eyes of our Lord. We should, therefore, remember this when we encounter those around us who have other special gifts, looks, talents, or abilities.

At preschool, our teachers intentionally plan activities and play opportunities to weave the concepts of acceptance, care, friendship, and tolerance of everyone into their days. One of my favorite activities involved cracking open white and brown eggs. The lesson was used to illustrate

with the class that no matter how someone looks on the outside, God made us all the same on the inside. Another way that I have seen this message shared is by having the children create a picture of themselves. By doing so, everyone in the class can see that some have brown hair or black hair, some have freckles, or pierced ears, but ultimately, we all have eyes, ears, a nose, and mouth.

I would encourage you to look for opportunities to encourage these lessons with the children who are special in your life. These are only a few examples, but there are many more out there! In addition, never forget the power behind teaching a child to pray to God....teaching them to pray for others who are not recognized for their uniqueness or treated kindly because they are different. Any chance to reiterate that we are all God's children is never wasted!

Registration for the 21-22 school year is open! To learn how to join our amazing preschool, please visit our website at [www.preschoolatstfrancis.com](http://www.preschoolatstfrancis.com) or contact Shelley Freeman at [shelley.freeman@stfrancisraleigh.org](mailto:shelley.freeman@stfrancisraleigh.org).