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CATHOLIC CENTER FOR EARLY LEARNING EARNs NATIONAL ACCREDITATION

Program Is Now Recognized Among the Top in the Nation

St. Jerome Early Childhood Center located in Largo has earned accreditation from the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC)—the world's largest

organization working on behalf of young children.

NAEYC Accreditation is a rigorous quality-improvement system that incorporates 10 research-based standards to collaborate with early education programs to recognize and drive quality-improvement in high-quality early learning environments.

“We’re proud to have earned the mark of quality from NAEYC, and to be recognized for our commitment to reaching the highest professional standards,” said Phyllis Steele, Administrator.

“Our program was established in 1990 and provides a faith-based learning environment in which children can learn and grow. Our mission is to help each child achieve developmental milestones and develop skills for school success and lifelong learning,” she added.

One of the unique offerings at St. Jerome is their Outdoor Classroom, which is a response to the newly coined phrase in Early Education known as “Nature Deficiency.” The outdoor space features a nature-rich learning environment. This setting is ideal for exploration, scientific discovery, mathematical thinking, creative expression, language, and social-emotional skill development. All the materials are natural (such as seashells and pinecones), recycled or repurposed (such as pots and pans for making sounds in the music center). Additionally, children are able to hear the Word of God while surrounded by the beauty of His creation. Bible lessons and songs take place on the grass under the pergola.

“It looks like they are just playing and having fun (and they are!) but we know they are establishing the foundation of skills they will need for a lifetime. Our philosophy of learning through play has brought joy and inspired growth for our students in all areas of development,” said Ms. Steele.

The Outdoor Classroom is used by each class once per week. It does not replace their regular outdoor play time. The water pump and mud kitchen are most popular with the children. This type of play helps children to process and integrate sensory input from the world around them. When they make “tea and cake” for a friend, they are engaged in representational play which is the foundation for language development.

To earn NAEYC Accreditation, St. Jerome went through an extensive self-study and quality-improvement process, followed by an on-site visit by NAEYC Assessors to verify and ensure that the program met each of the ten program standards, and hundreds of corresponding individual criteria. NAEYC-accredited programs are always prepared for unannounced quality-assurance visits during their accreditation term, which lasts for five years.

In the 30 years since NAEYC Accreditation was established, it has become a widely recognized sign of high-quality early childhood education. More than 6,000 programs are currently accredited by NAEYC—less than 10 percent of all childcare centers, preschools, and kindergartens nationally achieve this recognition.

“NAEYC-Accredited programs have committed to a process that takes time, energy and dedication to complete” states Alissa Mwenelupembe, Senior Director Early Learning Program Accreditation. “St. Jerome has demonstrated their commitment to young children and their families.”



For more information about NAEYC Accreditation, visit [the NAEYC website](#).

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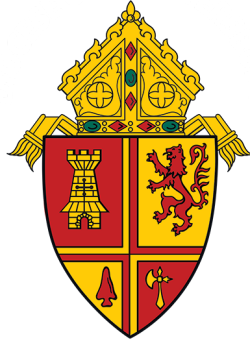
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Gulf Coast Catholic was created by the Diocese of St. Petersburg to serve Tampa Bay, the Suncoast and the Nature Coast. We share positive and relevant articles that help you live your best Catholic life. Bishop Gregory Parkes is the publisher and Teresa Peterson is the Content Manager. You can reach us at communicate@dosp.org.

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