

Spotlight on Crestwood Parent's Day Out

My goodness, times have changed. Clearly, the change is good, especially when seen from the eyes of the children. Ions ago, when my kids were little, I dropped them off a couple of mornings a week at a local Mothers' Day Out Program. I assumed they would have a good time and would still be alive when I picked them up a few hours later. My expectations weren't too high.

Crestwood is showing me how deprived my children must have been.

I've never seen anything quite as impressive as the Crestwood Parent's Day Out Program (PDO) started in the fall of 2016. Founded by Peggy King and Lauren York, the program meets in the children's wing of our church. The universal name of the program has changed over the years. Parent's Day Out is more reflective of today's parenting world than Mother's Day Out when many of us were stay-at-home moms.

The facilities, the programming, the incredible number of brightly-colored toys – all educational in a fun way– left me in a heady wonderment of what it might be to be a child again.

Today, the Crestwood PDO has a capacity of forty students, ages 1-4 with ten paid staff, all with teaching and childcare certifications galore. In addition, there is a director and an assistant director who float between classrooms as needed. Currently, there are 29 children enrolled, but it is anticipated that number will increase as people get more comfortable with post-covid activities. The program is financially independent of Crestwood, but as a non-profit, it is a ministry of Crestwood. This high quality of child-care is complex and takes a lot to run efficiently. Tuition is \$50 a child for a two-day week plus a yearly fee of \$75. One scholarship is provided each school year. The program meets Wednesday and Friday 9:00am-1:00pm and follows the Fayette County School Calendar.

Currently, there are no Crestwood children enrolled in the program, but in the past, I'm told, the Parent's Day Out program resulted in several new members for our church. The Director, Tara Monzon, is a member.

The classrooms are divided by age, with appropriate activities for each level. The teachers explain it is a Christian curriculum, and learning obviously can be fun. Each room has "learning centers" and there is an over-all theme each week. When I visited, the theme was "fall", the shape of the day was a square, the number was 4, and the letter was D.

There are dramatic play areas, with every imaginable tool and toy in each room. Colorful and educational posters dance up the walls. The large space in the center of the rooms is called the flex space and is used for more physical activities and interactions with children of other ages. It has a child-sized trampoline, basketball goal, and a sensory bin which is a deep table filled with corn kernels. It's like the sand tables we used to have, only much more sensible for indoor play, and frankly looks like more fun. The program shares the outdoor play equipment with the Child Care Center on a set schedule.

When I visited, the preschoolers were making cookies while learning skills of cutting, measuring, mixing. They were making Autumn toast (cinnamon toast)– cutting bread into squares (shape of the day) with scissors. They measured the ingredients, learned about numbers. Each one was completely engaged.



Next, I visited the music room where a teacher comes each Wednesday from *Musikgarten*, a private company specializing in children's music. The classes take turns visiting the music room which has hula hoops, tambourines, and chimes. While I was there, they sang good morning to each individual child and all were soon clapping, pounding sticks, and waving with the music.

Some years they have even offered Spanish lessons, Handwriting without Tears, and Baby Sign Language.

It is difficult to fully describe all the wonderful items available to the children to develop their creativity. They are surrounded with miniature kitchens, fields and streams printed on table tops for imaginative play, and stuffed animals galore.

During my visit I did not hear a single child cry. I heard lots of happy sounds, saw busy children and teachers, and I didn't see a single cellphone, tablet, or electronic device! Imagination and child-like wonder was everywhere. And somewhere, parents, guardians, and grandparents were catching up with work, running errands, or taking a much-needed nap.

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In the process of touring, I THINK I may have solved a puzzling mystery that has been niggling some brains. Months ago, when I spotlighted the Crestwood library, we found that the children's library books had been moved to the children's wing, but the whereabouts were unknown. We could not track down the books. But I was told the PDO has a nice collection of books in the classrooms and closet. Some were purchased and some were already there I was told. My guess is some of the library books were given to them, rather than to the Sunday School program. At least that's the story I'm going with! Maybe they were in the Sunday School wing all along. Regardless, it is nice to know the books are being used, and Parent's Day Out is a good use for them.

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If there is some area of the church you would like to know more about, please share your ideas with me. Let's explore together.

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