



Grace Nursery Staff Serious About Quality Childcare

By Barb Ceruti

"I'm pretty picky about who I hire," said Childcare Coordinator Jill Mieszala, who has provided care to Grace youngsters for the past 12 years. "I have to look at these children's parents and know I picked the best people." A former nanny and mother of three young children, Jill is joined by a staff of five other women who are either parents, grandparents, early childhood professionals, or all of the above.

"Our job application asks people why they want to work with children," explains Jill. "I think that is one of the most important questions, because I don't want someone to apply just because they need the money. I prefer that they've had experience with kids." Adds Kathleen Powers, a mother of a two-year-old and former early childhood teacher who has been a childcare provider at Grace for the past eight years, "You

also have to have compassion and love; that's the most important thing."

According to Vanessa Caicedo, hired two years ago, "You need to treat the children like they were your own." Vanessa works in a daycare center during the week and is studying to be an early childhood teacher. She also babysits for the three Fahs children, "regulars" in the Grace childcare program whom Jill and her co-workers have fondly watched grow.

"I can't believe how the kids we've watched over the years have changed!" says Jill. This sense of family toward their charges, as well as one another, is immediately apparent among the women in the two nursery rooms. "It feels like the kids and their parents are our family," said Kathleen. Said Vanessa, who moved to this area from New York, "I feel like I'm not even at a job

on Sunday mornings. I feel so blessed to have met these people; they're like family." Jill (whose culinary and domestic skills have earned her the moniker of "Martha Stewart") hosts a Christmas party each year for her staff. "I just appreciate them so much." The feeling is mutual among parents. Said Lori Fahs, "Our nursery staff is wonderful. They always greet the children by name and seem genuinely excited to see them."

Joining Jill, Kathleen and Vanessa are Onalee Taylor, Maralee Green and Santosh Gupta, the "grandma" in the Grace childcare family, whose Hindu lullabies have calmed a number of fussy babies over the years. When children cannot be consoled, a pager system is employed. "Fifteen minutes is our rule of thumb; if we can't calm a child after that amount of time, we page their parents," said Jill, who

also supplies parents with a Nursery Handbook explaining policies and practices. "We recommend that parents play in the room with their child for a while until they know they're comfortable." In

addition to making sure youngsters are happy, the staff is also aware of any special needs, allergies, etc. they may have. Snacks are not allowed, so as to eliminate any risk of food allergies.

While Grace childcare providers are paid staff, they are happy to accept the help of parent volunteers as well as youth, who often help out at larger events such as "Kids Camp In," when children come for an evening of fun while their parents go out. "I hope parents are aware that



(seated) Jill Mieszala; (back row, from left) Kathleen Powers, Onalee Taylor, Maralee Green, Vanessa Caicedo, San-

we are here and that our services are free," said Jill. "I encourage them to come and see what we're all about."

CHILDCARE 101

Grace nursery hours are 8:15 a.m.-12:00 noon on Sunday mornings in Rooms 130 (infants) and 131 (toddlers). There is also free childcare provided during all events at Grace.

Please make reservations 5-7 days in advance. This is very important! Reservation forms are in the church office, or call Jill Mieszala at 630-499-9391.