

# Plymouth Nursery School

BY JAN VAN WYK

Director, Plymouth  
Nursery School



Sunday morning is not the only time you'll find the Plymouth Church hallways filled with the sounds of children's voices. Stop in any weekday and you'll hear children talking, laughing and singing as they work and play at Plymouth Nursery School!

Plymouth Nursery School opened in September 1954 as the fourth preschool in the Des Moines area, and the first to be located in a church. But the planning for the nursery school goes back at least to 1953 when the Iowa Conference asked Plymouth to be the pilot church for sponsoring a cooperative preschool. This request came only after an exhaustive study by the Iowa Conference of church preschools throughout the country, as well as a needs assessment in Des Moines. This was a cutting-edge concept!

The first staff included Armilda Keiser as director, two salaried teachers and even its own nurse! Enrollment was 51 three- and four-year-old children, tuition was \$15 per month and teachers earned about \$135 per month. Important information sent home to families was safety pinned to the back of a child's coat. We've come a long way since that time!

Today, Plymouth Nursery School operates as a self-supporting 501c3 non-profit corporation serving children ages 2-5. Classes are offered Monday-Friday, morning and afternoon, with a staff of 13. We continue to be a private, tuition-based preschool but have a robust scholarship program to assist with financial need. Our annual Giving Tree service project blesses the community. We communicate by email and text message. You can even "like" us on Facebook!

Sally Gibson, one of the original teachers and then director from 1955-1971, was a woman ahead of her time. She was involved in the development of the early childhood program at Iowa State University and the early work in licensing preschool and childcare programs in the state of Iowa all while working at Plymouth Nursery School. Sally believed that play is important to a child's development, that children need "hands-on experiences" with materials, and that children need to learn respect for themselves and others. These early concepts are now considered "developmentally appropriate practice" in education. And they are still at the heart of what we do here at Plymouth Nursery School.

# Celebrates its 65-Year History

Our colorful Sticks mural, located near the south drive entrance, reflects many of our longstanding traditions. Home visits with families and having parents actively involved in our classrooms have been part of our practice since the beginning. Thousands of children have experienced searching for runaway gingerbread men, marching through the hallways serenading the church staff with kitchen band instruments, exploring the courtyard with toilet paper tube binoculars and more! Our mural also highlights the PNS mission statement as well as the Plymouth Church motto. Together these statements recognize that our families come from many backgrounds and traditions, and that all are welcome.

We are blessed to share space in this beautiful facility and to partner with Plymouth Church on projects that benefit all those who use the space. In 2013, PNS installed classroom security locks on every door on the first floor. PNS is actively participating in the Safety Task force aimed at creating a safer environment for everyone here at Plymouth Church.

Our registration form includes a space where parents can tell us how they came to know about PNS. It's not unusual to see the words "I attended as a child" in that space. We reached another milestone in 2014 when we enrolled our third generation! Barb Godwin, lifelong Plymouth Church member and former director of Child and Family Ministries, was enrolled in the first class at Plymouth Nursery School. Barb's children attended PNS, and now her daughter Jessica's sons are going through the program.

PNS has witnessed much change in its 65 years: construction, staff, trends in culture, communication and education. What hasn't changed is our commitment to high-quality early childhood education steeped in tradition but focused on the needs of today's children. The 2018-19 school year saw the launch of three expanded class offerings designed to provide all age groups with more opportunities, including a full-day option for Pre-kindergarten. Our experienced staff, strong curriculum and welcoming environment have helped countless children prepare for their next school experience!

As we remember our founding in 1954, we are so grateful for the vision that was cast and for a strong mutually supportive partnership with Plymouth Church. PNS strives to be a welcoming "doorway" to Plymouth Church, and its many opportunities for the young families coming and going every day. We value our heritage and have our eyes fixed on the future as we continue to provide an excellent preschool experience that helps children become life-long learners!

Contact Jan Van Wyk at [jvanwyk@plymouthchurch.com](mailto:jvanwyk@plymouthchurch.com) for enrollment information or to donate to the scholarship fund. ♡



A Three-Generation PNS Family: (from left) Jackson, Jessica and Hendrix Schroeder, Barb Godwin, Calvin Schroeder

Jan Van Wyk is entering her 15th year as PNS director. She holds a BA in Education, a National Administrator Credential and serves on the State Child Care Advisory Committee. Jan and Rod are active members at Meredith Drive Reformed Church where she was a children's ministry assistant, children's choir director and preschool director before starting at Plymouth.