

# EDUCATION MINISTRIES

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## Take A Child Outside week

“The best classroom and the richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky.” Margaret McMillan



As you have probably seen in past parish bulletins, Pope Francis wrote in 2015 “Laudato Si”. In this letter, he expresses the great need to take care of our earth and also the poorest among us. This same message is reiterated in churches around the world as they celebrate the Season of Creation which begins on September 1st and ends with the feast of St. Francis on October 4th. The Care of Creation Ministry here at our parish notes that during this time we should look to reflect, pray, and act on our call to be caretakers of all that God has created.

It might not be just a coincidence that T.A.C.O. week also happens to fall during the Season of Creation. Take A Child Outside week is an annual program that partners with agencies across the U.S. to help break down obstacles that children might encounter which would prevent them from enjoying and discovering the natural world. You can imagine that if children are not given an opportunity to play in and explore nature, then it might be difficult for them later in life to be full participants in celebrations like the Season of Creation. Like many things, developing a strong connection early in life can have positive effects that carry into adulthood. It is difficult to be invested in taking action or seeing the beauty of God’s world if one is not exposed or allowed to feel connected to nature.



For the past few years, we have tried to call special attention to T.A.C.O. week, particularly in light of the natural play-ground area that we have in front of our preschool. This area was the vision of a previous preschool director, Mrs. Cathy Ashton, who, like many educators, recognized the value and learning opportunity that is created when young children are allowed to discover the natural world around them. In this area, our preschoolers are encouraged to do things such as make pinecone soup, hunt for caterpillars, balance on logs, and play in wooden teepees. Even without a “formal” natural play area, the learning that can come from letting children use their imaginations and play outdoors is exponential.

There is not one area of a young child’s development that is not in some way positively impacted by an opportunity to investigate, create, and enjoy outside play. Being outdoors allows children not only the chance to run, expand their



imaginations, and create with peers, but it enables them to develop an early appreciation for the beauty that God has created. When they begin to understand that God has gifted us with the trees, flowers, sun, and animals, they build on their faith journey and develop a simple knowledge that God is in all things and all around us. One of our 2-year old teachers works on that relationship in a simple way each day with her class. She asks them every time they are walking outside, “Who made those clouds?”, “Who made that spider?” or “Who made those leaves?” By doing this repeatedly with things in the outdoors with which these children are familiar, God is more easily seen and understood by their young minds. Not only are the children seeing the beauty of their world but they are beginning a relationship with God that includes being thankful and appreciative for all that He has made.

Maybe we should all take a minute to enjoy the nature that surrounds us. Maybe if we really stopped to watch that butterfly or feel the wind blow on our faces we would deepen our relationship with God in a way that we might never have imagined!

To learn more about the wonderful opportunities that we provide, 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).