

Congratulations to Nancy Little on Her Retirement!

Congratulations to Nancy King Little who on December 31, 2020 retired after 41 years as the Founder and Director of the Palma Ceia Presbyterian Preschool!

Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church will recognize Nancy's retirement on Sunday, January 31 at noon in a live streamed presentation. We hope you will join us. The video feed will be found on palmaceia.org, on our YouTube Page, and social media pages including Facebook. Those who want to extend a personal greeting to Nancy can make a video of about 30 seconds' length and send it to communications@palmaceia.org. Those received by the 30th will be shared in the video presentation at the recognition on the 31st.

Nancy grew up in the Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church, where she worshipped in the Presbyterian community that greatly shaped her faith and character. Her parents Rex and Ann King, through their example, instilled within herself and her brother Bryant a deep sense of commitment to community service. It was through them and a life lived within the church, that Nancy developed a desire to nurture others and commit her life to service.

After graduating from Robinson High School in Tampa, Nancy attended the University of North Carolina at Charlotte. Here, her passion for the church's inclusion of children intersected with her experience growing up with differently-abled friends and family members. These two passions became the focus of her university studies.

As a young college graduate, she worked in several early childhood programs across the Tampa Bay area, serving children and those challenged by difficult social and economic circumstances. During this time, God gave her a vision to see a new world that did not yet exist but one in which early childhood education included children with special needs. She then set out to make this new vision a reality. She understood and believed that supportive interventions during early childhood could profoundly help children with special needs, just as their peers benefited greatly from a nurturing and immersive learning environment.

This vision started from a humble beginning, with sponsorship from her beloved church, Palma Ceia Presbyterian. She approached her pastor at that time, Rev. Irvine Williams, with a request to start a preschool at the church that included children with special needs. Rev. Williams encouraged her initiative and took it to the Session, which endorsed the idea and authorized her to start a preschool. And so, in 1979, Nancy opened her school in a Sunday School classroom, with only one single teacher and a part-time assistant. Because of her hard work, commitment, and capable skill, the school flourished and grew. It has since become a national model for the welcome and



full inclusion of children with special needs into early childhood education classrooms, creating a strong foundation for every child's future education.

When Nancy started the school, children with special needs had minimal opportunities for education and development. She saw this great need and used her ministry as a proof of concept for the wider community. But the paradigm-changing impact of her school's example truly spread through the witness of all the students, parents and children, who recognized the power of her new vision. As the school grew, it attracted the full spectrum of students who required special needs for their development. Today the school has 6 classrooms with 64 students. It employs a staff of 15 — teachers, aides, an administrative assistant, and director. The name of the school has changed from Palma Ceia Presbyterian Preschool for Special Needs Children to the Palma Ceia Presbyterian Preschool, reflecting the way in which the model she pioneered was no longer entirely unique, but had become the standard for public and private preschools across the nation.

Nancy brought to bear a persistent and tireless advocacy not only for children with special needs but for the inclusion of children in the life of the church and in the community in general. Her advocacy included careful persuasion, academic journal articles, public lobbying, and many compassionate conversations with parents, grandparents, and, indeed, children. Nancy and the Palma Ceia Presbyterian Preschool have received many awards and honors including, amongst others, the following: the national Scholastic Award for Director of the Year in an Early Childhood Program; the Handprint Award from St. John's Presbyterian Learning Center, Tampa for child advocacy; the University of South Florida De Laparte Florida Mental Health Institute Community Partner Award; and the Sarah Hill Brown Award for excellence in an early childhood program, Presbyterian Church in the USA.

Nancy's husband Tom and son Ryan are both elders at the Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church, and are absolutely bursting with pride as they reflect on her lifetime of service and achievements. Her commitment to the school would also not have been possible without countless advocates who supported and enabled her throughout her career, especially the Preschool staff and those who served on the Preschool Committee. The first graduates of her school, now in their early 40's, include many teachers, artists, physicians, and public servants. And a number of them have brought their own children back as students of the school. Some have even become teachers at the preschool themselves.

Pastor John DeBevoise said:

“Nancy has been a champion for children in the life of Christ's church. And the wonderful victories that she has achieved for them have been won with compassion, scholarship, hard work, and persistent faith. The presence of the school for 41 years on the campus of the church, the presence of the little children in the school with their laughter, songs, and play, has deeply shaped the character of the church. Not only is the school an enormous blessing to the community, but the school is an enormous blessing to the church, making us look more like the body of Christ. This is the fruit of Nancy's vocational labors, a witness to the love of God in Jesus Christ.”

Kurt Hine of PCPC's Preschool Committee said:

"On behalf of the Preschool Committee, we are profoundly grateful for the amount of life you've personally exchanged to make the world a better place through inspiring children in their most important developmental years. With all our hearts, may yours years ahead continuously blossom with the blessings you've selflessly cultivated all these years."

At their meeting stated meeting in November, the Session took action to elect Nancy "Preschool Director Emeritus," a sign of the congregation's deep gratitude for her lifelong commitment to children and the Church. Nancy intends to continue her life and presence within the PCPC community in worship and fellowship and looks forward to her son Ryan and future daughter-in-law Emily's upcoming wedding at Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church!

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said,

*"Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs."
And he laid his hands on them and went on his way.*

-Matthew 19:13-15

Those wishing to send Nancy a note or a card may do so to her home or to PCPC,
c/o Nancy Little: 3501 W. San Jose St., Tampa, FL 33629.