



“The family is where we first learn to relate to others, to listen, to share, to be patient and show respect, to help one another and live as one.”

Pope Francis, Amoris Laetitia (The Joy of Love)

“Welcome to PREPARES!” A colorful sign tucked into the lower level of St. Madeleine Sophie School leads visitors through a classroom door into a rich sensory environment of music, toys, books, and art supplies. Play with Love (Jugando con Amor), a weekly playgroup for Latina caregivers and children five years and under, is meeting for the first time since COVID ended classes in 2020.

Loretta Sursely, St. Madeleine Sophie’s Pastoral Coordinator, makes a point of stopping by to say how honored the parish is by the return of Play with Love families. Teresa Cacho-Govea, PREPARES Spanish Area Coordinator, and Alicia Tapia, class facilitator, welcome arrivals with hugs and exclamations of joy. While their own children are now grown, Teresa and Alicia are sympathetic to the challenges facing many of these young families, who are far from home, family, and old friends to help them as they navigate unfamiliar systems and languages.



After storytime, Bradley begins to make his own book.

Bradley, three years old, is new to the program and sticks close to his abuela (grandmother), she hopes her grandson will develop social and emotional skills since he is an only child with no nearby cousins or other children his age. Gesturing towards her heart, she confides that she hopes to use the program to develop her English skills and peer relationships so she can continue to support her grandson as he moves into elementary school.

Other families greet each other by name and move easily around the space, mothers catching up with each other while their children play with toys and “cook” in the miniature kitchen. Even when classes were suspended, Play with Love mothers and children prioritized meeting in parks and libraries, strengthening meaningful relationships and mutual

support during a difficult time. Mothers credit easy school transitions for older siblings to the emotional and social skills they learned alongside friends.

Eren, an alum parent, is excited for Sebastian, her younger son, to have the same experience as his older brother Christopher, now in second grade. “Seb has been diagnosed with speech delays, so I am really excited to have him in this environment, which is so comfortable for us. We wish there were more programs like these for the Latino community—they are the basis for so many friendships!” Later, Eren adds, “It is so important to feel included, welcome. The children notice this. They feel you relax.”



Seb has to think about what to draw next.



Sofia cumple dos años!

Conducted in Spanish, the class rhythm is familiar: welcome songs, circle time with a book, a small-motor-skills activity and, finally, a special snack to celebrate Sofia's second birthday!

The morning ends with a warm happy feeling—children and caregivers leave with their culture affirmed and more socially connected.



The PREPARES program is a ministry sponsored by the statewide Catholic bishops to provide a nurturing response to mothers and fathers who have chosen the precious gift of life: the promise of direct support and assistance from pregnancy to their child's fifth birthday. Regardless of religious beliefs, this parish-based program, administered locally by Catholic Community Services, offers low-income families vital, life-affirming services.



Ways to Help



DONATE

Support PREPARES by donating to the February, 2023 **OPEN YOUR HEART** campaign by mail or online at **PREPARESforlife.org**



VOLUNTEER

Become a trained PREPARES volunteer at a local Catholic parish as a **FAMILY COMPANION** or **SUPPORT GROUP** member for Moms and Dads. Both opportunities provide practical, emotional presence and support to families in need.



ASSIST

Sponsor a parish based **NEEDS DRIVE** to collect and distribute food and household goods or a **CLOTHING CLOSET** accessible to PREPARES families. Establish a parish **TRAVELING CRIB** for the collection of baby essentials. Provide age appropriate **PREPARES BAGS** filled with infant and child items such as diapers, wipes, blankets, toys, and books.

Aleah Patulot
PREPARES Program Director
(206) 737- 9264

Learn more at www.preparesforlife.org



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