



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

April and May 2006

From the Director

The Light is Shining

I hope that you were able to join us for the *Liturgy of the Light* last Thursday. As always, it was a very moving service, which vividly reflected the light that each of the children at CFMS bears. There are many glimpses of this light, which we, as a staff, have the privilege of experiencing each day. I'd like to share one of those glimpses with you. The following is a song that one of our primary children spontaneously composed in the atrium.

Alleluia! God is risen!

He cares!

We love his soul, we do.

But when He died, there was no one to love.

There was shaking, and a flash of light, and something had broken.

It meant Jesus had died.

They were so surprised when they looked inside the tomb the next day.

He was not there.

He had risen to heaven.

Alleluia!

Alleluia indeed!

Wendy

From the Director of Religious Education

May In The CFMS Atriums

In the atrium, as in the church, we turn our hearts and minds to the mysterious and joyful announcement that, after his death on a cross, **JESUS IS RISEN!**

The perception of Jesus' followers that he is alive and somehow still with them came less through historical events such as finding the empty tomb, and more through signs such as bread and wine, miracles, a grain of wheat, the power of the Holy Spirit, and the water of baptism. During the last months of the school year we will introduce some of these signs to the children, allowing them to use materials in the atrium to explore their meaning.

In the primary atrium we have:

- the City of Jerusalem to serve a simple narrative of the death and resurrection;
- the Cenacle (upper room) to listen to Jesus say over the bread, "This is my body" and over the wine, "This is my blood," giving himself to people of all times;
- the Women at the Tomb to experience the wonder of hearing the angel's words: He is not here, he is risen;
- the Paschal candle and Baptismal candles to perceive that the risen life of Jesus is shared with us at Baptism. As one boy

said in the atrium one year, if the Paschal Candle tells that Jesus is risen then the Baptismal candle says, "we rise too!"; and

- the water of Baptism, which nurtures God's life in us.

In the lower elementary atrium we have:

- the City of Jerusalem, along with readings from the Paschal narratives to deepen our knowledge of the historical from the Messianic Entry Into Jerusalem through Pentecost;
- the Cenacle, to trace the presence of Jesus in the bread and wine from the Last Supper, to the early church, to Eucharist today;
- the Women at the Tomb;
- the water and light of Baptism, as well as the oils, the Word of God, the prayers, and all the signs of God's life given to us in Baptism;
- the Mystery of Life and Death, a material to reflect on the parable of the grain of wheat which must die in order to bear fruit; and
- the Good Shepherd with the Wolf and the Hireling, a reflection on the verses of the Good Shepherd parable that reveal that Jesus died to protect his flock from evil, and that his risen life is stronger than evil and death.

In the upper elementary atrium

In addition to access to the readings and signs listed above we will focus on various sacraments and liturgies of the church through which the work of Jesus continues among us:

- through Baptism Jesus shares his risen life with us;

- through Eucharist Jesus remains present with us, nourishing us through the bread and wine;
- through anointing Jesus continues to strengthen and heal us when we are weak or ill;
- through reconciliation Jesus heals our blocks in our relationships with God and one another; and
- through confirmation Jesus empowers us the Holy Spirit to work with Jesus in the world, bringing his joy and peace to others.

From the Primary Classes

From Kristi

On the playground as Lindy and I came outside to pick up the afternoon primary children from recess, we found the entire group of 22 children engaged in a circle game. I was amazed, and walked over to Sarah to ask, "Wow. How did you get them to do that?" She shook her head and threw her hands up with a smile, "They just started it by themselves." A small group of children began the game, and slowly, one-by-one, the others joined in. As the game called for it they sang loudly, held hands, clapped, and danced in silly ways. Clearly, each child took great joy in the spontaneous event.

I shouldn't be surprised. It happens every day that the children organize themselves in some amazing community-supporting way. Sometimes it's when a child drops onto the floor the hundreds of small pieces from the stamp game, and five children rush over to see if they can help clean up. It happens when a child begins crying on the playground, and another comes over to comfort him. Recently, when I have had to step out of the classroom for a moment in the afternoon class, I've returned several times to a group of children all seated in complete silence,

because they have decided to surprise me. (It worked. I was surprised, to their great delight.) By five-years of age, these children are beginning to realize what they are creating together—a community where they are known, loved, and valued. It is clear, watching these children day in and out, they take GREAT joy in one another.

There is amazing work going on in the classroom right now; emerging reading is happening everywhere, children are learning their math facts, writing poetry together, making applesauce and planting seeds. But the most important experience these children have at CFMS is the community that they form among themselves.

And that community endures and grows. The relationships among the children continue to deepen, throughout their nine years at CFMS. Even teachers are less important than that experience. That is clear as I look at the current upper elementary class. When I first came to CFMS as an assistant, those children were three- and four-year-olds. It was a less stable time at the school, and their classroom went through five teachers in four years. But watching the upper elementary now, you would never know it. They have grown into confident, beautiful children. When the Upper Elementary children are outside of the school on “going outs” or doing community service like singing at a nursing home, again and again people comment, “These children don't seem like other children. They seem to actually like each other. They are respectful and kind to one another.”

It is not an easy process. As we all do, they struggle to get it just right. But they practice from three-years on to express to each other what they don't like. They practice again and again the hard skill of listening to each other when they have done something that upset

another child. These are skills we wrestle with as adults—but these children learn early on the benefits of that struggle.

When they leave this place, they will have vague happy memories of teachers or of enjoying the work in the classroom. But the thing that is most tangible, the thing that I now hear adults graduates of CFMS speak of when they recall their years here, are those relationships with their peers. They are rooted in a community in which they are known and loved, and that informs all that is to come.

From Lindy

Some mornings I take a minute to stand back when everything is in full motion and I get to see wonderful things going on with the children in the class. One thing I never see or hear is complete stillness or complete silence, however. At times it can get quite loud, but in the midst of the commotion there is a lot of learning happening right before my eyes. Maria Montessori believed that humans are born with intelligence and the ability to love. These endowments are what give people the capacity to go beyond other animals. As humans we are able to think, manipulate objects, have relationships, and explore new areas and ideas. Since we have these abilities Montessori believed that humans are guided by human tendencies rather than instincts like most other species. She defined human tendencies as, “a system of natural guides that are essential to our lives and self-fulfillment.”

There are several human tendencies, but lately I've been more aware of the tendency to communicate and the tendency for activity. Both of these are evident in the children who are constantly doing both. From the moment the

children enter the room they are communicating in some way. Sometimes what they are communicating is "I don't want to be here!" but most of the time it's "Okay, let's get started!" Humans in general are social beings, but this doesn't necessarily mean that everyone always wants to talk. One little girl in my class often comes into the classroom in the morning not saying a word. She comes up to me and, whether I'm standing or sitting, she will just lean on me while sucking her thumb. When I turn to say good morning to her sometimes there is no response and other times it's like I hit the wake up switch and the stories go on and on.

I learn a lot about each and every child's life outside of school because even the quietest children enjoy telling stories. I also enjoy hearing what the children are learning on their own or from one another. A few weeks ago, I overheard a little boy talking with another boy by the easel. Usually this work is just for one person, but I resisted saying anything at the time and just listened to their conversation. I could not see what was being written on the easel but from the conversation I learned that it was numbers. The first boy was writing numbers and he said the word minus, when the second boy asked "What does minus mean?" The first boy simply said "It's when you take something away." A few other girls came by and were listening as well. The boy who asked went on watching and seemed satisfied with the answer to his question. I realized at that moment that not only did the first boy understand the concept of subtraction, but the second boy's need for an answer was satisfied without an elaborate explanation.

The tendency for activity is one you would not be able to miss in a classroom of 3-6 year olds. At times, it almost seems like stillness is impossible! Humans have a natural need to act upon their environment. They want to create

new things and explore their surroundings. It is more natural to be active rather than passive which is why when a child first comes into a room they are usually very interested in everything around them. As adults we are able to control our desires to explore everything around us and we take it all in mainly with our eyes. The best way to completely absorb what something is, however, would be to manipulate it with our hands and work with it completely using all of our senses. The children are constantly in motion, walking from one end of the room to the other, in and out of each others ways. Sometimes it can be a challenge. They have come a long way from the bumping and banging into each other at the beginning of the year, however. Now for the most part they remember to walk around someone else's work or say "excuse me."

I hope during observations while they were a while ago that many of you were able to see and hear all of this wonderful learning and growing.

From the Lower Elementary

I would like to share some thoughts on spelling.

The English written code is a sound symbol code. Sounds in our language existed long before sound pictures (letters). Sound pictures were invented to graphically represent the sounds that come out of our mouths when we talk.

When your child enters primary, he or she is already a master of all the sounds of the English language. In the primary your child is shown that sound pictures are graphic representations of sounds that the child already knows. In other words letters represent sounds!

First your child obtains the skill of hearing the sounds in a word through the sound game. With the sandpaper letters your child experiences matching auditory sounds with a visual representation. Using the movable alphabet your child practices the skill of writing words from left to right. Imagine the moment when your child has mastered enough sound pictures to build his or her own first word!

From here your child grows in his or her ability to sound out and build words. First they build 3 letter words, then 4 and 5 letter words, including those that contain consonant blends and double vowels. Of course this early spelling can be very creative!

Unlike some other languages, English is not totally phonetic. English includes: two or more letters that can show 1 sound as in 'ough' for "oe". It also includes sounds that can be shown more than one way as in 'ai' and 'ay'. And one sound picture can show more than one sound, as in 'ow' showing "ow" or "oe" depending on the word.

At first, it is more important for your child to realize he or she can preserve his or her own speech in writing, than focusing on standard spelling.

There will come a time though, when your child will become more interested in the conventional way most words are spelled. Through reading your child will realize that there is a standard way that a certain word is usually spelled.

In the Lower Elementary your child will be supported in moving along towards standard spelling. Our spelling consists of a review of sounds and the pictures that represent them. Then we begin the task of analyzing words. At first, we analyze sound by sound, then syllable by syllable. We work on mastering the ability to

retrieve the appropriate symbol for each sound. Rather than memorizing, repeated practice with how a sound is spelled is our road to automatic spelling. Our lessons incorporate seeing, hearing, saying, and writing sounds so all the ways that a child learns are addressed for ease of learning. By building and recombining syllables into words the child is systematically applying and building on the knowledge gained from working with other words.

A by product of sound spelling is an increase in the child's reading skills. He or she may be willing to attack words that just a few weeks ago may have appeared a daunting task.

In the month of May this all will come together in a game we call, "Who wants to be a million dollar speller?" The class is divided into teams and each team tries to win a million dollars through spelling words.

Mrs. Proctor