



MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

April/May 2008

From the Director

The Liturgy of the Light

At the Liturgy of the Light, our children boldly and triumphantly "Sing Alleluia to the Lord," piercing the darkness of the room even before the Paschal candle is lit. Our elementary children, who once teetered with their candles on three year old legs, lead us in prayer and reflection about the light. Each child is called by name and given a candle, the light of Christ, which reminds them that they carry this holy and powerful light into the world. When the candles are all gathered back on the table we see what is possible when many people bring their light together.

CFMS is a place that has been made possible by many people bringing their lights together to radiate and create a loving, joyful, and peaceful place for children to learn and thrive and discover themselves. Thank you for being a light within our community and for sharing your child's light with us.



Loved Ones' Day: 16 May

Loved Ones' Day is an opportunity for your child to show off their classroom to grandparents, godparents, relatives, and friends. The morning has a similar feel to Night School. Your child can lead their adult friends around the classroom, do works with them, or give them a lesson. The children always love getting to show "their" classroom to other people. And inviting people into the classrooms is one of the best ways to introduce them to CFMS, Montessori, and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd if they've never had a chance to visit. There will be a flier in your Wednesday envelope later this month with additional information.

Spring Sing and Social: 16 May

The Spring Sing and Social is a wonderful evening of music and fun. All of the classes will perform songs and the music will be followed by dessert and time to enjoy one another's company. The event is also a fundraiser for our scholarship fund, so invite family and friends to join us for a fantastic evening!

Wendy

From the Director of Education

Over the past several weeks most of the staff has attended Montessori conferences as part of our continuing education. A number of us were able to hear various neuro-scientists speak about what current research in brain science has to offer us as teachers and parents.

Maria Montessori didn't have access to the sophisticated machinery that today's scientists have to study how the brain works, but as a scientist she observed much of what is being proved today by brain researchers. The whole Montessori approach is based on the belief that children have certain capacities and abilities that are available to them at certain stages of development. If we as adults work in concert with these stages of development, we can assist each child in optimum learning. If we as adults understand what is happening inside of children, we can better guide them in the world around them.

Here is one little insight from modern brain science that really hit home for me: *"Children do not have verbal negation before the age of 4 or 5 years."* What does that mean? It means that if you say, "Don't run in the hall.", a three year old doesn't understand the *don't* part. They hear only, "...run in the hall." I know from Montessori practice that it is always best to model for young children what we want them to do, "Watch me walk in the hall. Can you try it with me?" Modern brain science is confirming what Maria Montessori inferred from experience with children. It was a

great reminder for me about why we try to do what we do with children.

I invite you to do a little "continuing education" yourself. While at the conference I purchased a set of CD's called, *Montessori and the Mind: Insights from Brain Science*. It contains four talks by Dr. Dee Joy Coulter who shares amazing insights with humor and great heart. I hope that you will experience a few "a-hahs!" as I did when I heard her speak in person. Check out these and other great books and videos in our Parent Lending library.

It is a wonder being around these children. Thank you for the privilege of working with them.

Judy Walsh-Mellett

From the Atrium

Celebrating The Resurrection

Thanks to all of you who joined us for the Liturgy of the Light on 3 April. A special thanks to the 14 dancers from the elementary classes. This Liturgy is adapted from the Easter vigil and is the beginning of the 50 days of the Easter season. (I mentioned to one of my daughters that we were going to Granny's for Easter one year. Her eyes grew wide as she exclaimed, "For 50 days!?") Keep the good news of the resurrection alive in your homes during this time by lighting an Easter candle before dinner or evening prayer and singing one of our many "Alleluia!" songs.

In the atriums we continue to celebrate the resurrection with materials that focus on Baptism and Eucharist. The risen Jesus remains with us in many ways (the children can usually list some of them pretty quickly) and these two sacraments are among the most important signs of his presence.

Through Baptism we receive his risen life - water, light, anointing with oil, reading of the Word of God, and a special Baptismal garment are all signs of this life. These gifts are initiated at Baptism and continue to grow with us throughout our lives. The Baptism materials help us to reconsider the gifts in the light of being 3, or 6, or 9, or 30!

Receiving Jesus in the bread and wine of Eucharist helps us grow in communion with God, one another and all of creation. Every year in the atrium we add presentations based on the prayers and signs of this rich liturgy to deepen our understanding of it. One of my favorites is called "The Story of Bread" given in the 9-12 atrium. We name all the gifts that must come together to bring bread to our tables. They include the seed, the sun, rain, the nutrients of the soil, time for growing, and the work of harvesters, threshers, millers, bakers, and others. They are summarized in the prayer during Mass, "...fruit of the earth and work of human hands." This bread, encompassing all these gifts, is offered to God, who adds another gift: the Holy Spirit, so that the bread becomes the presence of Jesus with us. We then take communion together, receiving the gifts of the earth, one another and God.

While all the children continue to work with these materials during the Easter season, a group of our 6-9 year old children are preparing for their First Communion and Reconciliation. Their First Communion Mass will be April 27 at 2:30 at St. Martin's Catholic Church. Please keep them in your prayers as they prepare and consider joining us for this celebration.

Catherine Maresca

From the Primary Classes

From Kristi

The life of our classroom is one of constant flow. There are moments of serenity (of the sort that no amount of cajoling could possibly produce), moments when the unsettled energy in the room is almost tangible, and a myriad of moments that lay somewhere between. There is a beautiful ebb and flow in the classroom, which is wholly unpredictable and absolutely amazing.

Montessori talked of this same ebb and flow that occurs in the life of humans, "The life of man may remain diffused among a multiplicity of things, in an inferior state of chaos, until some special thing attracts it intensely and fixes it; and then man is revealed unto himself, he feels that he has begun to live." In the classroom, you see each of us as we move back and forth, each having moments of desperate, chaotic searching, and experiencing moments of feeling found.

In the primary Montessori classroom, there are materials: 1) to experience division and multiplication, algebraic equations in a concrete way; 2) the sensorial aspects of our world (such as length, weight, color, shape); and 3) writing. But one of the richest parts of the classroom is the Practical Life area. Practical life activities are those things we do to take care of ourselves and our environment. In the classroom, these things include table washing, polishing, flower arranging, and clothe washing. To us, they are the mundane tasks of our daily life, but to the child, who so desperately wants to participate in our lives in real ways, practical life is intensely compelling.

These materials are deeply attractive to the child. They are often beautiful, with a harmony of color. There is a clear sense of order and sequence that appeals to the child of this age.

Practical life builds independence ("help me to do it by myself"), concentration, and refinement of movement. All of these skills are necessary to help the child navigate the Montessori classroom. But the richest part of these materials is their ability to focus the attention of the child in an almost meditative way.

So often a child will have a day where they seem unsettled (we all have those days). Yesterday, I watched as one child washed cloth after cloth with great attention. In the process, the floor became soaked with water, but when he finished the work, he dried the floor with the same attention.

One boy wandered the classroom, interrupting his classmates, unable to settle himself. Eventually, he took out the flower arranging work, carefully selecting just one flower for each arrangement. He was so concentrated that it was difficult to get his attention when it was time to leave school.

Another child, who during the morning had struggled just to sit down, finally settled into polishing a collection of brass objects. As he completed the work and began to put it away, his expression was one of pure joy. Somehow in those moments, everything has shifted back into place. The child had found himself again. In our classroom, I've seen the same scenario play out hundreds of time. Practical life so very clearly meets the child's needs in a profound way. It serves so readily what I believe to be Montessori's central goal: to help the child experience again and again that sense of feeling found.

A parent in the classroom for the first time stood back and observed the buzz of activity thoughtfully. After some time, he commented, "Montessori is very Zen, isn't it?" It was a keen observation, and quite true. But it is truer that the children themselves are the very embodiment of Zen. They live completely in the moment, entirely engaged with their minds, bodies, and spirits working with great joy.

For us adults, this living in the moment is a much more difficult task. In his book *The Miracle of Mindfulness*, Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh talks of washing a dish to wash a dish. When we think of the task as a nuisance, with our minds flooded with the

future, we are not fully present. "We are completely incapable of realizing the miracle of life while standing at the sink....we are incapable of actually living one minute of life."

The joy of living with children is the constant call to act with deliberation and to be fully present in the moment. Occasionally when I seem to be distracted, a child will grab my face and pull it toward them, until they are certain they have my attention. They are Zen masters calling us back to the miracle of life.

From Lindy

It was only a few days ago when I had the privilege of handing the light of Christ to all of the children in my class during the Liturgy of the Light. Before the actual liturgy, my nerves are usually pretty high. It can be quite nerve racking when thinking about 25 three to six year olds carrying lit candles, but the whole event is so mesmerizing to everyone that soon it's not so scary. I quickly turn from a bundle of nerves to someone who feels so honored to have each and every one of these children in my class. It is quite an experience to see their little faces and get to look into their eyes and hand over that candle. I've loved it every time I've been able to do it. When we returned to the classroom that morning, we only had a short time before the morning children were going to leave for the day. I asked them all to raise their hands if their favorite part of the liturgy was receiving the candle and they all raised their hands. I asked if anyone's favorite part was singing

the songs and they all raised their hands. I asked a few more questions and you guessed it, they all raised their hands saying that was their favorite part. Then, when the class got very quiet for a moment, I asked them to guess what my favorite part was and I gave them a clue that it was something only I got to do. Many hands went up and someone said giving out the candles. I said yes and they all smiled. I shared with them just how special that was for me because I was able to see each one of them so excited.

I often get to see them excited for one reason or another when they are in school, whether it's just coming in for the day, getting a new lesson, being on their way to the library or playing on the playground. Their excitement is more subtle when they don't think anyone's looking. They might show excitement over a picture they've drawn, how they've labeled all of the objects with their corresponding words or even when they are observing a piece of artwork in the classroom. The joy and innocence of all children is so inspiring. At the Liturgy of the Light I get to see their eyes light up as they come walking up and take hold of this precious light and I remember for a moment that they show me this light they carry with them everyday. Sometimes it's easy to forget when the days continue to go by and the routines continue just how much even the smallest of moments can mean.

From the Elementary Classes

From Nieva

PAST: Thank you to Ms. Elizabeth McMeekin, Jamila's mother, for coming to the classroom to discuss selecting a class pet. She discussed the animal's food, habitat, equipment it would need and helped us clarify our goals for having a pet in the classroom. Indeed her insights helped the children narrow down their options. The children are now thinking of having a type of lizard to be a class pet.

[Note: Ms. McMeekin was chosen on basis of number of pets they have at home. Their family has about 8 different types of pets.]

PRESENT: The children are now getting settled after the Spring break. They are starting to get busy again with the work they need to practice and master. New concepts or follow up lessons are getting into the children's work plan.

The children, especially those who need to center their energy, get creative movement activities with Ms. Lizzy. At least once a month, Ms. Lizzy also does cooking with them.

Ms. Susan Holmes, a teacher trainee, is now in the classroom. As part of her preparation to be a Montessori trained teacher, Ms. Susan gives presentations to the children. She will be in the classroom until the end of April.

Of course, the happening in the classroom at the top of the children's minds is the start

of the children's preparation for the coming EI Event.

FUTURE: This is the first time the class is going to participate at the EI Event. The children are excited to join Ms. Melinda's class in this activity. They cannot wait to perform for everybody the poems and skit that they have composed. Aleja will play the violin. The children will sing "The Arrow and the Song" by Emily Dickenson. They will also sing a song together with Ms. Melinda's students. I truly hope that you will support the children in this activity.

There will also be other exciting activities the children will do for the coming weeks. One of these activities will be the arrival of our class' pet. What will it be? The children themselves will tell you after the week of the EI Event.

Ms. Nieva