



BI-MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

February/March 2010

From the Director of Education

Take the *Journey* that Leads to *Discovery*

The teachers and catechists have been preparing a unique and wonderful parent education experience for you. We hope that you can join us this Saturday 20 February for our first annual *Journey and Discovery*.

Many other Montessori schools around the country have used *Journey and Discovery* to help parents have a more in-depth and hands-on experience of Montessori education. We have added the dimension of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd to our *Journey and Discovery*. If this is your first year at CFMS, the *Journey and Discovery* will give you a tremendous grounding in what your child experiences here each day. If you have already been at CFMS for some time, the *Journey and Discovery* will be a deepening and broadening of some of what you have already learned. We expect it to be an "Ah-ha!" experience for all who attend.

The day will begin at 8:15a.m. and last until 1:00 p.m. We ask that you plan to attend the entire session as each part of the *Journey and Discovery* is important to understanding and enjoying the whole.

We need you to RSVP with the registration form and nominal fee because we do plan to serve some refreshments throughout the day.

Please RVSP right away. (The snow days have interrupted the registration process, so we ask you to let us know right away if you plan to attend.)

Childcare will be provided for CFMS students. We do ask that you be thoughtful about whether you need to use this provided childcare or whether you have another option off-site. We will hire staff depending on the number of children who need on-site care, but are limited with the amount of space we have to use for children. **Please use childcare if it means the difference between your coming or not coming.** We request and recommend, however, that you arrange childcare on your own if you can.

Since everyone has had lots of extra special time at home with their children during the blizzard, we hope that you will welcome this adult experience at CFMS and plan to attend.

Judy

From the Atrium

Prayer in the Atrium

Lent begins on 17 February this year. In the church this is a season of preparation for the great feast of Easter. In many churches, the season is observed with a focus on prayer, offering days of reflection and retreats for the congregation. In that spirit, I'd like to talk a little bit about the prayer of children in our atrium at CFMS.

In the 3-6 atrium, just as children learn with materials they can manipulate, they also pray with materials. For example, the materials representing the Good Shepherd (Jesus) and the sheep (all of us) calls the children to reflect on their relationship with Jesus: how Jesus cares for them, leads them and knows them and how they enjoy the care and presence of Jesus in return. At the Altar, the lovely table, prepared with the chalice, paten, cross and candles, invites the children to sing in celebration of Jesus present in the bread and wine of communion. The Mustard Seed, smaller than a grain of salt, allows the children to wonder at the powerful life of God within the seed, all growing things, and themselves.

Language is so important to the 3-6-year-old children that we also offer some of the beautiful words of prayer of our tradition. These become the building blocks of their own prayer - at this age we do not offer long formula prayers such as the Our Father. Some of these words are: Alleluia, Amen, *Shalom*, Mighty God, Hosanna, Glory to God in the Highest. When my own children were young, I often heard these words woven into spontaneous songs at home or in the car.

In the 6-9 atrium the prayer of the children becomes much more communal. Each week Ms. Nieva's class gathers for a prayer service planned and led by two of the children. They weave together a combination of some of the following elements: a reading from the Gospel, silence (up to three minutes), prayers of petition, a blessing, and as many songs as possible. Their work continues to be an opportunity for prayer as well. The Our Father is offered in phrases that the children put in order, and then choose just one or two to consider, discuss, illustrate and pray. Key prayers from the liturgies for Eucharist and Baptism are also introduced, preparing the children to join their own congregations in prayer.

Finally, in the 9-12 atrium, there is a balance of individual and communal prayer. Each week their time in the atrium begins with about ten minutes of silent prayer, supported by a number of choices on the prayer shelf. There are several labyrinths, a small sand "garden", rosaries, the Jesus prayer, prayer shawls to knit, needlepoint crosses and stars, yoga postures, Bibles and journals. These objects are used throughout their time in the atrium, as well as materials representing the lessons we are working on. Many of our lessons are Bible studies, a lovely blend of reflection and discussion. And they also have a prayer service each Wednesday, led by the "chaplain" of the week.

All the children of the school find music a joyful and comfortable way to pray. Most of the songs we sing can be found in one of two songbooks with CDs: Sing with Joy (for the

3-6 children) and Songs of Love (for the 6-12 children). If you'd like to see or purchase one of these please let me know at celawm@cctheo.org and I will arrange it.

You may want to talk to your children about how they might like to pray at home during Lent. You can have a song before meals, a lit candle and moment of silence, reading a little Scripture at bedtime, taking turns naming loved ones who need our prayers or any combination of these. Let them name all of their ideas, and then decide together when and where and how you'd like to pray together in preparation for Easter.

Catherine

From the Primary Classes

From Kristi

Recently I asked a child what work he was thinking of doing. He thought for a moment, and then said, "I'm going to do a work on estimating how many blocks are in the Trinomial Cube!" The Trinomial Cube is a three-dimensional puzzle with red, yellow, blue and black blocks in the Primary classroom. Later in the Elementary, it is used for much bigger work. But in neither classroom is estimating the number of blocks a work I've ever heard of. But I was interested to see what he was going to do, and watched him run over to take it out.

A couple minutes later he came over with a piece of paper with 29 written large enough to fill a whole page. "I estimated there are 29 blocks," he said.

"Did you verify that?" I replied. Accuracy is important in math, so he's done a lot of verifying in his math works. He shook his head and returned to his table.

A few minutes later he returned to say, "There are **nine** blocks on the top layer of this cube."

"And how many layers are there to the cube?" I asked.

"**Three**," he replied.

"Hmmm. And does every layer have the same number of blocks?" He's been building the Trinomial Cube for years. This was an easy question for him.

"Yes!"

"So...9 taken 3 times equals....?!"

Recently this child has been doing lots of multiplication with beads in the math area. He loves it. He loves trying to memorize the harder problems. He loves running over to tell me or his friends the answers to his favorite problems. But more importantly, he really understands multiplication. And in this real life situation, he instantly understood the usefulness of multiplication to solve this particular problem.

He ran across the room to grab a multiplication chart to check the answer to 9×3 , and returned moments later to say, "It's 27!!" He looked down at his paper where he had previously written the number 29, and said, "I WAS WRONG!" But he was still smiling.

He went on to organize the red, yellow, blue, and black into groups, and carefully wrote down the color names and the amount of block with each color. In the end, this work

he chose was a Sensorial work, a Math work, a writing work, and there was an element of scientific observation present. In the years to come when he moves on to the elementary, he'll use that same material to do algebra. And when he comes to that point, he will understand algebra in the same concrete, sensorial, experiential way he does now with multiplication.

Every day in our classrooms and atriums we have moments like this. Sometimes it is a 4-year-old who just learned something exciting about the puzzle map he's working with, and runs over to tell his friend, "Hey! This is China! Did you know that Giant Salamanders live here?" Other times it's the 3-year-old who looks at the paint on our water cooler and gets out table washing to scrub it away. Or occasionally, it's the child who started school yelling when something upset her, but now has found the self-composure to say, "I didn't like it when you touched my work....But I know you didn't mean it to upset me."

The way we approach education is very different than what most of us experienced as children. For that reason, Parent Education is very important. We are excited about the work these children are doing and we want to share it with you, so that together we can work to support the incredible, independent, self-aware and intellectually curious people your children are becoming.

At Parent Education nights and in our newsletters we try to give you pieces of this experience your child has, but it's like plucking a few flowers from a lush garden. Also it's frustrating, because Montessori learning is based on an experience, rather

than explanation; despite our best efforts, at Parent Education sessions you inevitably get a lot of talking. As adults, our ability to understand a concept abstractly is more advanced than a child's, but just like children, we still learn better through experience than through chatter.

So I'm very excited about our next Parent Education session, on Saturday morning 20 February! Rather than the chatter, you'll get some small part of that experience your child has. You'll get to explore every classroom and every atrium. Choose your own work and even do it with a friend if you like. You might give a lesson you've just done to another "child", or you'll be able to ask the teacher if she's available for a lesson. You will get to do the work for yourself, just as you child does every day.

Even if your child has been at CFMS for years, I think it will help you develop an even greater understanding of the world in which your child has been immersed. And if your child is just beginning at our school, we hope you get a small glimpse of what they are building toward—the culmination of their work which explodes in the upper elementary grades.

It might still be like plucking a flower from the garden, but at least you will be IN the garden!

From Lindy

Observing the Montessori environment is a unique experience. Some find it chaotic and others are amazed. I'm in the latter group. The children come and go, work, chat, argue and settle things on their own. They are a

community of young people learning to work together and yet learning to work on their own. Of course all of this does not happen instantaneously or over night. Montessori believed that children should not be held down by rules, but rather they should have the freedom to learn on their own with some limits. She believed that instead of telling a child what they cannot do, it is best to show them what they can do. By having freedom with limits this develops respect, for others and the environment, within each child.

There are several necessary freedoms that the children are given with corresponding limits. The freedom to choose their own work is probably one of the most important because it allows the child the chance to decide how they want to spend their time. Who wouldn't like that? Of course the limit to this freedom is that a child is only allowed to choose from work they have had lessons on. This takes some getting used to. The young child is naturally curious about the world around them and would love to explore it all. By only giving them the options of working with materials they have learned about, however, they are able to make not just a decision, but an *informed* decision about what to do. Once, I gave a presentation to a little girl on shoe polishing and she was completely involved in the lesson. I had observed her going up to the shelf to take this work off, but she hadn't had a lesson on it so either I had her put it back or another child would remind her that she had not had that lesson yet. After a few times of this happening, I was able to sit down with her to show her this work. From then on I saw her take that work out several times and she was able to set it up

fairly well and spend an extended amount of time polishing shoes. This work involves several steps and can get messy, so you might be able to imagine what it would have been like if she had taken it out without knowing what to do with it (in case you can't imagine it: a lot messier than it is after a lesson, believe me!). After the lesson, she was able to be successful with it and have a goal rather than being discouraged because she could not do it on her own.

Another freedom that the children have is to choose the place they want to work. They can decide where they want to place a mat or what table they want to sit at. The limit to this is that they need to respect the work of everyone else. Therefore, they cannot put their mats on top of someone else's or sit at a table that already has a work on it. The amount of time they spend with a work is their choice also. They do not have to put something away after doing it once, but can continue working with it the whole day. The limit to this is that, when the morning is over they need to put the work away or once they finish with it they need to return it to the shelf for the next person. It is also important to return it to its original condition and location. This does not always happen, sometimes they forget, which is not the end of the world and a gentle reminder may be all they need for them to say "oh yeah!"

Moving around the classroom is also something they want to do and are able to do whenever they want to. If their moving around interrupts other's work, however, then they need to find a work to do or another place to move around. This includes

running around the room, touching work on the shelves or other people because this can become very disruptive to children that are trying to concentrate. Sometimes all it takes is having them sit down with you to talk or giving a lesson either to the whole class or small groups on how to move around the room.

The children also have the freedom to interact with others throughout the day. They have a strong desire to communicate and they need to say what they're thinking right away. Having conversations is work, it's valid, interesting, and it's important for their social development. The limit to this freedom is like all the freedoms, which is to respect other's working. It is OK for two children to work side by side and talk as long as their talking does not become too loud and disruptive to others. There is hardly a time when our classroom is silent and I don't think it would be as much fun if it were. There have been times I have stopped to just listen to what they are saying to each other. Sometimes I hear things like "I'm telling on you" and those I pretend I didn't hear! Other times I've heard someone singing a song they've just learned over and over again. Just the other day a little girl sang one of our songs over and over for the entire time she was working. She was completely focused on her work and I think her singing kept her focused. Later that day, I heard the same girl say to another boy to stop singing that song over and over because it was annoying her! I just had to laugh to myself because she had been so oblivious when she spent 20 minutes doing the same.

The freedom to reflect is very important. While the children know that having a work out is something that is expected, they don't always have to move from one work to another without stopping. Like most people, they may need a break sometimes to reflect or rest. As long as this reflection time is respectful of others they can sit for as long as they would like. Of course once they start to get restless it is time for them to look for some work. I recall a year when in the first few weeks of school a boy in our class kept his distance. He hardly said a word and spent most of his time just watching. He didn't interrupt others and kept to himself. As some months went by he definitely found an interest in doing work, but would come in every morning, puts his things in his cubby and just sit in a chair. I think he would often take that time for reflection or contemplation about what he was going to do with his time. Then, after 10 minutes or so, I would see him go right into a work without any hesitation.

All of these freedoms, given with limits, result in positive developments. The children begin to develop independence, will, obedience, self-confidence, self-mastery, and responsibility. They learn that their choices are important because there is always an outcome to the choices you make.

From the Elementary Classes

From Nieva

On one late November day, three 6-year old girls came to me excitedly. They showed me their individual Mathematics papers on subtraction. It was the second day after

they received the lesson and I can say that they truly blossomed from the exercise. They decided to work together and, instead of completing one paper, they completed FIVE! Looking at their accomplishment, I got excited and inspired. I would not miss that one photo opportunity. With pride, each girl held up her papers. To my amusement, the papers almost matched their height!

In a Montessori classroom, it is common to see children manipulating a material, reading a book, engaging in a conversation or discussion or, being stirred by things that are going on around them. For most of the time, they choose to work. There are those who work for external reason but there are also those who work to satisfy an internal drive. The latter are those children who take the classroom exercises beyond what the adult has presented. Just like what those three 6-years old girls manifested. They are those who come out feeling refreshed and satisfied with their accomplishment. Those children have inner harmony and are able to complete a cycle of work and accomplish a great task.

From Melinda

January and February have been full of snow and other excitement for our class. We've begun our annual standardized testing (we're using the new Stanford 10) and are continuing our studies of Africa and Australia, among many other things.

I also announced to the class that I would not be their teacher next year, and that the school has hired a new teacher named Mary

Winterbottom to take over the class. (This announcement went along with the letter you received the same day in your Wednesday envelopes.) While this decision was a long time in the making, and I am looking forward to a change, it was a very sad announcement to have to make. I will miss CFMS enormously, but it is time to move on.

As we continue into February and March, we will begin to turn our focus on several spring traditions: the ELEVENT, Operation Rice Bowl, and having a practice teacher.

The ELEVENT (*E*lementary *E*vening of *E*NTertainment) is our annual benefit performance for our sibling school in Uganda. As you know, it's an evening of music, comedy and drama, chosen and often written by the students in both elementary classes. This year it will be on Friday 23 April. The children have begun reading African folk tales and listening to African and Australian music to prepare.

Operation Rice Bowl is a Lenten program of Catholic Relief Services. It is designed to help children reflect on poverty and other struggles around the world and in the US, with a focus on a different country and issue each week, and on what is being done to overcome these obstacles. A calendar and "Rice Bowl" will be sent home in the Wednesday envelope on Ash Wednesday, so your family can follow along if you so choose. In class, we go over each day's calendar items as part of our prayer time before lunch. On some days, we are asked to put money in the Rice Bowl. For this, we put in I.O.U.s, and to raise the amounts that add up over the weeks of Lent, we have a bake sale at the Liturgy of the Light.

Our practice teacher this year will be Sarah Fary, who observed our class earlier this year, and is excited to return. Her time with us begins a few days before Spring Break and continues throughout April. She is in training at the Washington Montessori Institute this year. She will be doing some Montessori lessons with all of the students, while I'll be doing more of the non-Montessori things like preparing for the ELEVENT.

As always, if you have any questions or concerns about the class or your child's progress, feel free to call or e-mail me. (mamelone@verizon.net, 301-277-3469)

Thank you once again for the privilege and blessing of working with your children. I hope to see you at our new Parent Education opportunity, Journey and Discovery, on Saturday 20 February, as well as at observations and conferences in March.

**THANKS TO ALL
THOSE WHO
HAVE WORKED
THEIR COOP JOB!**

IMPORTANT DATES

Saturday 20 February
8:15am to 1pm
Journey and Discovery

Thursday 8 April
Liturgy of the Light

Friday 23 April
Elevent