



# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

September/October 2009

## From the Director

Each year, the week before school starts, our entire staff goes away on retreat. It is a wonderful time for us to get to know our new staff, deepen our relationships, prepare our spirits for the year ahead of us, and remember why it is we have all chosen to work here.

Throughout the retreat this year, we used plant imagery to guide our reflection, prayer and sharing, using many images that the children encounter in the atrium such as the mustard seed and the vine. I thought about the way that a gardener prepares the soil to optimize the growth of the seeds or seedlings that she will plant and how likewise, Montessori teachers prepare the environment of the classroom.

It struck me that, just as a master gardener knows that each type of plant needs different amounts of light, water, nutrients and pruning, so our teachers and catechists are so very adept at recognizing that each child and each group of children are unique in what they need to grow. Our teachers take into account the particular children that will be in their class each year and prepare their rooms with thoughtfulness and intention, carefully deciding where to place each piece of furniture and each material to create spaces that are optimal for learning

on all levels: academic, social, emotional, spiritual. Each August, the teachers come back to rooms full of boxes and transform the classrooms into beautiful, welcoming spaces.

We have a tradition of concluding our retreat by praying aloud the name of each student and staff member who will be at CFMS that school year. It is always such a powerful time for me, hearing each child's name, visualizing their face, remembering what is so unique and beautiful about each one. Thank you for 'planting' your children here in the fertile soil of CFMS. You bring them to us as tiny seeds, and we are privileged to witness them taking root, growing and blossoming year after year. It is truly a gift.

Peace,

Wendy

## From the Director of Education

When I was in college my niece was three years old and started attending a Montessori school. I didn't know anything about Montessori in those days; only that it had something to do with education. My brother-in-law used to say jokingly (and only half-jokingly), "Why do we pay money to

have Monica learn all of these domestic skills like polishing and sweeping, and washing tables?" My sister, who had a Masters in Education and had taught school for a number of years in various settings, was clear that their kids were going to be in Montessori. I didn't really know her reasons, but I never forgot my brother-in-law's question.

My niece is now in her thirties and lives in Botswana where she is involved in public health education. I have since learned a great deal more about Montessori education, but I still reflect on my brother-in-law's question. (He has now been so thoroughly indoctrinated with Montessori, that he could give you a very extensive answer to his old query!) Nonetheless, it is an honest question.

Maria Montessori had the insight that children from birth to six are in a period of self-construction. They are, in essence, creating the person that they will be as an adult. She further reflected that if children are able to do this self-construction freely from birth to age six, then they are ready for the next developmental stage from six to 12 years, the age of tremendous intellectual growth and the time in which children learn how to be part of the society around them.

So back to those "domestic skills" that children are doing in our classrooms. What most parents already know is that for the youngest children in the school, the 3-6 year olds, it isn't so much about getting things clean, but it is about learning deep concentration.

This summer I caught up on some reading in the *North American Montessori Teachers Association Journal* and I enjoyed an article by Professor Kevin Rathunde. He explored the concept of "flow" that brain scientists and psychologists describe as a state of being in which an individual may be:

.....oblivious to distraction because of the merging of action and awareness, the full concentration of flow is also known to be associated with a change in the awareness of time (e.g. time passing quickly), feelings of clarity and control, a lack of self-consciousness, and feelings of intrinsic motivation, or doing an activity primarily for its own sake, even if the activity has other extrinsic rewards associated with it. The flow experience is triggered by a good fit between a person's skills in an activity and the challenges afforded by the environment. Therefore, flow always refers to a bidirectional relationship to the environment wherein a person is fully engaged with some challenging task. Flow can occur while doing a variety of activities, and people from many different cultures report the experience.

The main goal of Montessori education is to enhance students' focused concentration, their experiences of "flow", not just for the moment or for a particular day, but for a lifetime. It is those experiences of "flow" while arranging flowers or washing dishes that leads a child to the concentrated determination to sound out even the most

challenging exceptions to the rule in English, or count and label the *whole* thousand chain, or write a long division problem into the trillions because bigger numbers are more fun, or to go around the school finding every possible rectangular prism and figuring out its volume because you just learned the formula, or make a book of *every* flag of *every* nation in Africa because there are so many different ones, or writing a book of poems about *every* element in the Periodic Table of Elements after memorizing each one.

These examples of "flow experiences" of our older students are meant to lead them to self-understanding as they enter adolescence and young adulthood. As they gain experience and expertise in the varied educational "disciplines" they begin to deepen their own understanding of what they love, what might be an area they wish to study more deeply, what their "call" or vocation may be in life.

This past week I happened to go into the school office of my sons' middle school/ high school. The administrative assistant there knows that I work at CFMS. I gave her some papers that I needed to give her and she said, "Oh, I meant to call you and tell you that I gave your name and number to another parent here. Her younger son is in first grade and they are not very happy with the situation. I told her that I didn't know what you did at your school, but that it must be good because all of the students that have come here from your school are very well prepared and wonderful students." I thanked her for the endorsement.

It can be hard to see how some of the unusual activities that children do in our classrooms at all ages translate to future schooling, careers, and the journey of life. Frankly, some of what we do in Montessori and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd can seem mysterious to parents. We wonder as parents; sometimes we worry.

I would like to encourage you to do lots of wondering and ask lots of questions. If you wonder about something related to your child's work in school (and especially if you feel your "wonder" turning to "worry"), talk with your child's teacher or talk with me. Get the answer to your questions. We may sometimes say to you what we say to older children who ask questions about so many things, "Did you know that you can find out more about that question in this book?" We may direct you to our Parent Resource Library where there are some wonderful books, videos and CDs about Montessori education, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, child development and other related topics.

Come to each of the Parent Education sessions and the other events such as liturgies, plays, and other social events that are offered throughout the school year. Ask questions at the Parent Ed sessions; probe the teachers and catechists about the whys and wherefores of what we do. All those years ago, my brother-in-law asked his question about "domestic skills" partially in jest, but he did do further investigation into just what his money was paying for and he was happy with the investment.

Judy

## From the Atrium

### *Prayer at CFMS*

"God is in us."

(prayer of a primary child at CFMS)

Sofia Cavalletti, who developed the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd that we use at CFMS, writes that the young child is metaphysical, easily finding God in the everyday places of our lives. This is a path to prayer that is nurtured at CFMS. In their daily studies they encounter the wonderful gifts of God in creation, in history, and in the community of their class. There is time and openness for that encounter to become a moment of wonder, of contemplation, or of prayer.

Children in the primary classes move easily from class to atrium, where our catechists Ms. Oona and Ms. Jodi-beth are ready each morning to support their prayerful work. From Ms. Nieva's class, the children cross the hall to the atrium where Ms. Leslie and Ms. Jodi-beth are present two mornings and three afternoons each week for lessons, work and prayer. For Ms. Melinda's class, Ms. Kate and I meet with these older children once a week for study, and once a week for the class prayer service. All of our teachers are familiar with the work of the atrium so that they can also support the children's times of prayer.

While most of this prayer is unspoken, here are a few of the many prayers we've collected from CFMS students over the years - a taste for you savor - and just one of the many reasons I am nourished by my work as a catechist at CFMS. From these words we can learn a little about God and

God's creation, about ourselves, and about the children who can help us to pray.

#### 3-6 year old children

Alleluia! You make me so happy! Alleluia!  
Jesus is with us. Alleluia!

Thank you, Lord Jesus. He laid down his life for the sheep.

Jesus loves me.

I love God.

#### 6-9 year old children

The kingdom of God is a garden. It blooms with happiness and is flowing with love, home and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

There is a promise. I shall climb hills and mountains and go across lakes and fields until I find you. I shall fall at your feet and pray. Amen.

God is in us.

God wants to be your friend. God loves you. God is watching you. God likes you.

#### 9-12 year old children

The light of Christ is stronger than hate.

"Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit." These words from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthians are copied and illustrated repeatedly by the older children. One added, "The meaning of this sentence is that all plants and animals have bodies they live in and therefore they all have a temple of the Holy Spirit inside them."

"Probe me, O God and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; see if my way is crooked, and lead me along the way of old." To these words from the Psalms were added, "No war! O God! Peace, peace on Earth."

Catherine

## From the Primary Classes

### *From Kristi*

In our first few weeks of school, we are all finding our way. 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.

Years ago there was a boy who struggled in the classroom. The children in the classroom quickly learned to give him space. On one particular day, however, he was deeply involved in a drawing he was creating. It was clear that all of his being was focused on

that drawing, and there was deep joy in this work. The other children in the classroom were intensely drawn to him in that moment—several sat near him, aware something important was happening. They were silent, wanting simply to be with him in that moment.

I love, that at its heart Montessori education has as its goal serving as an aide and protector of those moments of feeling deeply and intensely found.

As we settle into our classroom and daily routines, the beginnings of our class community starts with the time we spend together singing songs and reciting poems.

The classroom is in so many ways a mysterious place to be for new children, full of so many new things to discover. It's a bit disorienting in the beginning. But even for the youngest of children, music and poems are instantly accessible and comforting. At the end of a song, there is a wonderful silence that lingers in the room, as we savor what we have created together.

For parents, as well, the classroom is a mysterious place. Often, the children don't offer much information about our day at school. But the thing that does find its way easily into home life is the songs and poems. It is the beginning of your connection as parents to our budding classroom community.

As the season shifts rapidly into fall, we have been reciting poems related to the season. Both of these poems have hand motions. Ask you child to share them with you.

### Whisky Frisky

Whisky, frisky, hippity, hop,  
Up he goes to the treetop.  
Whirly, twirly, round and round,  
Down he scampers to the ground.

Furly, curly what a tail,  
Tall as a feather, broad as a sail.  
Where's his supper? In a shell.  
Snappity, crackity, out it fell.

This next has been a wonderful rainy day song. Often as they work, children will sing this song to themselves. Slowly we have been learning each of the verses that go along with the song.

### *The Clouds are Gonna Roll Away*

(Chorus)

Oh, the clouds are gonna roll away,  
The clouds are gonna roll away,  
I don't care how hard it rains,  
'Cause the clouds are gonna roll away.

The lightin' bug he never knows  
Just what he's going to find,  
So he just flies round and round,  
With his little light on behind.

(Chorus)

The little bird in the gilded cage,  
Would've been whistlin' yet,  
But he flew out one rainy night,  
And he got his whistler wet!

(Chorus)

The hen first came from the egg,  
And the egg came from the hen.  
But I've been wondering all this time,  
Just how it's going to end?!!

(Chorus)

The blue jay saw the little worm,  
A wigglin' to and fro.  
And in the hole were the worm once dwelt,  
There ain't no worm no more!

### *From Lindy*

The school year has just begun and many of you are wondering how these first few weeks have gone. You are probably anticipating your time to observe which happens in October. This year's transition back into school has been quite peaceful and it feels like we've been at school for months now. There is a lot of curiosity and interest from new children and lots of catching up with old friends from returning children.

There are also many grace and courtesy lessons among the lessons that I give throughout the morning. These lessons are a vital part of how the Montessori environment can work. If the children were not introduced to lessons on how to move around our classroom or how to communicate with other children then our classroom would not be quite so peaceful. I give the children lessons on just how to weave their bodies around tables and chairs without bumping into them, how to walk around mats with work on them, or how to talk to someone that is all the way across the room. Then, they are able to go about without interrupting other children in the process. If a child learns early on that touching other children's work is not an option then everyone can feel that his or her work is very important. They also learn not to interrupt me when I am in a lesson with

another child. This gives them confidence that I will give my full attention to them if they are having a lesson. Maria Montessori believed that the children should be the focal point of the environment and that they can teach themselves through working with the materials provided. The role of the adult is to put the child in touch with the materials and simply be a link for the child if they need assistance. She wanted adults to get the idea that we need to step back, not disappear completely, but be there and observe the children develop. "The principle agent is the object itself and not the instruction given by the teacher."

Aside from giving lessons, my role in the classroom is to observe. I really enjoy stepping back when I am able and really watching and listening. The other day I observed a boy who has been with us awhile seeing a new girl moving things around on a shelf. He went up to her and put his hand on her shoulder. She looked into his eyes and he said "That's not how those go on the shelf. Can I show you how to fix them?" At the time, she was not interested and I think she just walked away. He stayed, at first looking a little confused as to why she left, but then he fixed what was awry on the shelf and then he went on his way. It was very sweet to watch and while she was not interested this time, she may be in the future and she will know who to ask. Everything comes to each child over time, for some sooner than others, but that's just one of the many things that make life in a Montessori classroom so exciting.

It is such a joy to come to school everyday to work with your children and I can't wait

for more fun things to come this year. I hope you and your family are just as excited! ☺.

I know that many of you have been wondering about some songs that we sing at school and have probably been trying to figure out some of the words just through what your child is singing to you. That can sometimes be difficult, so here are the words to just a few of the songs that we've been singing since school started.

*Mango Song*

Mama, Mama, I want a mango  
Papa, Papa, please papaya  
Nana, Nana, a ripe banana  
Kiwi kiwi kiwi quint

Red berries, berries blue  
These are fruits so good for you  
Cherries, cherries, sweet and new  
And coconuts, yes their fruits too

Mama, Mama, I want a mango  
Papa, Papa, please papaya  
Nana, Nana, a ripe banana  
Kiwi kiwi kiwi quint

*Una Tortalita*

Una tortalita para mi mama  
Una tortalita para mi papa  
Una tortalita para mi

Otra vez?  
Si otra vez

Una tortalita para mi mama  
Una tortalita para mi papa  
Una tortalita para mi

Otra vez?  
No otra vez

(Ask your child to show you the hang motions)

*Light a Candle for Peace*

Light a candle for peace  
Light a candle for love  
Light a candle that shines all the way around the world

Light a candle for me  
Light a candle for you  
That our wish for world peace will one day come true

Sing peace around the world  
Sing peace around the world  
Sing peace around the world  
Sing peace around the world

*Five Green and Speckled Frogs*

(finger play)

Five green and speckled frogs  
Sat on a hollow log  
Eating some most delicious bugs  
Yum yum

One jumped into the pool  
Where it was nice and cool  
Then there were four green speckled frogs  
Glub glub...

This continues until there are no more green speckled frogs. Ask your child to show you the motions that go along with the song

## From the Elementary Classes

### *From Nieva*

Young elementary children have always been a breath a fresh air to me. They are a bunch that would like to be out there. Why not? It is from the age of 6-7 when children start becoming social beings and when the need for order occurs. Their fascination is limitless. Their questions require the why and how of things. They become sticklers on what is right and what is wrong. They look up to people that interest them. They have the physical stamina that keeps them ready to tackle almost anything.

With these characteristics as guide, Maria Montessori designed a curriculum that has a wide array of possibilities for exploration, as infinite as the universe. We use the children's interest to motivate them to refine their handwriting, develop their oral and written expression, and engage their mind to do mathematical calculations. All these happen in the classroom.

Now that the children are in elementary, how can parents assist them? Always in the beginning of the school year, setting a routine is a priority. Maria Montessori said the adult is the link between the children and the environment. This is not only true in the classroom but also at home. The children's compass at this stage is still the adult. At home, parents need not only think of the kind of routine the elementary children should follow but they also need to consider which one they can follow through. One activity parents may want to establish at home is a regular time for oral or quiet reading. Eventually, the children can

substitute this block of time for a study period when they begin to bring schoolwork to finish or do at home.

When parents know the children's class schedule, it can help de-stress elementary children. Young elementary children not realize that it is P.E. day\* and therefore may end up choosing clothes that are not suitable for doing physical activities. For example, girls may wear a dress or a child may wear rain boots on a rainy day. So if the children choose the clothes they wear, remind girls to wear shorts or pants under their skirts. On rainy PE days, make sure the children have rubber shoes in their backpack if their rain boots are not suitable for PE. Since we are not near the water fountain during PE make sure the children bring their own water bottle. Things to consider on the kind of water bottle they should have: 1) keep in mind the child's little hand. Demonstrate how to open and close the lid. 2) Consider portability. Oftentimes children are discouraged to bring their water bottle when it is heavy to carry or it is too much for their hand to hold.

At this stage, elementary children can be conditioned to prepare their snack and lunch. This may not be possible every day but at least assign a day when a parent and the child can do the preparation together. If the parents or other adult prepare the children's snack and lunch box, the one who packed the food need to tell what is in the children's lunch box. Some parents even place in their child's lunch bag or box a note encouraging their child to enjoy lunch.

Visit a museum, do nature walks with the children When the children start asking

questions, parents should not think that the answer have to come from them. Bring the children to where they can find the answer. Take them to a museum docent, to the park horticulturist, to a friend who can act as the resource person and to a librarian.

At 6-7 years, the children would still like to engage in activities their parents are interested. Parents can use their area of interest as well as the children's favorite housework or activity to support the knowledge or skills they have learned or are learning at school.

Parents do not have to worry about the need to supplementary academic activities at home. Trust that the children are doing enough handwriting practice, composing, counting, and calculating activities in school. If for some reasons, a child is showing behavior that impedes him or her from learning then the teacher will call for a conference with the parents to discuss the matter.

Remember, the home is the place where each member comes together and be a family. Children like to be home because it is where they can be carefree and still feel loved and protected.

\* P.E. days are on Monday and Friday, 2 -3 p.m.

### *From Melinda*

The students and I are off to a good start. Our class has 21 students this year, (10 girls and 11 boys), with 10 third -graders, 3 fourth-graders, 5 fifth-graders, and 3 6<sup>th</sup>-graders. We have one student new to CFMS this year - we welcome fourth-grader Max Jackson.

Thanks to all of the parents who came to our first Parent Education night! Our next major parent event is our annual Rolling Ridge retreat, which this year will be September 30 - October 1.

Each year the classroom environment is a little different, and changes this year include some additional shelving for geography materials, some bigger and smaller chairs and more tables, and a new ceiling and light fixtures.

Another major change is the addition of our assistant, Kate Campion. Kate is in our classroom four mornings a week, does lunch and recess duty and works in the lower elementary atrium. Lizzy Maresca helps out with our PE twice a week, and two high school boys, Will Harris and Mike McCutcheon from St. Anselm's, volunteer in our class once a week on Tuesday mornings.

It's been lovely to see the returning students get right in and start to work, while I have been enjoying getting to know the many students new to my class. Work patterns are becoming established, and favorite works are emerging. A few notes about our curriculum this year:

- For the upper elementary students, we are beginning a Model United Nations club, assisted by our high school volunteers, who are in their school's Model UN program.
- Our history, geography, art and music tend to be linked, and run in three-year cycles. This year we are focusing on Australia/Oceania and Africa, after focusing on Europe and Asia last year.
- Our class has prayer service together each week in the upper elementary atrium,

and the third-graders have their Bible study there with Kate, but third-graders go to the lower elementary atrium for their work time, supervised by Jodi-Beth McCain and Leslie Proctor. The upper elementary students have their lessons and work time with Catherine Maresca.

We are all still getting used to our new schedules and roles, but we are all settling in nicely, and good work is already going on in great abundance. On Monday the students will give you a taste of it, as they bring home their work for the first time. At the end of each month, the students chose some of their best work to put in their portfolios, and then bring the rest home. Please take the time to look through it with them. Since much of this work is practice, before the students reach mastery, there will be many errors and incomplete works. Don't worry about that - it's all part of the learning process. Their work isn't graded, though I do look at it all to see how they're progressing and see where they might need lessons. If you have any questions about the works that the children can't answer, feel free to call or e-mail me.

Also, below, you will find a list of books that I recommend for elementary school children. *Not all of these books are suitable for all children.* If you have questions about individual books, or what your child has been reading at school, feel free to call or e-mail me. (301-277-3469, [mamelone@verizon.net](mailto:mamelone@verizon.net)).

Thank you for the privilege of working with your children!

## Good Books for Elementary Readers

I was asked at our Parent Education session about children's literature for third-graders and up. While I'm not sure any or all of these books qualify as literature, they have proved popular over the years with my classes. There are also many "Best Books for Kids" websites available, usually broken down by grades. (Since our students so often read things above or below their "grade level" I haven't done this.) Many of the books below are individual titles in a series - I've only listed one, just to give you a starting point. Other times I've listed whole series as such - start anywhere.

### Magic and Myth

*Half-Magic* - Eager  
*Finn Family Moomintroll* - Jansson  
*Sea of Trolls* - Farmer  
*Platform 13  $\frac{1}{2}$*  - Ibbotson  
*The Phantom Tollbooth* - Juster  
*The Princess and Curdie* - MacDonald  
*The Phoenix and the Carpet* - Nesbit  
*Beyond the Deepwoods* - Stewart & Riddell  
*Inkheart* - Funke  
*Fantastic Mr. Fox* - Dahl  
*The Lightning Thief* - Riordan

### Ordinary Life

*The Five-Story Mistake* - Enright  
*Theater Shoes* - Streatfeild  
*Soccer Halfback* - Christopher  
*Stanford Wong Flunks Big Time* - Lee  
*The Egypt Game* - Snyder  
*Frindle* - Clements  
*From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* - Konigsburg  
*Philip Hall Likes Me, I Reckon Maybe* - Greene

## Loser - Spinelli

### Comics and Comedy

*Calvin and Hobbes* - Watterson (series)  
*Captain Underpants* - Pilkey (series)  
*Geronimo Stilton* - (series)  
*Giraffes? Giraffes!* - Haggis-on-Whey

### Poetry

*A Pizza the Size of the Sun* - Prelutsky  
*The Dream-Keeper* - Hughes  
*Love That Dog* - Creech  
*You Read to Me, I'll Read to You* - Ciardi  
*Where the Sidewalk Ends* - Silverstein

### Historical Fiction

*Time Warp Trio* (Series)  
*American Girl History Mysteries* (Series)  
*My Name Is America/Dear America* (Series)  
*Five Little Peppers and How They Grew* - Sidney  
*Under the Lilacs* - Alcott  
*Heidi* - Spyri  
*The Black Stallion* - Farley  
*M.C. Higgins the Great* - Hamilton  
*Elijah of Buxton* - Curtis

### Science Fiction

*A Wind in the Door* - L'Engle  
*Twenty-One Balloons* - du Bois  
*The Wonderful Flight to the Mushroom Planet* - Cameron  
*The Forgotten Door* - Key  
*Down to Earth* - Wrightson

## From the Development Committee

The start of the each school year brings with it so many things that require

attention. From getting extra clothes in to the school, to co-op jobs, to parent education, to fundraising activities, for new and returning families alike, it can seem a little daunting. And yet I expect that for many of you, as for me, there is something incredibly compelling and engaging about the way that the CFMS community works. We find ourselves drawn in and grateful for the privilege of being part of such a remarkable group of teachers, parents, students, and friends who create a vital environment in which our children can grow and learn.

Part of the work of the Development Committee is to make sure that this vital community remains vibrant and thrives in a number of important ways. We strive to support the work of the Board in three key areas: generating resources that will support school operations; securing scholarship revenues; and establishing financial reserves that will serve to create a permanent home for CFMS. We do this, as parent volunteers, in collaboration with all of you, through a variety of modalities.

For now, I want to underscore the small and ongoing fundraising activities (e.g. Sally Foster, Helping Hands, SERV, and the different grocery store certificates). These activities tend to cluster in the fall months, and they generate resources to support the operations of the school. Last year, these activities generated more than \$5000 for CFMS. Our hope is to continue to keep the fundraising activities focused in ways that fit with the spirit of our community while at the same time providing a return that sustains the quality of the learning environment for the children.

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

## **IMPORTANT DATES**

Sally Foster orders due:  
October 9

Parent Business Meeting:  
October 19th

For Small Hands orders due:  
October 21st

Classroom Observations:  
October 19th-30<sup>th</sup>