



John XXIII Montessori Children's Center

CGS Atrium Newsletter ~ Ordinary Time ~ Feb. 2009

At the half-way point of the Atrium year, the children are well-acclimated to the rhythm of the Atrium day and are enjoying their prayer time, new lessons, and personal work choices. The self-direction invited and encouraged by the CGS Atrium program is one of the hallmarks of Dr. Montessori's philosophy. Opportunities in the Atrium for self-direction and the practice of healthy independence build life skills of self-confidence and good decision-making in even the youngest of children. This is an "aid to life" of inestimable value in the formation of our children. Under our guidance and by the opportunities and example we offer, we as parents hope that our children will grow and reach young adulthood able to make good choices.

This is especially important today in order to function maturely in our often hostile modern culture. However, if our children are given no experience or opportunity to practice "choice-making" skills, but rather have all choices made for them, how can we expect anything but the eventual abuse of "freedom of choice?" This becomes particularly true as soon as children reach adolescence and young adulthood and seize the first opportunity to prove they can choose on their own. But often this rebellion is really a cry of nature expressing, albeit in often inappropriate ways, the deep need of the human person to make their own decisions and choose their own path in life. Standard educational settings provide few opportunities for self-directed choices as children are micro-managed throughout their day with scheduled class periods, assignments and bells ringing to shuffle them from one adult-directed activity to another. Even in our homes we may be tempted to over-direct in order to make our task of parenting

seemingly "easier" in the short-term. However, providing children with the opportunity to make many of their own decisions, both at home and within a safe, prepared Montessori environment, accustoms them in the practice of good choice-making. It bestows upon them the blessing of self-confidence and an assurance that they can rely on their own abilities and practiced decision-making skills to determine for themselves the right choices. The habit of making good choices in the many little ways offered in the Atrium actually becomes a significant stepping-stone for the child to one day have the ability to make the right choices when it really counts.

Atrium Calendar at-a-glance:

Feb 11th – 27th - Atrium Parent

Observations continue. Sign up in our HLI entrance vestibule.

Feb 18th – First Communion Parent's Gathering at the Atrium 7:30-8:30pm.

For parents of children making First Communion this year; (rescheduled from 2/11)

Feb 22nd – John XXIIIMCC Open House:

Tours, information and literature about Atrium and Three Morning Programs for the upcoming year will be available. The Open House will be held 2:00 – 4:00 p.m. at the Atrium. Please invite your friends.

March – John XXIIIMCC Open House: date TBA

February through April 15th – "Early Bird" registration period for Atrium and Three Morning Program for lower enrollment fee.

Three Morning Program Update: Things are moving ahead for the fall 2009 opening of our new Three Morning Primary and Elementary Academic Programs. These programs will be held on three consecutive

mornings, Tues. – Thurs. and will be additional options besides the Atrium to be offered to families by John XXIIIMCC. As part of the progress made since last spring, we are pleased to announce that we have procured both a Primary and an Elementary Directress to lead our programs. These Directresses have each taken Association Montessori Internationale (AMI) certified training. AMI is the only Montessori course of study approved by Dr. Montessori and is recognized internationally as having the highest standards of excellence in training qualified teachers. We are also working with a Montessori consultant, Diane Quinn, who has 25 years' experience in the fields of AMI Montessori, CGS, Home-schooling and Special Education. Diane will be guiding the structure of our curricula and classrooms. *More information and literature will be available at our upcoming Open House – see below.* Enrollment forms for both the Three Morning and Atrium Programs will be available at the Open House and also distributed in the coming weeks after Atrium sessions. We encourage you to enroll your children early to secure a space in either program. Due to the addition of the Three Morning Program, fewer Atrium sessions will be available and as such, spaces will be limited, as will spaces in the new Primary and Elementary classrooms. "Early bird" enrollment until April 15th offers the usual \$50.00 application fee per child. ***After the early enrollment period ends on April 15th, application fees will rise to \$65.00 per child.***

John XXIIIMCC Open House - Sunday, February 22nd, 2:00-4:00 pm. Tours, information and enrollment literature will be available as well as light refreshments. Please come and bring a friend with an interest to learn more about our expanded offerings for children and their families. (An additional Open House will be scheduled for March – date TBA.)

First Communion Parent's Gathering: Wednesday February 18th, 7:30-8:30 pm. We will review what Atrium 1st Communion lessons entail as an aid to preparing your child for first Confession and Communion. (*Rescheduled from the original date of Feb. 11th as on the 2008-9 Atrium Calendar.*)

John XXIIIMCC Spring Fundraiser:

"Slow Food, Vast Wine" By now you have heard from our fundraising chairpersons, Brian & Karen Delaney about our planned fundraiser to be held **Saturday, April 25th, 6:30-9:30 pm.** Slow Food, Vast Wine should be a first-class, fun event for all who attend, and hopefully become an annual and looked-forward-to event for our families and the community. As we look at expansion with accompanying increased costs, a successful fundraiser will help with funds for new materials, scholarships, and allow us to keep tuition for all programs affordable. Slow Food, Vast Wine will be held at LaGrange winery in Haymarket in their lovely historic manor house. There will be four themed rooms, Virginia, California, France, and Mediterranean, each of which will feature wines from that region. Attendees will receive a "passport" at the door, which will be stamped as they "travel" to the four different wine regions represented. At each region there will be fine wines to sample, paired with delicious food prepared from offerings by local organic producers. There will be door prizes, and silent and live auctions. Please contact Brian & Karen and help make this event a great success: musikids8@embarqmail.com, or 636-8035.

Drop-off and Pick up Procedures

reminder: With the additional parking spaces and traffic that Chelsea brings to our shared entrance to HLI, we would like to remind you of our procedures in order to properly ensure each child's safety:

At drop-off time, once an Atrium Catechist or Assistant is waiting in the vestibule area, parents should escort their children to the side entrance of HLI. *Children may not be dropped off early as they would be unsupervised.*

At pick-up time, parents may either wait for an assistant to escort their child to the car, or may come to the vestibule door once the assistant and children have arrived. Parents (or other responsible adult or teen) must be an escort to their child(ren) anytime there is either:

- 1. Only one adult with the children in the vestibule, OR**
- 2. You are late for drop off/pick up and there is no one in the vestibule. In this case, *the parent must come into the building and remain until their child enters (or exits) the Atrium, making sure a Catechist or Assistant knows your child has arrived (or is departing.) At no time should a child under 10 be allowed to either cross the parking lot or enter the building unescorted.***

Notes from each of the Atrium Sessions:

Wednesday Atria

Mrs. Janaro's Level I Atrium:

The Children in the Wednesday 3-6 Atrium have embraced their work with curiosity, wonder and joy. They have entered into the environment whole-heartedly and have claimed it as their own special place of meeting Jesus, their Good Shepherd.

At the feast of Epiphany, the children welcomed Jesus, the newborn King, into the Atrium and into their hearts. During the short interval of Ordinary time before Lent begins, they are meditating on the Parables of the Mustard Seed, and of the Merchant and the Pearl of Great Price, leading them to a great desire of His kingdom. Work with the materials of the parable of the Good Shepherd invites the children to know that "The King of Love my Shepherd is."

Maria Montessori recognized that the child had a real and significant role in the transformation of humanity. Each time I am in the Atrium with your children, I experience this gift they unknowingly give, and I am blessed by it and grateful for it.

~ Mrs. Janaro

Mrs. Accettullo's Level III Atrium:

The community setting of the 9-12 Atrium provides this age child with motivation to both undertake and complete extended large works such as timelines (a favorite!) and research projects, which may take weeks and even months to complete. One such work in our Level III Atrium has been a series of timelines the children initiated last spring to illustrate Jesus' Miracles, Events in the life of Jesus, and the Parables. The work began when the children decided to divide themselves into three groups to best cover these three subject areas. After the timeline format was decided upon, each group discussed, debated and, in some groups, voted about how best to convey these subjects on their timeline. The closet held these special works-in-progress over the summer for the children's return this year. The timelines were taken up again in September without missing a beat; children new to the 9-12 Atrium were invited to join in if they had an

interest. Two of these three big works have been completed this semester and are now beautifying one of the walls of our room.

In October, the older children in the Level III took a field trip to the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. Immaculee Ilibagiza, author of Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust was a guest speaker at the Week of Prayer and Fasting event at the Shrine. The trip was a follow-up to our reading excerpts from Immaculee's book last spring. The talk she gave was incredibly inspiring to all of us; she shared how God had changed her heart to be able to meet with her family's killer in prison, to look into his eyes, and to forgive him. When the children were asked later what they most remembered most about Immaculee's presentation, the comments came: "God's love and forgiveness are greater than anything that we can do," and "She said we can forgive others like Jesus when He said from the cross, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.'"

Since Christmas several new lessons have been introduced, one of which involves two charts which depict the structure of the Mass. "The Structure of Mass," which has the Eucharist at its center, is presented as a series of prayers which together make up one Great Prayer, as so many pearls which are strung together to make a beautiful necklace. We looked at the parts which must be the same at every Mass, and the parts which change with the feast or season, called the Propers. An additional lesson which follows after work with these charts is "The Sacramentary;" a material in which each prayer of the Mass is detailed on a card, all of which are laid out in order on one of four charts: The Liturgy of the Word, The Preparation of the Gifts, The Liturgy of the Eucharist, and Communion. Children may choose to make their own Missal by copying all the prayers for themselves. When finished, we will have the Missals bound. Another lesson soon to be introduced is one which focuses on the previously touched upon Propers of the Mass, which are essential to a valid Mass, but which change in their content with the liturgical season or feast of the day. These are quite scholarly works which may give the children an opportunity to instruct their parents!

~ Mrs. Accettullo

Thursday Atria

Mrs. Wadleigh's Level I Atrium:

We currently find ourselves in this short Ordinary time between Christmas and Lent. Looking back, the children have been very busy in our Thursday Atrium.

The year began with a lot of work in the life of the Church and geography.

Highlights include our beautiful Advent procession, changing the green prayer table cloth to purple, and meditating on the Prophecies and Infancy Narratives. These important works led up to our great Epiphany celebration where we focused on the three gifts of the magi and the liturgical color change to white. What a joyful time it has been! Presently, we are focusing on the five 'Kingdom Parables'. "The Kingdom of Heaven is like..." a mustard seed, a pearl of great price, a hidden treasure, a growing seed, and leaven. These parables contain great riches expressed in such simple language, helping us to see through this world, and into the mystery behind it.

Looking ahead, soon we will enter into the special time of Lent where we deepen our prayer by focusing our gaze on the Good Shepherd works and Psalm 23. The cenacle and the city of Jerusalem works will draw the children in, as we meditate on the Last Supper and Jesus' final steps to Calvary. Many "connections" with other work done throughout the year take place at this time. Jeanette, Helani, and I enjoy our time with your children. They are truly a treasure, and offer such a beautiful gift of themselves to the Atrium.

~ Mrs. Wadleigh

Mrs. Accettullo's Level II Atrium

At this time of year in the Level II Atrium, we intensify our focus on the Sacraments of Reconciliation and the Eucharist in a specific way. The purpose of this is to assist both those children preparing to celebrate these sacraments for the first time in the spring, and to encourage a deepening of understanding with those children only newly-welcomed at the Lord's banquet table in the past year or two. Recently we have begun pondering together the great mystery of the Eucharist by

means of several lessons; one such is entitled "The Origins of the Eucharist." Using our familiar Cenacle backdrop and figures of Jesus and His Apostles, which have been worked with since the Level I Atrium, this lesson invites links to the Holy Mass. We discuss how after the Last Supper, Jesus died, rose and ascended. But not wanting to leave us alone as orphans, He gave us two great gifts: Himself in the Eucharist and the gift of the Holy Spirit. By means of the Holy Spirit and the work of the apostles, Bishops and Priests were commissioned to carry on the work of Jesus and say the words of consecration never before heard until Jesus spoke them at the Last Supper. The children then replace the figures of the Apostles with that of the Priest, who stands behind the Cenacle table already prepared with a chalice and paten, crucifix and miniature (birthday-sized) candles, which we then actually light. At that moment the backdrop behind the Last Supper table is changed by turning it around to view a beautiful stained-glass window background. *What does this remind us of?* (What happens next is one of those many ah-hah moments in the Atrium.) Our Cenacle room now looks like a Church . . .

A few weeks ago at prayer time, as we sat in a circle on the floor in a darkened Atrium, we shared among us a small loaf of bread. We discussed how we knew that the bread in the Atrium was *not* Jesus; we were just using it to help us think more about this mystery. But what do we know about the bread at Mass? Does He really change the bread into Himself for us? We pondered and discussed how Jesus loves us so much that He wanted to be with us in a very special way. He wanted to give us Himself, a gift for all people of all times. We then passed around the small loaf in silence and all broke off a little piece, waiting until everyone had a piece so we could partake of the bread at the same time. How close did sharing this bread make us feel? If this bread were really Jesus, how close would we be to each other then? How close would we be to Jesus? (VERY close!) How close to Jesus will we be when we have been able to receive Him for many years? What about for our whole lives; even every day? How will being this close to Jesus change us?

So many mysteries about God's love to wonder about and to ponder with the children . . .

~ Mrs. Accettullo

Friday Atria

Mrs. Hibl's Level I Atrium:

Greetings from the Friday afternoon 3-6 Atrium. Our Atrium has been very busy. During the Christmas season and "celebration" time the children loved to meditate on the Nativity of Jesus, the travels and gifts of the Magi and the adoration of the shepherds. A favorite focus in our class being the simple movement of the star leading the Magi to the stable. We have observed during the simple and slow movement of the biblical figures in these narratives the child's absorbent mind connecting with God, and seeing their place in His community. Sometimes they ask at the Raised Surface Map of the Holy Land "Where would I walk?" or "I would walk this way and drink water from here." or "Did they (Mary and Joseph) go in this cave?" It is wonderful to see the joy in their faces as they make their own sincere journey with Mary and Joseph and the Magi. They see Jesus' world as their world too. Their comments are so sweet. One little child cheerfully told the others, "Jesus made the whole world." His face was beaming with joy as he said this.

Now we have entered into Ordinary or "growing" time in the church. Our Atrium has focused on the Kingdom of God parables such as the Mustard Seed or the Precious Pearl. When Lent or "preparation" time approaches we will bring out the City of Jerusalem and also focus on the Cenacle. All of these lessons never fail to inspire awe and wonder. They have so much impact on the child's relationship with Jesus. Even the smallest children notice all the small details of these works and ask questions like "Why did they arrest Jesus?" and "What is this Apostle's name?" Observing the children it is easy to conclude that God is truly communicating to them in our beautiful Atrium environment.

Thank you to Assistants, Kristin Uhlenkott and Joan Robinson for their

Dedication, and to all the parents for letting us "observe" your beautiful children.

~Mrs. Hibl

Mrs. Luetkemeyer's & Mrs. Castellan's Level II Atrium:

As we look forward to the start of Lent in the Church and in our 6-9 Atrium we see that the children have been working on many and varied lessons. One we have added this year which has been very popular is "walking on the line". This work, used in many Montessori environments, is to aid the child in developing concentration and focus as well as control of movement. As the Catechists received the lesson over the summer, we all recognized that it *does* require focus and concentration to walk gracefully on the line! This work, in the Atrium environment, has the added benefit of disposing the child toward prayer. It is done in a meditative fashion while carrying a vase of water, a lit candle or a bell. Some children have chosen to put on meditative hymns while walking. Others have chosen a reader to read a psalm or other Scripture passage while they walk slowly around the line.

Community prayer is also enjoyed in the 6-9 Atrium and is an important part of our time there. At this point of the year, every child has learned how to prepare a prayer service and has had at least one or two opportunities to plan a prayer service with a partner. The children choose a theme and select Scripture readings and songs to include. They love the "silence" and often have it as part of the prayer service. The children need very little assistance from the Catechists as older and younger ones work together. These prayer services are truly the work of the children and the Holy Spirit for the benefit of all in the Atrium and those whom the children remember in their prayers!

*~ Mrs. Luetkemeyer and
Mrs. Castellan*