



John XXIII Montessori Children's Center

CGS Atrium and Three Morning Newsletter ~ Advent 2009

Message from the Director

What a pleasure it has been for me to have the opportunity to work with the families of John XXIII Center these last nine months. It was last March when I was first persuaded to come and visit. I was utterly amazed at the lovely Center and how well established the environments were as well as the high caliber and number of the trained Catechists. Working with the Catechists, Directresses, as well as the Board at John XXIII in expanding the program, has been great joy and true satisfaction as both a Directress and a Catechist. The hallmark of my desire in working with families has been to help others to help themselves to achieve their best. For the most part this goal has been realized in my work with children. Now this opportunity at John XXIII has expanded the circle and the joy of working with children includes working with adults, all with the common goal to realize more fully this gift God has blessed us all with John XXIII Montessori Children's Center. I look forward to our continued work in the months to come. Please remember that I am available to you via email at dianeruth@john23mcc.org Let me know how we can serve you, help you most effectively, and assist your family in educating our children.

~ Diane Quinn, Director

Atrium Calendar at-a-Glance:

Week of November 29: Advent Celebrations – please have your child bring evergreens to their session.

December 8, 9: Parent Information Sessions: 10:30-11:30 a.m.; all parents welcome - signup sheets in hallway by John XXIII mailbox. Bring curriculum examples from home.

Weeks of December 20 & 27: Christmas Break – the Center is closed. Have a blessed Christmas!

Week January 3: All sessions resume with Epiphany Celebrations.

Week of January 31: Parent Observations - signups begin. See sheets in hallway by John XXIII mailbox.

Week of February 7 – Parent Observations begin.

Notes from all John XXIII Sessions:

Mrs. Castellan's 3 Morning 3-6 Atrium News:

The children in the Three Morning Program have spent much time in the Atrium. We often pray and sing as a group in addition to the individual lessons the children choose. They have been very eager to learn about Geography and especially about the land of Israel. We have learned about Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem and seen water from the Jordan River and soil from the Holy Land. We have also studied pictures of the Holy Land. They love to see the salt chunks in the Dead Sea! The geography work helps them to place the story of Jesus' life in time and space.

A favorite work is the Altar. The children find out the names of the sacred vessels, books and linens which Father uses during Mass. A lesson of growing interest is the liturgical colors. Your children may begin to notice what color Father is wearing and what it means, especially as we enter Advent and then the Christmas season. All of these beautiful lessons will heighten their interest in the Mass.

They are becoming more aware of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. Several children have noted that the reason the sheep are special is because "God made them." "They are His sheep." Most do not yet realize that **we** are His sheep and we do not directly tell them. It is such a beautiful discovery when they reach it on their own! One child noted that the Good Shepherd "holies" the sheep. "He gives them their food and their drink...and their holiness."

It is a joy and privilege to be with your children in the Atrium! Have a blessed Advent and Christmas.

~ Mrs. Castellan

Mrs. Wadleigh's Thursday 3-6 Atrium News:

Your children have been very busy in our Atrium. The beginning of the year has been fruitful with work in the life of the Church and geography. As we looked at the globe, we saw where we live, and compared it to the tiny red dot marking the place where Jesus lived; and the children were clearly moved. They began an extended talk on how they could get from here to there. How would they travel such a far distance? Many said they would take a boat or travel by airplane to get to the Holy Land. Some gave more particular details such as driving to the airport first, then flying across the big ocean, then taking a boat! These beautiful thoughts are a good beginning to the Advent season as we prepare ourselves for the celebration of the birth of Jesus in that small town of Bethlehem. Jeanette, Mrs. Uhlenkott and I look forward to this very special time in the Atrium.

~ Mrs. Wadleigh

Mrs. Hibl's Friday 3-6 Atrium News:

Greetings from the Friday morning Atrium. The children have been very busy. We have presented the four basic colors of the church year: purple, green, red, and white. Soon our prayer table will be covered with purple for Advent. In Advent, some favorite works of the children are the stories of the Annunciation, Visitation, Adoration of the Shepherds, and Adoration of the Magi. Working with these stories inspires the children to discuss many beautiful topics such as angels, stars, new babies, and presents for new babies. One child said that the star the magi followed was "God". Sometimes we ask, "What gift would you bring to a new baby?" or "would you be afraid if you saw an angel?" One child sincerely answered, "I would give baby Jesus a sheep."

Light is also a big theme in our Atrium. Some children make the connection between Jesus and the Star of Bethlehem or the candlelight of the prayer circle. They see that candlelight shows us the presence of Jesus. They often repeat "Jesus is the Light." These discoveries are completely their own and are nurtured by their beautiful families and our beautiful Atrium environment. Thank you to our assistants Joan Robinson and Maria Hibl. From all of us we wish you a blessed Advent.

~ Mrs. Hibl

Mrs. Quinn's Thursday 6-9 Atrium News:

The children all began the year remembering the great love of God in the place He has made for us in creation. We have walked through time, through the thousands of years of God unfolding His Great gift of life in this world, ultimately, for us. We have remembered that God created for no other reason than love and created a perfect world ready for our dominion. We have discussed the work of having this dominion, the responsibility of care for the world and our part to play in that work in looking at choices.

This has spurred large work, for some, with the making of their own creation timelines segments, with children picking particular aspects of the creation sequence to expand and at the same time focus on particular "days" of creation. The children see what an ordered and detailed creator our God is.

There has also been renewed interest in the Mass looking at the specific order and prayers used as well as the gestures and articles. Entering into this interest has been work with the Books of the Bible, The Missal and the Maxims work. I'd like to share one moment from the Thursday Atrium group.

In talking with a child the other day I asked him if he had worked with the Maxims very much. He said maybe saying that he'd done almost everything "but maybe not". So I presented him with this work. As I reached to get the work from the shelf, with him standing next to me, the child reached to open the cabinet they are kept in before I took it off to go to a table to present it. His whole face lit up and his eyes grew wide as he began to read the first one aloud. I ended up presenting the lesson from the shelf for the child quickly began looking through all of them with growing excitement. Before I could offer to him work with the material he noticed the prepared sheets of paper present for children to use in copying. These were on the next shelf down. He asked with real excitement if he could make one. I laughed quietly and said he could make them all. I also told him he might even find more in the Bible if he looked these up and he could write those down. He could actually collect Maxims if he wanted. He could make his own booklet. He looked at me for a moment with large eyes and said, "All right" with such joy. He worked for the next ½ hour on this work until time for prayer service. Afterward he told me he was going to work on the rest next time.

The group for the most part is really settling into work and this past week was so caught up in their work that I was loath to ring the bell to stop them. They are really beginning to see the specialness of this time set aside for prayer and contemplation and using that time to productive ends.

~ Mrs. Quinn

Mrs. Accettullo's 3 Morning 6-9 and 9-12 Atrium

News:

The Unity and the Vastness of the Kingdom of God is a touchstone theme for the 6-12 year old child in the Atrium. In both of the two levels of the Elementary Atrium, we use several different types of timelines to help us to grasp the immensity of not only time and history, but also the incredible Love of God, who from the beginning has had a Plan of salvation for all of humankind. God's Plan has been gradually unfolding; it began at the time of Creation, reaches a peak at the time of Christ's Redemption, and will culminate at Parousia with Christ's return in glory. All other lessons and studies in the Level II & III Atria connect with this theme and help to ground us in the "Big Picture" of why we are here.

The 6-9 year old children begin to gain a sense of the vastness of this history through their work with "The Fettuccia," the Italian word for ribbon; a timeline along which the three big events of salvation history are detailed and labeled. What a marvel to unwind this grosgrain ribbon timeline of over 200 feet on which a single rib represents 1000 years! It is an often-chosen work; on a sunny day the Fettuccia is taken outside so the full length of the timeline may be appreciated. Even on a day when unfavorable weather keeps us inside, the Fettuccia is frequently unwound from its large spool in the hallway; we traverse the length of the corridor both up and back while unrolling, telling the story, and placing our *Creation, Redemption and Parousia* labels and plaques with corresponding scripture verses.

After pondering the immensity of the Kingdom of God during their years in the Level II Atrium, The 9-12 children now begin to "zoom in" to focus and meditate on the part each individual has to play in this Kingdom. We look at and research historical peoples and the gifts they have passed on to us as members of the human family. We look also at individuals, leaders, historical figures, some Saints and some sinners, and whether they have furthered or hindered the Plan of God. We ponder our own individual place and work in this Kingdom; a work that no one else can do – How shall we use our time on earth? To further or hinder God's Plan? We look at a work about the Cardinal Virtues which helps us to know how to live so we can help build His Kingdom. We may re-visit parables already heard in earlier years and see what can now be discovered to help us to advance the Plan of God since we are "older and wiser." As always, we approach a parable of Jesus'

with the thought that we must be "detectives" and good listeners to discover the deeper meaning of what Jesus is saying. One parable that was pondered recently at a shared Prayer Service at which both levels of children were present was the Pearl of Great Price. "*The Kingdom of God is like a merchant searching for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value, he goes and sells all he has and buys it.*" (Matt 13:45-46) The children have heard this parable proclaimed since they began in the Atrium as three-year-olds. We discuss: How did the merchant know this Pearl was special? How must he have felt when he found it? We converse about the surface meanings. Then we dig deeper. What is Jesus saying to us about the Kingdom? Who is the merchant, what about this Pearl? The children answer: We are the merchant, the kingdom is a Pearl that is worth selling all we have to get, it is *beautiful*, but we must be looking for it to find it . . . Such well-considered responses. But then a wise ten year old says thoughtfully, "We are the pearl, and Jesus is the merchant . . ." A long, deep silence follows as we all take a few moments to ponder and to savor this beautiful thought . . . Jesus considers each of us a *precious pearl* . . . He "sells all he has" to "buy" us for His Kingdom . . .

~ Mrs. Accettullo

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**Christmas Gift Ideas:** Back by request, Have yourself a Montessori Christmas, taken from Christian *Family Montessori School* parent handout, is attached at the back of this newsletter. We hope you may find these suggestions helpful this Advent-Christmas season. You may also want to pick up one of the recommended source catalogs, ***For Small Hands***, from our Library Cart. It contains most of the items suggested in one catalog, including 200 gifts under \$10.00. John XXIII receives a 10% merchandise credit voucher on any orders over \$25.00. We have pre-labeled our customer information on the back of the catalog; simply mention this information if you order by phone. If you order online, during step two of your online order type in: Customer # 145618, John XXIII Montessori Children's Center, 4 Family Life Ln. Front Royal VA, 22630, 540-631-0900. A bulk order may be organized if there is interest; this would mean a savings on shipping and handling for each individual. **Contact Terri Barnikel, [mountainbarnicles@embarqmail.com](mailto:mountainbarnicles@embarqmail.com), with your order before December 9<sup>th</sup> if you would like to be part of a group order for Christmas delivery.**

### **Mrs. Schmiedicke's 3 Morning Primary News:**

As we approach the nearly half-way mark of our term we have done much of the very essential work of learning how to live and work in our community. The many lessons in Grace and Courtesy which punctuate every aspect of what we do in a Montessori environment are helping the children to feel more settled and comfortable. The children have learned such things as how we move in the classroom, how to get an adults attention, how to observe a lesson without interrupting, how to walk around someone's work rug, how sit in a group, the, ever essential at this time of year, how to cough, sneeze and blow ones nose and many, many more. Grace and Courtesy lessons are repeated as often as necessary, given throughout the year and are continually calling the children to a higher understanding of themselves and those around them. Of course our job as adults in the environment is not only to give these lessons, but to model this standard of behavior ourselves.

Practical Life is always a key point of connection for any group, but especially a brand new one. The exercises of Practical Life have been allowing the children to take part in familiar and purposeful activities, which give them those early tools of independence, coordination of movement and concentration so essential to all the work that follows. Even the returning Atrium children have found many new lessons in Practical Life to capture their interest. This area continues to span the ages from youngest to oldest as the youngest are learning to pour and fold all the way to the older ones learning to polish shoes and tie bows.

The lessons of Sensorial have been very popular. The children are really enjoying the work of fine discrimination of the senses and I see these lessons being repeated quite often. This is the also the area where I receive the most requests for lessons – they are just naturally attractive and so much fun. Where a child's age and capability is perhaps beyond a particular material we have fun adding challenge by doing it blindfolded or playing a distance game.

The area of Mathematics is beginning to hum now. Depending on where a child is with his or her understanding of quantity is where we have been able to begin. Many of the younger children are learning those critical lessons in pairing quantity and symbol which sets them up for a deep understanding and

enjoyment of math. With the older children we have been trying to work through the many preliminary lessons that will allow them to enter the extensive work of the decimal system. This is a lengthy series of lessons using golden bead material and gives children a solid grasp of the four operations (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division). We have just begun addition with a couple of groups of 6's and older 5's.

The area of Language continues to be the most challenging from the standpoint of assessment. Most children entering a new group come in having acquired many various skills relating to reading and writing already. The challenge comes in gaining an understanding of what each child knows, knowing where to pick up with that knowledge in terms of material and then discovering how to grab their interest. We have been playing A LOT of Sound Games (incidentally, anyone interested in learning how to play these, I would love to share this lesson with you – they are so simple, can be played anywhere, and go a long way in preparing your child to write and then read). We have also been doing a lot of Sand Paper Letters. A few children have begun work with the moveable alphabet which will only increase. The small group of children that read have been doing some classified reading and will soon be entering into a series of grammar lessons.

Finally, we have been learning quite a few new songs and rhymes (doubtless you've heard some of them) and have shared many a good book. Snack continues to be the most popular choice of "work" (always is) and lest your child tell you nothing of his or her day, I've no doubt they are always happy to tell you about what they had for snack!

We have had our share of challenges to be sure, but little by little we are becoming a community and that "Montessori Magic", to quote a seasoned Montessorian and friend, is beginning to work its way through. Above all, we have the Good Shepherd always in our midst blessing both our successes and yes, our failures too - urging us on, as Montessori always did, to "follow the child".

A Most Blessed Advent and Christmas Season to you all,

~ Mrs. Schmiedicke

## *Have Yourself a Montessori Christmas*

With holiday shopping upon us, we would like to make a few suggestions about presents for children from a Montessori perspective. We start with a few general principles, and then give specific suggestions for each plane of development.

### For All Ages

- **Less is more** – Children need limits on their toys. Your child should only have access to the number of toys he or she can keep neat. Other toys can be kept in storage, and rotated in and out, perhaps on a monthly or quarterly basis. After the holidays, old toys can be rotated out to make room for the new ones, or even retired (stored for the grandkids, or donated to a younger friend or a charity).
- **Order is essential** – Storage space is a precious commodity in any child's room. Have low, open shelves for primary-aged children, and lots of bins or drawers for older children to organize. Children can and should be tidying up regularly; if toys are constantly all over, they can disappear into storage.
- **"Reality is so much more beautiful than fantasy"** – While children may ask for any glittery licensed merchandise they've been exposed to, they actually crave, and get more long-term enjoyment out of, simpler and more reality-based playthings. Heavily advertised items may only last until the next fad comes along, but a real mop or screwdriver provides skills for a lifetime. Not only will a good, generic wooden dollhouse or blocks last for generations, they'll do more to spark your child's imagination and creativity than the latest plastic brand-name toy.
- **Family fun is number one** – What children really long for most of all is more fun time with their parents. Board games to play with parents, tools or art materials that come with parental supervision and lessons, read-aloud books, and gift certificates for one-on-one special events.

### Gifts for Primary Students, ages 3-6

- Child-sized but truly functional cleaning tools: broom, mop, bucket, sponge, crumber, duster, scrub-brush, carpet-sweeper (and chances to really use them!)
- Blocks, including pattern blocks (small, colored geometric shapes to make patterns)
- Beads for stringing; sewing/lacing cards
- Child-sized, sturdy tables, chairs and easels
  
- Books about real-life events, nature, including children's cookbooks, holiday books, art books, poetry, etc.

- Real, child-sized kitchen tools: bowls, spoons, cutting boards, vegetable slicer, etc. (so your child can really help in the kitchen!)
- A big cardboard box of thrift-store dress-up clothes and accessories
- Puzzles – especially maps, realistic multi-cultural scenes, letters and numbers
- Simple board games
- Realistic baby dolls whose life-size clothes need buttoning, tying, lacing, etc.
- Simple, acoustic musical instruments

### Gifts for Elementary Students, ages 7-12

- Artist-quality art materials and papers, sketchbooks and journals
- Musical instruments (and lessons or how-to books)
- Craft kits - knitting, beading, woodworking
- Science kits – microscope, chemistry set, rock tumbler, etc.
- Gardening tools, seeds and potting equipment
- Blocks, including pattern blocks (really, they're not too old!)
- Art materials
- Cameras, from disposable to digital to video
- Really big books of lists and facts (almanacs, how everything works)
- Simple cookbooks (at child's reading level)
- Tool kits and projects for using them, like do-it-yourself furniture
- Sewing kit; beginner's sewing machine
- Family board games and puzzles
- Gift certificates for one-on-one day trips (museums, hiking, etc.)

### On-line sources for Great Gifts:

- <http://www.forsmallhands.com/> (cleaning, kitchen, wood working, gardening, nature observation tools, books)
- <http://www.communityplaythings.com> (furniture)
- <http://www.michaelolaf.com> (practical life, science and cultural plus great advice.)
- <http://www.ravensburger.com> (puzzles and games)
- <http://www.thinkfun.com> (puzzles and games, brainteasers)
- <http://www.hearthsong.com> (toys, games, books)