



John XXIII Montessori Children's Center

CGS Atrium and Three Morning Newsletter ~ Advent 2011

Message From the Director

"Children come to us as a rain of souls, as a richness and a promise which can always be fulfilled but which needs the help of our efforts for its fulfillment. Do not consider the child a weakling: the child is the builder of the human personality. That this personality be Christian or not depends on the environment around him and on those who guide his religious formation . . . Protect in their development those natural energies implanted in the souls of children by the guiding hand of God."

- Maria Montessori, in an address to religion teachers on the eve of her death

The season of Advent is for us all a special time of preparing to welcome the God who comes to us as a Child. We are charmed by the tiny Baby in a manger, so helpless, so beguiling. The tender feelings the manger scene evokes should lead us not only to ponder how we can more fully welcome *The Child* this Christmas, but also how we can be more welcoming to the children in our own family and sphere of influence. That the child's guidance and an appreciation of the childlike have had too little effect on us as a society is seen in the extremes of abortion and the triumph of force. "Where the will of God is not followed as the directive, the strong man treats the weak as a being without rights, because it is he – the Director – who determines the destiny of his subjects." (Montessori, *The Child in the Church*) But we as parents can also fall prey to this attitude of arrogance in subtle ways when we ignore that the child has as much to teach the adult as the adult to teach the child. Perhaps as an Advent task we could consider how we can cultivate a more humble, reverent listening attitude with our children; one more full of faith in the inner, God-given creative

energies which each child possesses. If we adopt this "truer and deeper respect for the rights and needs of the child . . . harshness, stern commands and arbitrary prohibitions, which are often given more because we are in a bad humor than with any educational purpose will disappear. We shall know better how to carry out St. Paul's practical advice to the Ephesians: 'Fathers, provoke not your children to anger' . . . Thinking of the Christ Child we can learn to abandon our own tyrannical behavior toward children." (*ibid*) Let us welcome the little "adventus" moments that come to us each day as we open ourselves to what our children want to teach us this holy season.



John XXIII Calendar at a Glance

December 8th – Feast of the Immaculate Conception. Happy Feast Day! Full day Three Morning Elementary children attend noon Mass.

December 14th – Three Morning Elementary Presentations – 11:00-11:45 am. Parents and Grandparents welcome!

Week of December 25th and January 1st – Christmas Break, no sessions. Have a Blessed Christmas!

January 10th -13th – All sessions resume with Epiphany Celebrations

January 12th – First Thursday Parent Ed – Primary Atrium 8:15-8:30 am.

January 13th – Christmas/Epiphany Potluck Dinner 5:30-7:30 pm. All John XXIII families invited.

Mrs. Wallace's Friday Morning Toddler Atrium

A Glimpse into Toddler Atrium

Shaking hands at the door, hanging up their coats on a little hook, squealing at seeing a friend, feeding the fish, a small voice saying "deacon, bishop, altar boy, Pope Benedict, priest" working with the language cards, requesting the balance beam and everyone drops their work and begins to walk on the beam, one child is working on fruit language cards, and they all join in, the plum becomes a ball, time to choose a new work, work returned to the shelf, polishing a wooden dish, wiping the dust off the leaf of a plant, drawing a picture, discussing the saints on the holy cards, pasting their own holy card picture, carrying a large tray of work to a table, delighted that they were able to do it, working with clay, buttoning the button frame, group snack- each child with his own place setting- passing the snack bowl, serving themselves or others, putting away snack dishes, cleaning their spot at the table, spilling beans, cleaning up the beans, spilling the beans again so they can clean them up, getting a glass of water to drink, deciding to water the plant with it instead, working with puzzles, learning animal names, listening to the ringing bell for prayer time, gathering around prayer table on sitting mats, setting the prayer table, admiring the Holy Bible, lighting the candle, listening to Jesus' words, singing songs of joy to the Good Shepherd, thanking Jesus for gifts like friends, Jesus, Atrium, Mommy, and nursing, snuffing the candle, putting on shoes and coats and off to joyfully embrace naptime!

What a gift these little toddlers are! There is so much they can do, they have grown so much and they love their little space! ~ *Elizabeth Wallace*

Mrs. Uhlenkott's Thursday Level I Atrium

As this season of Advent approaches I reflect on the word, "preparation." Preparation has been a common theme in our Atrium this year. The children have worked diligently at preparing and keeping our Atrium a quiet and clean place to come and learn about God. They have cleaned cloths, polished items, washed windows, and swept the floors of our Atrium. They have prepared beautiful flower arrangements for the prayer table or little

nooks in the room. They have learned about many of the articles of the Mass and have prepared the altar accordingly. They have also studied the different vestments of the priest as he prepares to celebrate the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

Preparing and caring for our new garden has brought great joy to the children as well. They take great pride in keeping the garden beautiful. We have followed all the steps of planting seeds. Of course, tilling the earth and preparing the ground for the seed to grow was a favorite activity. Jessica Meza, Maria Hibl and I have been struck by the children's beautiful and simple understanding of the True Presence, as well as their comprehension of the correlation between the Good Shepherd and Jesus. On one occasion, I was giving Altar lessons the children. We discussed the paten as a special plate, and we identified the sanctuary light as the sign of God's presence when it was lit. Then I a little boy, took the white candle out of the sanctuary lamp and placed the candle on the paten. I asked him why he did that, and he said, "Because the paten holds Jesus, and Jesus is the light!" I am so honored and blessed to be able to be the catechist for your children on Thursdays. I learn so much from these little ones as I witness their total love and trust in God the Father. I wish you all a blessed Advent and a Joyful Christmas

~ *Kristin Uhlenkott*

Mrs. Hibl's Friday Level I Atrium

Greetings from the Friday morning 3-6 Atrium. Our room has been very busy this year. The children are serious and focused on their works. They often arrive with a clear plan of what they will choose. Newer children have experience with several lessons now and are focusing on their favorite works. For example, one little boy repeats over and over again the story of the Good Shepherd. Another little girl repeats all the Infancy Narratives from the Annunciation to the Finding of Jesus in the Temple. Sometimes a Catechist will read the scripture passage for the child. Sometimes the child works quietly alone. It is wonderful to see the child peaceful and happy to choose and repeat their work.

During our prayer circle time we have been practicing choosing "Silence." The children are very precious when they close their eyes and sit perfectly still and "listen." We do this lesson for one to three minutes. When it is over, several children say, "I heard God!" or, "God talked to me!" These reflections show the beginnings of a child's interior dialog with God.

Throughout each Atrium session, the assistants and myself are in constant observation mode. This means, we watch the child at work and try very hard to do nothing to disturb their concentration or focus. There is so much to learn from simply observing children! For myself I am in awe of their abilities. Their joyful love of work and love of God is truly inspiring.

Soon we will be preparing with the whole church for the coming of the Prince of Peace!
A Blessed Advent to Your Families! ~ *Susan Hibl*

Mrs. Powell's Three Morning Level I Atrium

Preparation Through Work

Advent is one of the two times of preparation in our liturgical year. It is a time given to us by the Church to ready ourselves for the coming of Christ. Through our work in the Atrium, a way is made ready for Him to enter into our hearts. I am seeing more and more this year how our work in the Atrium is a prayer, how it truly allows us to explore and meditate on the mysteries of our salvation.

Already this year, after observing the children work, I have been led to a deeper meditation of the truths of the Faith. One child, while working with the found sheep, paused with the Good Shepherd and, without saying anything, placed him on top of Christ on the San Damiano cross. He just held it there and looked at it. Another child set up the sheep in the form of a cross with the Good Shepherd in the middle. Without a word, these children showed that they had made the connection between the Good Shepherd laying down His life for the sheep and Jesus dying on the cross out of love for mankind.

One of the first group prayers in the Atrium for the

year is: "The Lord is God and He has given us light." I had been thinking about this prayer all semester, but nothing made it clearer to me than a simple prayer card one of the children recently made. When merely glanced at, it may have looked like a scribble with a holy card pasted on it. However, when I asked her about it, she told me that the black patch was the darkness that was on earth and the darkness that was in the hearts of mankind. Continuing, she said that the patch of yellow next to it is the light that came into the world when Jesus was born and the light that had come in the hearts of men. She had then carefully selected a beautiful picture of Baby Jesus out of the pile of holy cards and pasted it onto the side of the card nearer to the light. I can only wonder at the depth of these meditations.

It is with joy and awe that we approach this blessed season. May we all be drawn closer to Christ as we work in and out of our homes in preparation of this joyous occasion.
~ *Elizabeth Powell*

Mrs. Wallace's Primary Three Morning Academic

The Gift of Time

Can you imagine a place where you were able to work uninterrupted for three hours? Can you imagine what you would get done, would accomplish and learn, if for just three hours a day you could focus on your work, your to-do list, or your pleasure reading? How much joy would you have? How much peace? How much more perfect would your work be?

This is the gift you give your child three mornings a week: *The gift of time*. We live in such a busy, hurried, rushed world. There is always an errand to be run, a sibling to be picked up, chores to be done, meals to be prepared. These are all necessities, but they leave us so hurried, so scheduled and without the time to contemplate, to learn with enjoyment, or to feel peaceful. Our children become caught up in this hurry.

Yet, here, in the Three Morning Academic Program, your beautiful children are given the gift of time. Once they enter the classroom there is no rush, no

hurry, only an environment of peaceful and joyful work. The children are allowed to work with a freely chosen work (as long as they have had a presentation on it and no one else is using it) for as long as they wish. It becomes “their work.” They do not have to put it away until they are satisfied with their results and are learning. One may think washing a table would only take a minute; for some children it can take 45 minutes. It helps them focus, think, and use their energy in a productive manner. They are allowed that time. For some children, once they’ve figured out they can read, they want to read words for the whole morning. They are allowed. The color tablet shades can be matched throughout the environment. There are 56 different shades. The children are able to match for as long as they like, sharpening their senses. The short 5 counting chain only goes to 25, yet some children receive so much joy in counting it again and again that they can count it for an hour. They are able. A child may love to work with the Good Shepherd for half an hour. They may meditate and contemplate as long as they wish. A child may become so entranced with the Annunciation, moving the angel back and forth in conversation with Our Lady that he is allowed to ponder this great mystery as long as he needs. And if the bell has rung for the end of the day, and a child is still deep in her work and does not want to stop, she is allowed to work until her parent comes. (And we adults in the environment look on with awe at their concentration.)

In our classroom environment, we see the products of this uninterrupted time. The children are able to truly work through the whole process of learning and absorption with each material they choose. They are joyful in their work. They are peaceful when they are engaged in their work. They become respectful of other’s time with a work, and desire not to be interrupted. They are able to perfect the work they choose, rather than needing to move on to the next subject at a specific time. The children become calmer, happier and more peaceful. At this time of year, as we begin to think about gifts for our children, others and ourselves, think about this gift of time and how we can perhaps give it to our

children (and ourselves) in our own lives and homes. I promise the results are worth the thought! Thank you for the great gifts that your children are to me! It is an incredible blessing to work with them, teach them, and learn from them myself!
With joy, *Elizabeth Wallace*

Three Morning Elementary Atrium – Level II & III

Behold how good it is and how pleasant where brethren dwell as one! It is as when the precious ointment upon the head runs down over the beard, the beard of Aaron, till it runs down upon the collar of his robe. It is a dew like that of Hermon, which comes down upon the mountains of Zion, for there the Lord has pronounced his blessing, life forever. – Psalm 133:1-3

One of the unique aspects of a Montessori elementary environment is that the children come up with their own mutually agreed-upon rules. As an aid to this process, we begin each year in the elementary Atrium with a discussion of what kind of place do we want this to be? How shall we live and work together during our time here? This year we used Psalm 133 as our inspiration. We first meditated on this precious oil mentioned in the scripture – it was very fragrant oil, often smelling of roses, used for anointing a priest. How abundant is the oil mentioned? It is running down Aaron’s beard onto his collar! How beautiful would this anointing oil smell . . . ? We then discussed the dew of Hermon – Mt. Hermon is a mountain so high that the snow remains all year. Even on hot evening cool breezes would come down from Mt. Hermon and sweep over the valley of Zion, bringing dew so abundant that it was more like a refreshing rain which well-watered the ground. All this lovely vivid imagery made us wonder – how beautiful and peaceful is this place where brethren together live in peace and harmony? Is this what God wants for all of us?

Our discussion then turned to how we can create a place where these things are also lived and experienced. Our covenant of agreed-upon behaviors is our tool to help us to achieve this goal. Here are the rules that we agreed to live by this year:

1. Listen with interest and respect when another is talking.
2. Talk quietly and only about God and the work of the environment/Atrium.
3. Raise your hand in a group of three or more.
4. Move slowly so as to not disturb others' work and prayer.
5. Do not take a work off the shelf unless you have had a lesson and put it back when you are finished.
6. Respect the materials.
7. Ask permission/get an adult to light a candle.
8. Come to prayer service unless you are very involved finishing another work.
9. If you need help, ask a friend or stand next to the Catechist until she can talk to you.

At the end of the discussion, we deliberated about if these can be summed up in one main principle. The Golden rule was suggested: "Treat others as you would like them to treat you." This principle was put at the top of the Covenant page as the most important. We then voted to agree on the final list. A scribe among the children re-copied the Covenant notes in best calligraphy on scroll paper. Space was left at the bottom for all to sign; Directress, Catechist and Assistant too! We discuss what it means to put your signature on a document - a pledge or promise, agreeing to uphold the principles. When all have signed, it is prominently posted. We agree to help each other remember if someone forgets, as we all do sometimes. The posted Covenant is then referred to as needed throughout the year. If small, general issues arise among a number of children, at neutral times we gather as a group to discuss - How do you think we are we doing living the Covenant? What are we doing well? Examples that have been observed are given. How can we improve - what rule especially needs work? At other times a child or adult might need to remind a co-worker in the environment: "I think you need to go and review rule #2 on the Covenant because your loud talking is disturbing my work." It is beautiful to see that once the children find the Atrium and classroom are a "safe" place, they will respectfully come up with just exactly what improvements need to happen and how they might resolve them peacefully!

A blessed Advent – *Laura Accettullo*

Mrs. Janaro -Three Morning Elementary Academic

Advent is a good time to think about time. What is time for the elementary child? The younger the child, the less likely he is to have an agenda when he wakes up in the morning. For the adult, this can be frustrating because he or she has to get the children to school on time, or to Mass, music lessons, soccer, ballet, etc., etc., etc. The world runs according to the adult clock. Here is a story about a five year old from E.M. Standing's book, *Maria Montessori: Her Life and Work*:

One day [Maria Montessori] was watching a child of about five years composing the numbers 1-100 with the number frame. This is a material not unlike those wooden frames one sees put up in churches to indicate the numbers of the hymns to be sung. The child was patiently putting the cards in and taking them out. She had before her the task of separately composing each number from 1-100. To Montessori it seemed a dreadfully slow and long-drawn-out business. So, thinking she could help the child to arrive more quickly at its goal-which she took to be the number 100- she began asking her to compose some numbers further on, skipping out others to accelerate the process. The child submitted to her suggestions for some time with quiet patience, obediently doing what she was asked to do. Then, as if she could stand it no longer, she said, politely but firmly, "Please will you go away and let me do it my own way." Whereupon the little girl went back to the point in the number series where she had been interrupted, and carried on from there at the same tempo as before. "I felt justly rebuked," said Montessori, "for my stupidity. I had made the mistake of thinking the child's interest lay in getting to the end of the process and not in the process itself."

The child's work is to self-construct, or to build himself as a human being, and for this work he needs freedom, opportunity to work, and time to work. We are constantly putting the universe, its marvelous order, and the Lord who made that order before the children. We are providing lessons that

help them build a sense of orientation within the universe. But the child has to be able to make choices because he will gravitate towards what he most needs, like a compass that needs to point north. And he needs time to make those choices!

Appropriate to the discussion of time, I thought I would talk about the role of timeline work in the environment. I'm sure you have heard your children talking about their work with timelines. They are an essential element in the Montessori environment. Timelines give children a sense of

Order: certain things happened before other things could happen.

Orientation: a particular event fits into a given point in the unfolding of history.

Humility: look how much time has unfolded and how relatively short a time I have in the story.

Mission: what will my contribution be?

Gratitude: others before me have made it possible for me to do so many of the things I can do.

As well, they offer children the opportunity to work cooperatively with other children, to coordinate their ideas, to plan the layout, to make decisions with respect for other children's ideas, and of course, to learn about history.

Some of the children are making cyclical timelines, typically of a pattern in nature that repeats, for example, a seed grows into a plant that disperses seeds, and that begin the cycle again. Some of the children are working on timelines of a day in their life. Older children are working on timelines of fundamental needs of human beings, that is, looking at how people have clothed themselves, how they have gotten themselves from one place to another (transportation), or what kinds of foods people have eaten throughout history. Children can do timelines of just about anything. If you were at elementary presentation day, you saw the remarkable timeline of ships with its detailed and proportionate drawings and interesting information.

I wish you all a beautiful Advent and Christmas that move according to the child's clock.

~ *Eileen Janaro*

Mrs. Accettullo's Friday Level II Atrium

All of the works in the Atrium are Misso-centric, meaning each lesson, either directly or indirectly, is designed to both make accessible and inspire a more full participation in the Liturgy. Favorite works to begin the year in the Level II Atrium are our materials pertaining to the articles seen at Mass. One such material is our miniature Model Altar. It is a favored material for the new six-year-olds because it is familiar, having worked with the Articles of the Mass in the Level I Atrium. It is also well-loved by the older children because it is inherently appealing. This work includes models of all of the Articles of the Mass, previously presented and worked with in Level I. But now these articles are ingeniously presented anew in the Level II simply by the fact that they are literally doll-sized and are able to fit on a mini altar of about 2 by 4 inches – what a marvel! “Ooh - it is so cute!” the girls often exclaim, but many times it is the boys who are drawn to repeat this work. To begin, we recall that Mass is Jesus' special Meal, and that there are so many beautiful things that we see at Holy Mass that are used for this special Meal . . . first we place a 7 x 7” marble tile to represent the sanctuary floor and the small altar upon it. Then one by one, all of the articles are ever-so- carefully removed from the tiny Sacristy Cabinet and placed on the altar – first the altar cloth, the candles, then the Chalice and Paten on the Corporal, with the Purificator cloth next to the Chalice and the Pall on top. Next comes the tiny 1 ½” tall golden Tabernacle with a working door in which we place the silver Ciborium; the Sanctuary lamp is located next to it on the tabernacle stand (although we ask – “have you seen where ours is in the church? Yes- it hangs from the ceiling!”) Then the Sacramentary book and its stand are placed on the altar, the Lectionary on the Lectern, the cruets, finger towel, candle snuffer and bell are each carefully put on the credence table. With evident delight, the miniature scene is surveyed with all of these precious articles. Now that we are learning to read, are we ready to name and label all of these articles? Yes! Small labels with each name are then carefully matched with the correct article. (What knowledgeable altar servers will one day assist at St. John's!) Upon completion, each article must be painstaking

restored to the Sacristy cabinet so it may be ready for the next person. It is amazing that in the seven years these tiny, delicate articles have been in use in the Level II Atrium they have rarely been lost or broken; a testimony to the love and regard with which the children work and care for this material. When they are at an appropriate reading level, a child may choose to work further on a set of articles of the Mass cards - pictures to match with labels and definitions. Or they may choose to color, cut and paste their own version of the model altar and articles. You may have seen this large altar pasting work come home upon its completion – usually the first “big” extension work in the Level II; a great triumph of concentration and perseverance over several weeks of work for the proud six or seven year old who completes it! ~ *Laura Accettullo*

Mrs. Accettullo’s Thurs. Level III Atrium

Several children in the Level III Atrium have recently undertaken to copy their own Missal made up of all of the prayers of the Mass. This is a big work of many, many weeks, commenced after considering a “Structure of the Mass” chart of all the prayers which make up the one great prayer of the Holy Mass - like so many pearls strung together to make up a beautiful pearl necklace. We have considered how some of the prayers change each day with the feast and season – the Propers of the Mass, as well as those that do not change, but are familiar and heard at each and every Mass. We progress from the Structure of the Mass chart to a set of four color-coded “timelines” representing each of the four main parts of the Mass – the Liturgy of the Word, the Preparation of the Gifts, The Eucharistic Prayer, and Communion. We discuss and place cards which detail each prayer, song and reading that go to make up the parts of the Mass. A big work for me recently has been to update this work with all of the new changes of the Roman Missal! I have enjoyed re-copying the Mass timeline cards with the beautiful new prayer words, working next to one dedicated young lady who has chosen to allot a significant amount of time each week, steadily working on writing Missal pages in order to finish her Missal this year. Once completed, the front and back cover are made by choosing a beautiful Florentine paper and using special book-

binding glue to adhere the paper to heavy cardboard. The pages and cover are compiled; a title plate placed on the cover, and then it is wire-bound. The result is a lovely, handmade yet professional-looking Missal book. This is a proud accomplishment for the Level III child who completes such a very large work; the precious gift of time in the Atrium is well-used in this ennobling and uplifting project. ~ *Laura Accettullo*

A few additional snippets of the children’s joy and wisdom from our Level I Atrium this year:

1) In her second day at the Atrium, one of our youngest children, a girl not quite three years old, just wanted to sing to Jesus, but didn’t seem to know how to ask to do this, so she kept setting up the Articles of the Mass with EVERYTHING on the model Altar and then asking for the Catechist to come and sing with her; she did this and sang at least three times that day.

2) After receiving the presentation of the Parable of the Precious Pearl, a little boy of four wanted the Scripture booklet read so he could work with the figures. At the point when the merchant finds the Precious Pearl, he walked the merchant across the room to the Good Shepherd and had the merchant give the Good Shepherd the pearl. When asked why the merchant gave his Precious Pearl to the Good Shepherd he said, “Because the pearl belongs with the Good Shepherd.”

3) At two separate times the parable of the Good Shepherd was being read to two girls, age three and four. After the Good Shepherd has called out each of His sheep by name, both of these girls have stood the Good Shepherd figure in the center of the sheep and had the Good Shepherd carefully look at each sheep slowly, until each sheep has been “seen.” When asked why the Shepherd was doing this, one girl said, “Because it makes the sheep feel loved.” When further asked, “They feel loved because they are being looked at by the Good Shepherd?” She replied, “Yes!” It means a lot to these girls that He both calls the sheep by name and that they are seen...or maybe it is their way of showing that each sheep is “known.”