

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship
March 2004

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That's a Good Question.

Seventh in a series of questions often asked about what is Montessori.

How do you bring Christianity into the environment?

The concern often hidden behind this question is a fear on the parent's part that you are going to spend the whole day indoctrinating their children with a severe catechism. That sounds extreme doesn't it? Maybe even a little paranoid on our part but we now live in a world where religion (and faith) has been marginalized. The media and the elite constantly drum the refrain – "You can believe that on Sunday, you can believe that privately – but none of that religious stuff (morals, standards, responsibilities etc) has anything to do with the "public square"". Otherwise how do we explain to our children (and ourselves) that what a man does privately (cheats on his wife – which is the breaking of a vow, a covenant, a promise and the living of a lie) he will also do publicly – the breaking of a vow, a covenant, a promise and the living of lies. And given that this is election time this is not a Republican or Democratic issue but an issue concerning the sinfulness of man.

Many of us have had bad "religious" experiences. It makes me very sensitive

to people who want to protect their children from similar traumas. I want to protect their children from similar traumas too so that they might have no impediments in their relationship with God. So how we bring Jesus into the classroom is a serious question for us as well.

God has given us a great tool in the Montessori approach – an approach of gentleness with a winsome wooing of the child (It reminds me a lot of the ministry of the Holy Spirit.) Christianity is more than a well-defined set of core beliefs it is a living relationship with the Good Shepherd. What more appropriate manner (and environment) could there be in which to introduce the child to his Creator?

Here in the fourth paragraph we answer the question, "How do you bring Jesus into the environment?" – Gently. (Profound right?) Yes, though the answer is simplistic it is highly complex and nuanced. Our relationship with Jesus to be fully realized must be a gentle relationship. Many of us were introduced to a severe God (severe catechism anyone?) - A God filled with wrath. Yet Jesus came to share a new vision of God – God as our father ("Which of you being a good father when your son asks for bread will give him a stone?") a loving, tender, caring father.

And it is this manifestation of Godly, fatherly tenderness that woos the child to Him. There is not only an absorbent

mind but an absorbent heart. And our children when surrounded by this tenderness will absorb it, reflect it, manifest it and produce it. The difference between a secular Montessori environment and a “Christian” Montessori environment is not found in the spirit – both share this wonderful, peaceful, caring approach to the child. The major difference lies in the fact that in a Christian environment we can introduce a complete spiritual three period lesson to the child. We voice for the child the yet undefined spiritual world that he is entering. We voice it, we label it, we express it and we allow the child to observe it, “touch” it, voice it and then produce it.

For those of you who have an atrium in your classroom (a place for hands on Bible stories) your children are able to add to their daily experience an entry into the spiritual truths that will form their own spirit and relationship to God. I find that we sometimes make it harder than is necessary to create a “spiritual” environment. We get intimidated about creating Montessori Bible materials. If we treat the creation of hands on Bible stories in the same way we treat the creation of practical life variations we are well underway to opening a whole new dimension for our children.

In other words we create an exercise that has a direct and indirect aim. It can be manipulated. It has a prescribed presentation. It has a place on the shelf that is accessible to the child. We should not be intimidated by our own feelings that others may do it better. Until we find something “better” we need to make the best presentation we can and still be on the watch for better materials and presentations. If we follow our training and experience –

everything can be presented in a Montessori fashion with great gentleness.

So how do we bring Christianity into our environment? Once we had a parent who asked if we could keep her child out of class while we did the “religious” stuff. We smiled and said, “The Christianity is not in the religious stuff but in every part of our life. It is in how we treat each other on the playground; in how we act at circle time, and in how we do our work.”

Yes, we told Bible stories, we sang songs at circle time, we prayed over our snacks and our lunch. We taught the “Golden Rule” but most importantly we shared with our children how much Jesus really loves them. We gave them a spiritual vocabulary to be able to name and identify for themselves their own growing relationship with Jesus.

What we did leave out were some of the major theological differences found among denominations and creeds: questions of communion, church governance, hierarchy, actions that constitute sin for some (drinking, smoking etc). Two reasons we left these things out: First, as important as they might be theologically, they were not central to the establishment of a relationship to God and second, the age of our children (preschool and elementary mostly) who needed lessons about the Good Shepherd and not theological controversy.

We were also a non-denominational school. Had we been Catholic or Baptist we would have felt freer to share our theological base. Again due to the nature of our program we felt that parents needed to share with their children their own theological beliefs.

One area we were always circumspect about was the question of Hell. Again due to the age of our children and our desire to build a relationship for them with the Good Shepherd we chose not to emphasize this important theological concept. A discussion and clear understanding of the concept of Hell is often better left to parents where a one on one conversation can educate and resolve the conflicts and confusions that might arise in young minds.

One area that we did not shy away from (even with the occasional parental concern) was the concept of death and dying as most prominently figures in Easter. Easter IS the Christian HOLY day. Without Easter we have no Christianity. And death is part of that sacrifice. Our children are surrounded by death. They see plants die, pets die, and elderly family members. However the Easter discussion of death always leads to resurrection. And so also our discussion of death is part of their reality and of their hope in Jesus.

Ultimately, the introduction of Christianity into the classroom comes through, not only our words and actions, but through our spirit and the love we share in Jesus' name.

A Baker's Dozen

Of Montessori benefits for the child

Empowerment

Of all of the benefits of a Montessori environment empowerment has to be a stellar contender for a life time gift. As the old joke goes "There are people who make things happen, people who things happen to and people who don't know what's happening." Montessori children

will not fall into the last two categories because the whole environment is geared to teaching them to make things happen for themselves. Now the real teaching part comes in helping children to understand that not only do actions have consequences but inactions have consequences as well. Children can make things happen but you want to teach them how to make "good" things happen. By empowering our children we give them the antidote to inaction, the antidote to letting things happen to them. Empowering makes our children pro-active instead of reactive or even inactive.

There are four significant parts to empowerment. One is giving them the ability to choose – having things to choose from. Two, giving them the tools (the know-how) to successfully accomplish their choices. Three, the initiative to even want to attempt a task and four the confidence to attempt the project before them.

As in the analogy of the mother bird who keeps her babies in the nest until they are ready to fly. So we have a nest that makes truly independent flight possible. We literally empower them to learn for themselves.

Brighten the Corner ...

"If I sold my house and my car, had a big garage sale, and gave all my money to the church, would that get me into heaven?" A Sunday school teacher asked the children in his Sunday school class.

"No." the children all answered.

"If I cleaned the church every day, mowed the yard, and kept everything

neat and tidy, would that get me into heaven?"

Again the answer was, "No."

"Well, then, if I was kind to animals and gave candy to all the children and loved my wife, would that get me into heaven?" I asked them again.

Once more they all answered, "No."

"Well," I continued, thinking they were a good bit more theologically sophisticated than I had given them credit for, "then how can I get into heaven?"

A five-year-old boy shouted out, "You got to be dead."

Easter

Easter is the significant celebration of our spiritual lives. Easter is also the dividing line between those who think that all religions and Christianity are the same. And it is a dividing line in Christianity between those who seek to be merely "culturally relevant" and those who embrace the essence of what Christianity is. We are sinners who cannot save ourselves and we need a Savior. The dividing lines come between those who don't think we are sinners and need a savior or those who think we can save ourselves and those who accept fully the sacrifice of the Lamb of God for us.

Easter, which is our celebration of Passover, is full of symbolism that our children can understand. Telling the story of Passover sets the stage for our children to understand the tremendous

work of God accomplished on the cross and out of the empty tomb.

Passover was the sacrifice of an unblemished – perfect – lamb for the atonement of our sins. And when the lamb was sacrificed the blood was put on the doorway and lintel of the house.

Easter is when Jesus became our lamb. He was perfect. The difference now between Passover and Easter is that we no longer have to have a yearly sacrifice because Jesus did it once and for all.

He loved us so much that he was willing to make the sacrifice of Himself for us. But His sacrifice and death on the cross was only a part of what He did for us. It is His resurrection that frees us from the fear of death. He conquered death so it could not hold us. He conquered death and sin so we could be free to be all that He created us to be and that we could be with Him in Heaven forever.

Easter is a powerful story. The cross is a wonderful symbol but it is the empty tomb that "holds" the power of our redemption.

A symbol of the empty tomb could be an egg out of which you have blown the contents. You do this by making a small needle hole in the top and the bottom of the shell also using the needle to puncture the yolk. And then you fill your lungs and blow until the contents are expelled. Wash it off and let it dry. It looks like an ordinary egg but will serve as a great visual.

"What's this?" holding up the egg.

"An egg." They'll reply.

"You all know about Easter eggs.

Some Easter eggs are candy and others are real eggs but this one is special because it reminds us of something tremendous that happened on the first

Easter. What did they expect to find when they went to the tomb? That's right they expected to find the body of Jesus there. But what did they find? An empty tomb. (Crack the egg and show them the empty halves.) God raised Jesus from the dead and took Him out of the tomb."

The 10 P's of Ministry

Problems

Part 6 Personalities

Do you remember this old childhood prayer? "Now I lay me down to sleep. I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I should die before I wake. I pray the Lord my soul to take." Not exactly a great prayer to get your kids to go to sleep. But it is good for an illustration. Because if you wake up in the morning with the same problems (and maybe a few more) that you went to sleep with the night before you can tell two things - you didn't die "before you wake" and you certainly aren't in Heaven. Remember that the only people who don't have problems are the people who have no problems at all - they're dead. As long as you're alive you will have problems.

How you want to label or categorize your problems will have a lot to do with your approach to life. You can call them difficulties, challenges, mole hills, mountains or anything in between but you need to understand that God in His infinite wisdom uses problems to refine us, shape us, mold us and conform us to His likeness. I wish He didn't but He didn't ask my advice.

Now having said this, we don't have to go looking to create problems. There are enough in the world to go around and

people are always willing to give you their share and then some.

Problems are a mystery. Yes there are the consequences (and problems) of sin but often problems arise without malicious intent by just the daily interchange of human beings and their personalities.

Proverbs 25:2 "It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of Kings." Resolving problems is like solving a mystery. Some are more complex than others and some have no answers but they all have to be dealt with.

So how do you deal with the problem of personalities? Very few of us get the choice of the personalities of those who surround us. Even when you are the one doing the hiring you often can't pick and choose. Often you can't even tell for sure the nuances and shades of personalities that are being presented. And in the end is it healthy for all the personalities in an organization to be just like you. I'm not sure if that would be a dream or a nightmare. I had a business manager for 27 years who had a different personality than I did. And it took me years to appreciate her particular attention to details and how she functioned in the ministry. I learned a lot of patience and a lot of wisdom in that relationship. I learned to listen when she brought up concerns. She saw them from a different perspective than I did. And I never went wrong listening to her wisdom as it moderated my actions.

But what about the personalities that you haven't come to appreciate (or maybe don't want to)? You have to decide if the personality is just a different approach to the world than yours or if the manifestation of the

personality is detrimental to the ministry at large.

My wife is a consummate detail person (I've also learned to appreciate some of that as well). She can walk into a classroom and see the towels need straightening, the pink tower is askew, someone didn't put the soap dish with it's exercise, the table cloth has slipped, the trash can is out of place, the sink isn't clean – and we've only been in the classroom five seconds. She is wonderful to have in an environment to help maintain that order and aesthetic feeling. She gently strives to train her staff – many who did not have that level of attention to detail. Most people will strive to do what you ask but unless it is their gifting they will need to constantly work at it.

I will never have my wife's facility for reading and reacting to people. She operates out of an empathetic heart. Over the years I have learned much on how to deal with people. I've had a great teacher but my actions and reactions, though no less sincere than hers, will always be studied and thought through and will not arise out of the same well-spring of her personality.

But what about when personalities confronted with the need for change or amelioration choose not to do so (or can't). Then you have to become the consummate teacher that is needed. You have to model, voice, evaluate, judge, and encourage. How much progress is acceptable? If someone is not as neat as they should be, or as punctual as is necessary how much of this is a cause for change of employment?

The problem of personalities ultimately rests not on your discomfort level or annoyance level but on the basis if the actions and attitudes of the

personality are detrimental to the functioning of the school.

You need to enter a step by step program where it is clearly defined what behaviors need to change, in what time frame, to what consequence.

Ultimately, some behaviors are not personality induced by cries for courage to be able to make changes. Sometimes letting people go is the kindest thing you do for them. I had an experience with a teacher who had been with us seven years. It came to a place where her personal unhappiness (not related to the job) affected her performance and demeanor. I saw her several months after I let her go and she was bright with smiles and grateful for the change.

We all have to amend our personalities to the realities of the world. If you are in a position of authority the ultimate personality problem is yours. Can you accept the various outcomes of personalities different than yours which are not detrimental to the unity and harmony of the school and make allowances for the uniqueness of all God's children?

The Benefits of Gardening

Ronda Dizney

It takes a garden to grow a child. Children love the opportunity to garden. Children tickle the earth with their garden tools. Through gardening the child develops affection for the Earth.

Most children abuse nature because they don't know any better. Gardening develops an aesthetic appreciation of the natural world and a caring concern for nature.

Children deal with insects and birds in the garden. They learn which ones are beneficial and which are harmful. They can carry tools, water, dig and mix soil,

plant, weed, identify and observe. They can experiment with insects, learning what plants insects eat at what stage. They learn to share the garden with ants, grasshoppers and earthworms.

Gardening introduces the cycle of life and death to the child.

Gardening with children is the study of biology and botany. Gardening also brings opportunity to study the weather.

Children enjoy eating plants and fruits right out of the garden, munching on carrots, strawberries, grapes, broccoli, lettuce, basil, beans, corn, cucumbers, watermelons, cantaloupes and tomatoes. This way children can learn healthy nutrition. Children also enjoy growing gourds and sponges. They like plant-supporting teepees and growing vine plants vertically.

Actually, the benefits are endless. Garden with your child. Children will always remember their childhood garden. Gardening – growing your own organic food – is a very valuable lesson and worthy of any child.

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Educational Principles Of Montessori

3. Individualized

One of the clearest educational principles of Montessori is the idea of individualized education. Years ago I heard "Traditional schools teach classes, Montessori schools teach children." A simplistic truism which is still effective. Individualization still means that we are looking at the outcome for each child. Much of our instruction is done

individually. (Our challenge is to effectively do group teaching in a Montessori fashion. Or is that a contradiction?) Traditional schools often feel that they are saving time by group teaching. What is lost in this translation is not the efficiency of teaching but the efficiency of learning. As teachers we have a tough job when we say we taught somebody something. We make our presentation, which is called teaching, but what happens if the learner doesn't get it? Have we taught? Yes and No. Individualization is an "outcome" as well as a style of teaching.

Individualization also needs to mean that the child is able to use our presentation as a springboard to self teaching and self learning. (In reality is there any other kind of learning?)

Individualization also means taking into account the personality and learning style of the child. This is a tremendous burden in a lock-step world. This is a normal challenge in a Montessori environment.

Individualization is how God deals with each of us. After all, He gave us our personality and gifts and aptitudes. The outcome that He is expecting is that we reflect the image of his uniquely begotten Son.

Individualization in our classrooms helps children on their way to fulfilling this expectation.

Membership

We need you to join and support the fellowship. As we've visited with many of you, you've shared "Oh yes, I've meant to do that." Others have responded with offerings and others have paid half memberships with a promise to send the rest later. Whatever you can do will help support the ministry.

National Conference

June 24-26

The Absorbent Mind

The Absorbent Heart

The conference begins at 10:00 A.M.
Thursday June 24th and runs through
Saturday evening.

Conference cost is \$325 (\$300 if paid
by May 1st, an additional \$25 discount
for CMF members) and includes 3
lunches, 2 full breakfasts, morning and
afternoon breaks and Saturday dinner.
More details are available on our
websites:

www.christianmontessorifellowship.com

www.crossmountainforum.com

Or call 210-698-1911

Send in your registration Now

Christian Montessori Fellowship

22630 East Range

San Antonio, TX 78255

Make your reservations at

The Crockett Hotel

Across from the Alamo

1-800-292-1050

Lodging costs \$98.28 (tax included)

Double or single

**Rates are good if you register for the
hotel by May 24th**

Conference topics include:

The special needs child

Observation

Classroom management

Hands on Bible

Record keeping

Parent conferences

And more!

**We will be doing a special two session
discussion and book review of the**

“Secret of Childhood “

**Outlines of the discussion will be sent
when you register.**