

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship

January – February 2007

**National Conference
July 26-28, 2007
San Antonio, Texas
“Celebrate the Inspiration
Continue the commitment”**

Wrestling With God

Genesis 32:22-32

22 That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two maidservants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. 23 After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. 24 So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. 25 When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. 26 Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak."

But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me."

27 The man asked him, "What is your name?"

"Jacob," he answered.

28 Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel, ^[a] because you have struggled with God and with men and have overcome."

29 Jacob said, "Please tell me your name."

But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there.

30 So Jacob called the place Peniel, ^[b] saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared."

31 The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel, ^[c] and he was limping because of his hip. 32 Therefore to this day the Israelites do not eat the tendon attached to the socket of the hip, because the socket of Jacob's hip was touched near the tendon.

Footnotes:

- a. [Genesis 32:28](#) *Israel* means *he struggles with God* .
- b. [Genesis 32:30](#) *Peniel* means *face of God* .
- c. [Genesis 32:31](#) Hebrew *Penuel* , a variant of *Peniel*

Here is the incredible story of Jacob wrestling with God. We tend to think that we wrestle with ourselves or even more dramatically wrestle with the devil. But there can be nothing more dramatic or life-changing than the match with God Himself. And for most of us our “Peniel” (“I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared”) happens in our classrooms.

There are five things that are similar in this story to our own lives – especially in the classroom. One, life hangs in the balance. Jacob was on his way to meet his brother, whom he had defrauded. He was concerned for his life but more importantly for the life of his family, for his children. So he sent them across the river to safety and he stood guard. Montessori gives us this same avenue of standing guard over our children. Education is only part of a guide's function. Standing guard over the emotional and spiritual well being of our children is the first calling of a guide. Even though people come to us because of the fantastic education that alone is not the significance of a Montessori experience. It is the preservation of this delicate embryonic being.

Second, like Jacob we wrestle. Wrestling is different than combat. The outcome of wrestling is life – not death. Too many children “die” emotionally in school. We want to wrestle them to life. And like Jacob, we are not over-powered by our adversary but we prevail – for good.

Third, our “hip” is touched and we will always walk differently afterward.

Fourth, our name is changed. Jacob became Israel – “You have struggled with God and with men and have overcome” Our name is changed too by the gentle overcoming accomplished in the environment each day. The difference is, it is not the children we have overcome but ourselves.

Fifth, like Jacob, we are blessed by the encounter. We are blessed by the children, blessed by the environment and blessed by the transformation – not only in the children but in ourselves.

Valentine's day is almost here, (But the school year just started!) soon it will

be spring and the end of another school year. Pretty soon ten years pass and then twenty. And then the children you've taught begin to bring their own children for you to teach. The seasons move on. And when you reflect on your life, there will probably be no great monuments nor “great” accomplishments. But you will have written your life, not on granite but on the hearts and souls of children.

And then, like Jacob, your “children” and your influence will be like the stars of the sky – beyond counting. And your monument – the hearts of children – will go on into eternity. The transformation in them and in you is monumental. Not a bad days work for wrestling with God.

To Be Or Not To Be

Like Hamlet, that is a question we all face in different aspects of our life. Five or six times a year we get inquiries from people wanting to start Christian Montessori schools. But occasionally we get a call from someone asking, “If I market my school as overtly Christian, won't I limit my enrollment and my ability to reach families?” It is a valid question and concern.

Over the last four years I have talked to hundreds of schools looking for Christian Montessori environments. That search has revealed about 280 schools that do some kind of Christian spiritual nurturing in their environments. Some use Godly Play, some the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, others have chapel and prayer or use other resources. Christian Montessori schools account for about 7% of the Montessori total.

The search has revealed a variety of responses to the question of whether to be an overtly Christian school or not. One memorable response from a school

called Good Shepherd Montessori (there are a number of Good Shepherd schools) was that they were not a religious school at all. I was flustered so much that I forgot to ask why they had such an endearing name.

In my search I would call a school – make it St. Edward Montessori (It kind of has a ring to it.) and they would reply, “No, we don’t do any Christian spiritual formation because we have a diverse population.” The next St. Edward I would call (May St. Edward’s tribe increase!) would chuckle and say “Of course we do Christian spiritual formation – we are a Catholic, Episcopal, Lutheran, etc school.”

The two reasons that tend to predominate in the decision to not be overtly Christian is not to offend a diverse population or the desire to model Christianity quietly.

The decision to be an overtly Christian school has to be based on one of two things (or maybe both). One, because God told you to. Or two, an overwhelming desire to share the Gospel. Each of us has to make that decision for ourselves.

In the Christian Montessori community we have hundreds of people who are working in secular schools and that is an honorable and wonderful thing. And over the years we’ve had Montessorians contact us about their desire to work in or run a Christian Montessori school. But you can’t or shouldn’t do it unless you have an overwhelming desire for it. Because no matter what you do – Christian or Secular – you will always have your set of critics. And you need to believe whole-heartedly in what you are doing.

What are the disadvantages of being or becoming a Christian Montessori

school? Six questions come to mind. First is parent’s perception. “How much ‘religious’ stuff are you going to do?” “No more than 6 or 8 hours a day.” (Just kidding! But that is a concern for parents.) Second, “Will my child be comfortable here (Will I)?” Third, “How different will a ‘Christian’ Montessori program be?” Fourth, “How will this affect diversity?” And fifth, “How will this affect enrollment?” Sixth, “How will this affect staff?”

The first three questions have a similar answer. The program really changes in only small increments but like yeast affect the whole. Red rods, broad stairs, moveable alphabets, writing, reading and math all continue to hold their predominance. It is on the margins of the day – circle time, story time, extended day, playground – that the spiritual impact begins to make itself known. Some schools begin to incorporate hands on Bible lessons into the curriculum. These lessons are put on shelves either in the classroom or a special area set aside for that purpose.

How will this affect diversity and enrollment? Far less than you would expect. We ran an overtly Christian school and yet had a population of Jewish children, Muslims, Hindus etc. Two facts to consider: For every family you might lose because of your Christian nurturing there is one that you will gain because of that nurturing. Second, many people do not have deep religious convictions and are not offended by your convictions. In fact many will say, “A little religion is good for my child.” (“I had some religion in school and it didn’t hurt me.”)

How will it impact your staff? That is always a crucial question. Some people are uncomfortable sharing their faith,

others are anxious to do so. It is always a go slow process. Change is always difficult and this one seemingly more so. But the decision to become an overtly Christian school when handled gently can be far less traumatic than expected and filled with blessings never anticipated.

We have helped a number of schools make the transition from secular to parochial. Probably, the greatest surprise is on Monday you are a wonderful school. On Tuesday, you announce your intention to become a “Christian” Montessori school and some will begin to doubt whether you are a wonderful school or not. Little has changed and yet those reactions tend to scare directors. In a short time people settle back down and realize that your program is just as wonderful as ever.

So, what are the advantages of becoming overtly Christian? One, you can talk about Christmas and Easter freely. You can pray with your children openly. You can share Bible stories. You can pray with your students. You can share your spiritual passion in a wonderfully sweet non-threatening way. And significantly, you can better approach the Montessori ideal of nurturing the child – intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually.

You will find that after the children begin absorbing Bible stories their parents will come to you and say, “My child knows more about the Bible than I do. Can you recommend a church that we might go to?”

This is a major transition in the life of a school (and the individuals). And really should only be attempted after you’ve weighed the costs and considered the outcomes. You really have to know from God what he wants you to do.

Everyone has a different set of callings and you have to be convinced of yours.

However, once you’ve embarked on this adventure life takes on a different glow. And yes, it is worth the pain of transition and change.

Regional Conferences

Seattle February 10, 2007

Kidus Montessori School
834 18th Ave.
Seattle, WA 98122
(206) 720-0523
Dee Stephens

Amarillo February 17, 2007

Southwest Montessori Pre-School
4515 Cornell St.
Amarillo, TX 79109
806-359-9826
Betty Golightly

Rock Hill, SC February 24, 2007

Freedom Montessori
215 East Main Street
Rock Hill, SC 29730
(803) 327-7885
Jamie Laymon

Meaningful Fundraising

Please visit our website to see the great items available to help celebrate this wonderful 100th anniversary of Montessori education.

The items are also wonderful to help raise funds to send your staff to training or to buy new materials for your environment.

A Recently Spotted Bumper Sticker:

Lord, walk beside me with your arm on my shoulder and your hand over my mouth.

Christian Montessori Fellowship

Membership Application

Name _____

Address _____

Email _____

Telephone _____

How long have you taught? _____

School _____

Level you teach: _____

(Mark all that apply.)

Are you a: teacher _____

administrator _____

owner _____

other _____

What is your church affiliation?

Interests

What is your interest in Christian Montessori?

To teach in a Christian Montessori school _____

To start a Christian Montessori school _____

To transform an existing school _____

To be a better teacher where you are now _____

Not sure at this time _____

Are you familiar with hands on Bible curriculums (Godly play, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd)? Yes ___ No ___

Do you have an interest in being a regional representative for CMF? _____

Are you in a position to host or help host a regional CMF seminar?

Host _____ Help _____

Membership Benefits

1. Discounts at conferences, seminars and forums.
2. Membership certificate
3. Free advertising in the Cobbler
4. Discounts from selected vendors
5. A nice warm feeling knowing you are not alone and are not the only one seeking to return to the true spiritual roots of this unique education.
6. Your membership will help you, and many others, to serve your children better in Christ's name by providing opportunities for fellowship, learning and encouragement.
7. We have found a "pearl of great price" and your support of the Christian Montessori Fellowship will help spread this "good news" so many more children might truly be nurtured intellectually, physically, emotionally and spiritually and come to know the Good Shepherd personally.

Join and support the fellowship by making your check for \$25 payable to: The Christian Montessori Fellowship or use your Visa, Master Card, American Express, or Discover.

Credit card number _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

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