

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship

March 2007

**National Conference
July 26-28, 2007
San Antonio, Texas
“Celebrate the Inspiration
Continue the commitment”
100th
Anniversary of Montessori
25th Anniversary of the
Christian Montessori Fellowship**

Why your children want you to attend the National Conference!

All conferences are not created alike. In fact, no two conferences even of the same organization are ever the same. However, there is a consistency in what you can expect at the National CMF conference.

First, God will be honored in word as well as presentation. What you hear about Montessori will be spoken of through its original God inspired inspiration. Montessori education is God's idea. God's great respect for the child will be presented over and over again.

Second, the things that you have already learned will be shared again through a Christian spiritual matrix that will reconcile the two great philosophies of your life bringing them into a holistic balance.

Third, you will gain a deeper understanding of why you do what you

do. You may not “learn” anything new but what you already know will become brand new.

Fourth, the people you'll meet will share not only your passion for Montessori but will share your passion for God. The friendships and the fellowship are in of themselves priceless.

Fifth, when you return home, the challenges and the problems will be the same but you will have changed. And your approach will have changed – not by something you've “learned” but by someone you have become – a child, a disciple, a refreshed and inspired guide.

This will be the eighth year that Christian Center School in Shreveport, LA has attended the national conference. And it will be the sixth year that Mary Cook, the principal of the school, has brought her entire staff of 11 or 12. Mary will tell you (318-688-9858) that the conference has made a great difference in the life of her teachers and the life of her school.

If you are serious about the integration of the development of the intellectual, physical, emotional and spiritual life of your children then this is the conference that you need to attend.

Your children will be the one's to benefit from your attendance. And if they knew about the conference they would encourage you to attend.

One note about our conference. The titles of our workshops are fairly plain – Grace and Courtesy, Cosmic Education,

Personalities of Children – not a lot of “cutting edge” hyperbole but what you will get will be a dynamic reminder of what attracted you to Montessori in the first place – the deeply Christian spiritual nature of the whole nurturing process. And what you will take away will be a renewed sense of your commitment and a deep satisfaction of knowing you are exactly where God wants you to be – among His favorite people – the children.

How can I afford to attend?

That is always the dilemma of running a school. Always needing more than we can afford. To help, the fellowship has developed a number of fundraising items. The items both celebrate the 100th anniversary and make possible your attendance. We look at this as a meaningful fundraiser – it’s not candy. You can visit our website www.crossmountainpress.com to see the items. We’ve created a T-shirt to celebrate this great year. There is also a sweat shirt and embroidered shirts (polo, denim and twill). We have a coffee mug which makes a great gift that will last for years. We created a gorgeous banner (beach towel). If you go to the pool or beach during school hours you can always tell people you are advertising. And we’ve also created a darling teddy bear “Monty” which will be a great keep sake for our children.

This is a meaningful fundraiser. You share something with parents that commemorates this great celebration year. And by setting up the fundraiser so your teachers can go to the national conference encourages parents’ enthusiasm and support. They know that the teachers will come back enthused

and inspired and will be an even greater blessing to their children.

Last year Christine Jenschke from ABC Christian Montessori School in Fredericksburg, TX wanted her staff to attend the conference but the money wasn’t in the budget. During the summer they did a bear fundraiser (with Monty and his cousins) and in two weeks less than 40 families helped raise \$1000.

The conference is worth the effort – ask Christine (830-997-9997).

Your use of the fundraisers also helps support the continued work of the fellowship.

Liturgy

Much of the hands on Bible development has been done by two organizations in the United States, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play. Catechesis is Catholic, while Godly play was created by a Montessori trained Episcopal priest, Jerome Berryman. Both programs are based on a liturgical approach to worship. Both programs do include much hands on Bible material that can be used in any setting.

I would like to encourage you to look at both programs and glean from them what can be of use for your own setting. Many people in the fellowship do not worship in liturgical settings and occasionally this can be an impediment to using the great materials that have already been developed.

Let me share my experience. I have worshipped in both liturgical and non-liturgical settings. Most of my religious formation was in a non-liturgical church. In fact, I didn’t really know that there was church history before 1903 when this church was founded. But over the

years I've had opportunity to study, learn, worship and minister in a wide variety of church settings, alphabetically from AME, to Assemblies of God, Baptist, Bible, Catholic, Charismatic, Church of God, Episcopal, Evangelical, Fundamental, Independent, Lutheran, Methodist, Orthodox, Pentecostal, Presbyterian and probably several more.

I have found worship styles that were comfortable, invigorating, reflective, challenging and different. And in all of these experiences I have found people who truly loved the Lord. Comfort in worship styles often reflect personality. There are people who would feel uncomfortable in a classic Pentecostal worship service. While there would be an equal number of people uncomfortable in a more sedate worship service.

In this article let's try to understand the liturgical style of worship for non-liturgists. E. M. Standing in "The Child and the Church" writes, "By their very nature children are inveterate liturgists. At the early age of two-and-a-half to four they are most insistent on having things done in the correct, that is the accustomed, way." Liturgy then is a prescribed way of doing things. Each of us follows our own sets of liturgies or accustomed actions. I shower, put on contacts, brush my teeth and then shave in that order everyday. (If I shave before I brush my teeth, I have to check my tooth brush to see if it is wet!)

It is ironic that people who follow no liturgy often have an unwritten liturgy. When I graduated from college, I joined a religious peace corps. It was a very dynamic, charismatic, sold out to God kind of group. And of course they didn't have a liturgy! But chapel each day started with a prayer, had two songs, we

prayed before the reading of the scripture, we had another song, prayed before we took the offering, had another song, prayed before the message and prayed when it was done. And we did the same thing the next day – but we did not have a liturgy!

Now the challenge with liturgy is how do you keep the 'accustomed' from becoming stale and rote? We see this long term in many areas of life – jobs, marriages, friendships, relationships etc. That is the challenge of life but it is not the "fault" of our liturgies. The challenge with "religious" liturgies is that they tend to have the added weight of "God-giveness". We have to observe our liturgies to determine how their continued use benefits us or their abuse by inattention, rote and unbelief desensitizes us.

There are many liturgies given to us in the scriptures themselves – the Ten Commandments, the temple, the feasts and even the Lord's Prayer. Again, the challenge for liturgists is not to let the liturgy descend into rote nor to let it preclude God's visitation in the midst of our liturgies.

It is wonderful to be comforted by our liturgies. It is just like the child who has you read his favorite book for the 20th time. He is comforted by already knowing what happens on the next page. And we too are comforted by our liturgies. But at the same time, it is good to be discomforted in God's presence as a reminder of God's holiness, power, awesomeness and mystery. Our liturgies can bring us again and again to God's mystery if we embrace our liturgies with expectation and hope and not just routine.

I'm reminded of having attended a high folk mass – complete with incense.

And as the priest walked the aisles swinging the censer the church was filled with the pungent smoke and aroma of the incense. Because it was a different experience (I'm sure even for the liturgists) it took me out of my comfort (normal) zone. But as I experienced that part of an unfamiliar liturgy, I remember being reminded (by God) of the incense burned in the temple. And how that was a pleasing fragrance of worship to God. My unfamiliarity with this part of worship was a good reminder not to become jaded with the forms of worship and forget the purpose of worship.

There is a challenge when you don't have liturgy. There is a challenge when you do. But the best parts of liturgy can be a constant reminder and focus for our worship. One advantage of liturgy is the liturgical calendar which is not much used by non-liturgists. As Christians (liturgists or non) we celebrate the great feasts of the church – Christmas and Easter. The liturgical approach does offer a benefit by helping us to prepare for these events. Advent and Lent can add measurably to our spiritual preparation by making us aware (like the child reading their favorite book) in advance what is coming, so we are not surprised (and unprepared) to worship.

Let's provide our children the best of what God has to offer – both liturgy and spontaneity in worship while keeping fresh the mystery of God's great love. In teaching, there is both springtime and harvest (the liturgy of the seasons) as well as the mystery of the expanse of the stars, the power of the thunderstorms and the lightning that illuminates our skies. Let us be as wide-eyed before God as our children are when faced with the glories of creation.

A Brief History of the Development of the Christian Montessori Movement

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There has been a “great awakening” of interest in the integration of spiritual life with Montessori education. This shouldn't be a surprise as Montessori is decidedly a spiritual approach to learning. What is somewhat surprising is how enthusiastically people of formal faith are beginning to appropriate this marvelous tool of discovery and are applying it to the sharing of faith.

Most of what we have experienced in modern Montessori (post WWII) has been a singular focus on developing and sharing the educational methodology. The challenge for Montessori has been to plant this new method in a foreign environment (traditional education), nurture it, stabilize it, professionalize it, standardize it and make it understandable and acceptable to a community that has not experienced anything like the “miracle” of Montessori education.

A great debt is owed to the pioneers. It is on their work that the next generation has begun to broaden the impact and effectiveness of the method. Because of Montessori's unique approach to the spirit of the child the method has attracted a unique blend of sensitive and spiritually oriented adults.

Much of the educational progress of Montessori acceptance has been made without particular reference to Dr. Montessori's own spiritual heritage of Catholic and Biblical Christianity. On one hand this is a testament to the truth and uniqueness of her God given insights. Truth, irrespective of the

spiritual orientation of whoever uses the methodology, is effective and dynamic as is witnessed by the powerful transformed lives coming out of the prepared environment of a Montessori school.

On the other hand, Montessori started her first Casa de Bambini in an age, time and culture that was infused with a Catholic spiritual tradition. This orientation was a “given” not an add-on or an afterthought. Dr. Montessori was obviously interested in the spiritual development of children and didn’t see any dichotomy between her educational and spiritual goals.

In fact, her biographer E.M. Standing writes in “The Child in the Church”, “Montessori herself admitted to the present writer on more than one occasion that in the working out of her own educational ideas she learned much from what she called the “pedagogical method” of the Church. Furthermore, she put on record that – as one of the results of her experiments, particularly in Barcelona - her own method could only find its fullest expression when applied to the teaching of the Catholic faith. In fact, she was convinced that this new method was, by a peculiar and providential concatenation of circumstances placed in her hands for the advancement of the Kingdom of God through its application to teaching the truths of the Catholic faith.”

It is in this light, that people of faith, Christian and others, are re-appropriating the method to be able to meet the needs of our children physically, intellectually, emotionally and - spiritually.

In the early days of modern Montessori most of our efforts were directed at the educational pedagogy of Montessori. It is now in the maturing

years of Montessori that many are returning to this spiritual base and rekindling this first love for the formal spiritual development of the child. This re-born movement had many midwives but the work of Dr. Sofia Cavalletti in “The Religious Potential of the Child” helped to focus this “new” emphasis into the work of “The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.” Dr. Jerome Berryman, a Montessorian trained in Bergamo and a later collaborator with Dr. Cavalletti, went on to develop “Godly Play” as an additional means of sharing spiritual insights and training children. It is interesting to note that both of these programs have gone beyond the doors of traditional Montessori schools and are now finding homes in churches of all denominations, not only across the United States but the world.

In 1972, my wife and I started a “Christian Montessori” school. The spiritual components were present even though the hands on components were yet to be put in place. In 1983 we started the Christian Montessori Fellowship as a means of networking Montessorians who shared this interest in Christian spirituality in a Montessori context. Our board chairman, Downen Johnson, (a gifted Montessorian whose mother had started a Montessori school) reflects that in those early days most of those members worked in secular settings. Now twenty some years later there are hundreds of Montessorians who work in “Christian Montessori” schools. The work of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play are major influences in providing the hands on components and inspiration for schools (and churches) who want to enrich the lives of their children spiritually.

The Christian Montessori Fellowship is a trans-denominational group (everything from Baptist and Catholic to Lutheran, Methodist, Episcopal etc) who want to nurture children spiritually within the context of a Montessori environment and pedagogy. The work of the fellowship for the last 25 years has been to encourage the hands on teaching of faith and the Bible while at the same time strengthening the skills and practices of Montessorians across all disciplines found in the environment. To this end the Fellowship holds a national conference each summer and regional conferences around the country to both foster the highest teaching standards and to promote fellowship among Montessorians who share this dual passion for Montessori and Christian spirituality.

This “new” movement in Montessori has raised some concerns from the “old guard” who carefully and wonderfully seek to maintain the purity of the method. Two questions in particular seem to be of concern. One, are you imposing “religion” on the child? And two, are you being less than inclusive (inclusivity has been a wonderful Montessori trait)?

First, all of us would agree that there is by nature a spirituality both in the child and the Montessori approach. The hands on Bible and spiritual materials presented are done in the Montessori fashion of allowing the child to “discover” the truth of the presentation. Just as golden beads will lead a child to the truth of $2+2=4$, so will the truth of lessons like the Good Shepherd lead children to the truth that God does care for them. Now the difficulty for some Montessorians is that Christianity is not a “truth” for them and they somehow

feel that we are doing a disservice to Montessori by introducing this “truth” into the movement. They do not realize that Christianity was a foundational hallmark of Dr. Montessori’s method and inspiration. The challenge is to understand that every Montessori environment doesn’t have to be the same though each has a basic family resemblance (like brothers and sisters) but each bears unique distinguishing characteristics. Some Montessori environments have tremendous gardening programs; others have sophisticated programs involving animals, others emphasize music and art, while some have programs that set tables for lunch with tablecloths, napkins and china while others do none of those. Though each is different they maintain the spirit of what constitutes the method. Religion is not “imposed” on a Montessori environment. It is an integral part of the environment – just like gardens etc – for those who share this passion.

This leads us to the second question. Are we excluding people from our environments because of religion? My experience has been that “Christian Montessori” schools enroll Hindu, Muslim and Jewish children (as well as children of no faith) just like their secular counterparts. The choice for any education remains with the parents. This is a free market and Montessori approach to Montessori education. Parents make a choice if they want this spiritual component in their children’s nurturing. If they don’t, they choose another school. What could be more Montessori than choice?

So exactly how “different” is a Christian Montessori school? The major physical difference in the environment

will usually be found in the setting up of an “atrium” – a special place or corner where children can work with hands on Bible materials. These materials will consist of Bible stories, parables, liturgical and historical materials all created and presented in the Montessori fashion. The major program difference is found in the songs and stories you add to circle time and in the freedom to share the most important relationship you have – that personal relationship with Jesus. People who share these twin passions of Christianity and Montessori bring added joy to the meeting of their children’s needs physically, emotionally, intellectually - and spiritually.

The ultimate difference is in the integration of spiritual life into the normalized child in the environment.

E.M. Standing wrote in 1965, “It is beyond question that the complete application of Montessori’s principles to the teaching of religion is something which still belongs to the future. Its fulfillment will require the loving and disciplined labor of many collaborators in a field which still contains many areas of virgin soil. We hope that some readers will devote themselves to this important task.”

The future is now. There are many collaborators. And the call that Montessori heard echoed from so many centuries before still rings true “Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them, for of such is the kingdom of God.”

Organizations involved in Christian spiritual nurturing in a Montessori context.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd
P.O. Box 1084
Oak Park, IL 60304

708-524-1210

www.cgsusa.org

Godly Play
The Center for the Theology of
Childhood
1117 Texas Ave.
Houston, TX 77009
713-223-4305
www.Godlyplay.org

National Conference

Cost and housing details

Conference cost

\$350 (\$325 if paid by May 1st, an additional \$25 discount for CMF members. Conference includes 3 lunches, morning and afternoon breaks and Saturday dinner,

Location

Menger Hotel

1-800-345-9285

www.historicmenger.com

Lodging costs \$123.76 (tax included) per night

Double or single

Rates good if you register by June 26th

Membership

We need your support. Please join the fellowship by taking a membership so we can continue to spread the Good News.

Email

If you have an email address could you please send it to us. Emailing reduces the expenses of distributing the newsletter. If you are no longer interested in receiving the newsletter please let us know. Thank you.