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September 27th, 2010

Why Christian Montessori Accreditation?

What I love about Montessori is the foundational approach to meeting the child's needs – intellectually, physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually – rather than the primary emphasis being on academic excellence. It is the great irony of Montessori education that the by product of "following the child" is academic excellence.

Why not join one of the standard accrediting bodies instead of creating our own. The external features of traditional accreditation do not address the uniqueness of Montessori education. Then the valid question arises of why not join with one of the premier Montessori groups who already have an accreditation program. First, however, let me say that some of the most wonderful people I have known have been Montessorians of all kinds of stripes and training; people who have dedicated their lives to children and teaching, idealists and secular saints – salt of the earth. And for this dedication, I salute and honor them. But we march to a different drummer!

There are three obstacles to joining them. First, is a matter of recognition. My friends at AMI only acknowledge their own trainees as being acceptable on which to build an accredited school. AMS will recognize AMI and their own trainees as an acceptable foundation for accreditation. Many excellent schools and a majority of schools are not accredited or recognized by either group.

Second, most Montessori training is devoid of the Christian spiritual emphasis that Dr. Montessori's work and early writings portray. In an effort not to offend anyone and to emphasize Montessori education's universal appeal the Christian emphasis has been replaced with a vague emphasis on "spiritual" education. However, E.M. Standing quotes Dr. Montessori saying (on more than one occasion) that God gave her this method in order to advance the kingdom of God.

Which brings us to our third obstacle – we have totally different goals. Many of the idealist Montessorians who I know and love will

quote Dr. Montessori about the new child bringing peace to the world through Montessori education. While this is notable and noble it is not our goal. In the "Secret of Childhood" Dr. Montessori states that many people have likened "normalization" to a conversion. And this is where the goal changes for us. Can you truly "normalize" a child without meeting his spiritual needs? And because we are Christians the spiritual truth is found in Christ. Jesus said, "I am the truth." And as politically incorrect as that may be it is the foundation of our spiritual lives. Again, there is an irony. The child who becomes normalized in a Christian Montessori setting does become the instrument of bringing peace to the world – but bringing it through the "Prince of Peace" and not through education.

Our goal in this new accreditation and training program is to create hundreds, if not thousands, of excellent Montessori schools all over the world that will transform children's lives – intellectually, physically, emotionally, socially and spiritually – thereby advancing the kingdom of God and fulfilling the inspiration given to Dr. Montessori a century ago and also fulfilling the commission we were given 2000 years ago – to preach the Gospel and make disciples.

Montessori is a spiritual journey lived out in an educational setting.

We appreciate your prayers and we also pray for your daily endeavors.

September 21st, 2010

What I wish I knew before I started ... It's all about "listening" Part 7

Dan Rather once interviewed Mother Teresa about prayer. She said, "When I pray, I just listen." "What does God say to you?" "Oh, He just listens!" "I don't understand." "Then, I can't explain it to you."

We miss something vital if we think Montessori is primarily about education. Montessori is a transformational process for both student and teacher. One way this transformation comes is by listening. Listening to the word of God is

essential but so also is listening to the heart of God. It is in prayer that we learn to listen. For most of my life prayer has been talking, petitioning, dealing or begging and very little about listening.

In our desire to do God's will, we have to know first what it is. Often we would prefer that God's voice (and His instructions) would boom and thunder out of heaven or would be headlines on the evening news. It would be so much easier if there were no ambiguity in our assignments or directions. But that is not how God speaks to us most of the time. In 1 Kings 19:11-12, God says to Elijah, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by." Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper."

The gentle whisper requires us to listen closely – and to continue to listen closely. The whisper is so subtle and so gentle we are often not sure we heard it – which again calls us to listen even more carefully. All of this keeps us in a state of humility (and dependence.) When God speaks loudly we have no question in how to follow Him – "Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not commit adultery."

It is also learning to listen to the whisper that transforms us into Montessori teachers. "Follow the child" is more than a cliché. It is foundational to the transformation of the child, the environment and the teacher. In Montessori you are constantly listening. You not only listen with your ears but you listen with your eyes and your heart.

Children's words often don't tell their real thoughts and emotions. It is learning to read their expressions, their faces, their body language that gives insight into their needs which are often inexpressible verbally. Learning to read the character of their souls is a ring side seat at God's unique creations.

If we get too preoccupied with pink towers and golden beads we may miss the deep communication coming from the child that tells us who they are and what they need. It is that

subtle communication that should keep us in a state of humility because we may get it wrong or we may even miss it totally. Staying in a state of expectation to hear, can keep us from becoming complacent or fixated on our own agenda instead of being open to "follow the child" or even more importantly to "Follow Me" – which is always said in a whisper.

September 12th, 2010

School Accreditation Committee

The Christian Montessori Fellowship is organizing an accreditation committee to create the processes and procedures to grant certification and accreditation of teachers and schools.

The purpose of accreditation is to document and encourage the excellence of the ministry each of us has been called to. Accreditation has four components. First, is a set of general principles that help establish and distinguish a Montessori school from other types of educational institutions. Among these principles are philosophy, training and the excellence of the environment. As Christians we are called to stewardship and the stewardship of our opportunities is a call from God to excellence – "workman needing not to be ashamed."

The second component of accreditation is to help schools to establish their goals by creating a plan that is unique to each school. Just as each child is unique, each school is unique. It is these written goals – like a distant star – that gives us a point of reference for our journey. There is power in the written word to help focus our concentration and activity.

Third, accreditation helps us determine how we are planning to reach our goals – again written reminders for our journey.

Fourth, the written documents of accreditation help you evaluate your progress in reaching your goals.

The whole process is to take what is in our hearts and in our heads and put it on paper so we might hold ourselves better accountable to achieve, with excellence, the call we have been given.

The accreditation committee will consist of eight Ph.D.s and eight Masters level participants. We've already identified a third of the committee and would like your help in identifying other Christian people who have a heart and passion and commitment to Christian Montessori along with the attendant expertise to carry forward this endeavor.

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September 11th, 2010

New Christian Montessori School

Christian Montessori Fellowship has launched a new Christian Montessori school – Christian Montessori Academy; three years old through 6th grade. We have finished three weeks of school and enrollment stands at 7. (I know 7 is a perfect number but we would ask God to bless enrollment beyond perfection!)

We have started the academy as a lab and training school. We have two trainees in attendance. They are getting a very special education and insight. Starting a class with some new students mixed in with a returning class has its own challenges but to start a class with no trained students is an adventure. (It is also a challenge for trainees to just sit and observe – without interfering, correcting or intervening.)

To watch what unfolds is amazing. As often as you see Montessori in action it is breath taking. (The inspiration that Dr. Montessori received was God-breathed.) To watch it unfold day after day (we have been in school three weeks) is mind blowing. One trainee had to miss two days. When she returned the change in the children was dramatic.

Then, two parents shared how their children were bringing the Montessori home – everything from hanging towels to pushing chairs in. The Montessori is life changing. But it is not just the external but what is happening in the children – the formation of character and concentration, the awareness of God in their life and in their environment.

You, and we, get to have ringside seats at the formation of new life both physically, emotionally and spiritually in the classroom. It is a "wonder" to behold. And amid all the work and lesson plans and daily activity be like the child and keep that sense of wonder. It is a great gift God gives His children – both small and big.