

The Cobbler

Ephesians 6:15

The Newsletter of the Christian Montessori Fellowship

November 2003

Plan Now!
Christian Montessori Conference
June 24 – 26, 2004
San Antonio, Texas

Conference Theme
“The Absorbent Mind
The Absorbent Heart”

Regional Seminar
Shreveport, LA
January 31, 2004

The Christian Montessori
Fellowship Needs You.

To help spread the good news we need you to join the Christian Montessori Fellowship. We've been handed a unique treasure – not only educationally but spiritually. There are many people who are looking for what we have.

Montessori is as much a spiritual approach to the child as it is an academic approach. And you don't have to work in a Christian school to recognize and use this spiritual component.

In the last few years the secular Montessori world has taken recognition of this marriage of spirit and mind and has attempted to address this phenomenon. However what you get is a general, indistinct spirituality that does not share the experience of the power of God in a living dynamic relationship.

It is wonderful, that people are aware of the spiritual component however a general feeling of spirituality has no power to effect the dynamic spiritual transformation that comes from an encounter with Jesus.

In today's world we want to give our children every advantage. Being alive and alert spiritually is the greatest advantage to achieving all that God has intended for each of us.

Joining the fellowship, going to seminars and conferences and reading and fellowshiping will sharpen the eyes of your spiritual understanding. We need to encourage each other. If traditional Montessori is a vibrant but struggling (in a totally positive sense) educational reformation; Christian Montessori is its younger brother – equally vibrant, equaling struggling. The significant difference is that the wonderful world of traditional Montessori has a number of groups (AMI, AMS, MIA, IMC, IMS, NCME etc) and thousands of dedicated guides where Christian Montessori (CMF) measures its numbers only in the multiple of hundreds and known Christian Montessori schools in the multiple of dozens. It is not a discouragement but a challenge. God has provided two other dynamic tools to stir the waters – The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and Godly Play which are introducing people to hands on (Montessori) Bible learning.

Thirty plus years ago when we started a Christian Montessori school we were scarcer than the proverbial hens teeth. Now Christian Montessori schools begin to dot the landscape and are emerging from survival mode to thriving mode. And that is why we need to encourage each other and build each other up so that others will take the leap of faith and create even more Christian Montessori schools.

Note an interesting phenomenon about Montessori; that while the teacher is not the center of attention in the classroom (like in traditional school) and even though the environment is “not about you” the power of the classroom transforms not only the students it transforms the guide as well. It really is the ox grinding at the mill that is well taken care of.

My life has been indelibly transformed while I have been trying to prepare an environment that allows the transformation of the children in my care.

We want to continue these transformations, enhance our abilities to serve in the environment, expand the outreach of Christian Montessori and make inroads into traditional Christian education – and you are the key. None of us by ourselves have the time or the energy to make this impact but working together we can bless many more children.

Please let us hear from you and of your continuing interest in Christian Montessori.

That’s a good question.

Fourth in a series of questions often asked about what is Montessori?

Isn’t Montessori too structured?

The real question that people are asking is really in reference to the fact that Montessori has a cohesive plan of education and nurturing. Most of us were educated and raised with very little cohesiveness in our education. Nobody “connected the dots for us”. Most people never had the dots connected for them or they could not see any purpose, design or advantage in a cohesive approach. Genius (and Montessori was gifted with this form) is to be able to see relationships and structures where other people only see disparate facts and objects – not being able to see the forest for the trees.

And because it is cohesive people will tend to see it as rigid. We need to share how “rigid” the alphabet is. B **always** follows a, and c **always** follows b. Is it rigid? Yes. Does it serve a purpose? Yes. Would you like a dictionary that wasn’t so “rigid”? Of course not! Now what Montessori shares with the alphabet is, yes, there are things that always follow each other and lead up to the next step. In Montessori once we learn our basics we apply it the same way we learn to apply the alphabet – we use our knowledge in creative ways.

We use the alphabet to spell “Atlanta” where b doesn’t follow a, and c doesn’t follow b. We are free to make creative use of our knowledge. (However if you want to look it up in the dictionary or atlas you go back to the rigidity of the alphabet).

Coherence (and this kind of rigidity) is ultimately a shortcut to what parents are really wanting for their children – the ability to handle life as it comes because life doesn’t come coherently. However learning the tools of life should be done coherently so you have a model from which to work from to put order into

(and impose order on) the random (and incoherent) problems and challenges that make up life.

It is also the “surreal” quality of order in the environment that makes people feel that this must be a “rigid” environment. For most adults that kind of order just “has” to have been imposed. Because they missed their sensitive period to order they have no idea of its naturalness.

Let’s follow an interesting digression here since we started off using the alphabet as a symbol of coherence. Ironically, then the alphabet is not how we teach. Knowing the alphabet (A to Z) at two or three is essentially useless information. It is when we use the letters of the alphabet phonetically (and not in order) that we begin to use the power of the letters to write, read and to understand non-verbal communication. It is only **after** we master the individual parts of the alphabet that we will eventually need a system to be able to sort and retrieve our knowledge.

Interestingly, also, is that order does impose a certain “rigidity” to life. You certainly find this when you come to numbers. Seven means seven and not six. It **is** rigid. The secret of successful life is to have the wisdom to know when being “rigid” IS required and when to be spontaneous.

If you have no order how can you truly be spontaneous? One definition of spontaneous is “controlled and directed internally”. Without order (rigidity?) everything is a spur of the moment, seat of the pants response – and not a “willful decision” based on reason and emotion.

The only real danger of rigidity is that we might become like the Pharisees who hold to the letter of the law while ignoring the spirit of the law. Montessori gives our children the spirit

of the law while teaching them to handle joyfully the things that make up the letter of the law – and to know the difference.

Holidays Christmas Redeeming Santa Claus

It seems that the more the world tries to de-Christ Christmas the greater looms our friend St. Nick. We don’t have to discount Santa Claus in order to bring the proper focus on Jesus for our children at Christmas. Santa is everywhere so let’s use his ubiquitous presence to help remind our children of “the reason for the season”.

Our children need to know that when they see a Santa that they are seeing a commemoration of a Christian saint. St. Nicholas was the bishop of Myra in southwestern Turkey in the 4th century. He was known for his generosity and the giving of gifts. He became the patron saint of children. And why did he do all of this? Because of his love for Jesus.

Santa can be redeemed if we choose to emphasize St. Nick’s love for God and show that his expression of love – the giving of gifts – is what God did for us when he gave us Jesus in the manger. Learning to give (and loving to give) is both a sign of growing maturity and growing spirituality. St. Nick does always bring to mind the scripture, “It is better to give than to receive.” A tough but good lesson to learn early in life.

Topics for 2004

What would you like to see presented at our annual conference and in the newsletter? Let us know.

What should be in the glove box of your car?

Besides gloves of course. Gloves?

You should start off with a copy of “The Absorbent Mind.”, then add a copy of “The Secret of Childhood” and “The Discovery of the Child” along with “The Child in the Family”, “Dr. Montessori’s Own Handbook” and --- Oh wait, you’d need to be driving a Hummer or a semi to get all of these books into the glove box. However what you could do is to put one of the books into your car. It is an American way of life to spend time – an extended time - in our vehicles. By having a Montessori book available we could profitably use the time that we spend waiting to pick up the family. It would be available to us when we had to wait at the Doctor’s or Dentist’s office or at the barber or hairdresser. The idea is to make those “already spent” minutes profitable to increase our expertise and understanding of this tremendous tool we use.

Hopefully, we’ve all read the books at least once. If we read them during training we certainly missed much of what they have to offer because everything was so new and fascinating we didn’t know for sure what part of the candy store to start in. Now that you’ve had some experience and you’ve begun to really understand the principles of your training and have seen the fruit you will benefit immensely from a fresh reading of the materials.

If you’re like most of us our time is limited and that is why I suggest keeping a book close at hand for those inevitable down times in the car. You’d not only be “redeeming the time” but “studying to show yourself approved”. (The bathroom is another place for a good book.)

A Baker’s Dozen Of Montessori benefits for the child

Principles

A principle is defined as a comprehensive and fundamental law, doctrine or assumption. Of all educational systems, Montessori is truly guided by “principles”. And it is these principles that are in effect transmitted to the children. How we approach materials becomes a “principle” of the classroom. Hands on, self-correcting becomes a guiding principle for language as well as math – and botany and geography etc. What the child learns in one realm is transferred to all of the other realms of learning. In Montessori you use the principle of the three period lesson. The approach of the guide to the materials is a principle. Allowing children time to assimilate the material is a principle. Allowing the child to discover is a principle. And the principles go on and on. It is these principles which give Montessori its coherence, which in turn gives it its power.

Montessori children are affected by and learn these principles. They in turn are able to apply what they have learned to what they need to learn next. Rules tend to be specific. All children learn rules. However principles are broad and fit many situations. A child who is introduced to principles and allowed to apply them soon learns that principles are wonderful tools and have great value.

Being immersed in principles the student benefits from the coherence which in turn helps produce that very wonderful peaceful environment that utterly amazes visitors

As the child assimilates these principles and applies them he moves

from being a child into the next phase of development – becoming an adult who is not blown about by emotions and circumstances but begins to make decisions based on knowledge, experience and principles. And these principles are often first found in a Montessori environment. There is not only an “absorbent mind” there is also an absorbent spirit that is nurtured on principle.

The spirit of the teacher The spirit of the learner

The emphasis on continuing to become a master teacher is an emphasis on spiritual growth. None of us ever arrive – spiritually, professionally, or emotionally. We are either further along than we were or not as far along. We cannot chide ourselves or discourage ourselves that we are not as good as someone else in the classroom all we can do is to continue to live in the learning process. When we started our school over thirty years ago my wife was in awe of the experienced mature teachers that God had sent. She remembers asking herself, “How do they do it? How do they get the children to respond in the ways they do?” And then came the time when the newer and younger teachers would stand in awe of her and ask, “How does she do it? How does she get the children to respond?”

It takes time and dedication to becoming better. That’s why I encourage you to read and reread Montessori to gain new and fresh insights. It also requires that you read widely. Add to your store of knowledge. There are so many fields of knowledge that will add sparkle and luster to both your environment and to your

understanding of children. Recent times have seen a great surge of “brain studies”. These studies on how the brain works (and children learn) are wonderful. They give you additional insights into the children in your environment. They also give you a chuckle (and a little bit of a feeling of superiority – which we have to watch) because these “new” studies are proving and validating what Montessori began implementing almost a hundred years ago.

And because we already “know” these things we need to guard against becoming complacent. There is always much to learn, much yet to accomplish.

I encourage you to continue your learning; never resting on the amazing insights that you’ve already gained because there are many more insights that lie ahead.

The 10 P’s of Ministry Problems

This month we will discuss the problems that are created by **expectations**. Why should expectations lead to problems? We all have expectations. We expect to get paid. We expect to have the materials we need. We expect to have the support we need. We expect our children to be on time. We expect lunch at a certain time. And the list goes on. All of them are basically reasonable expectations. So what’s the problem?

The problem is that they **are** expectations. They are what we hope could be called future facts. A fact exists. It is raining. It is a fact. I expect the rain to stop is a hope, an expectation. There is no guarantee it will stop when I want it to. And therein lays the problem with expectations. There are no

guarantees. Now we expect honorable people to fulfill their promises and commitments. What happens however when this does not come to pass? We are faced with our own reactions that hover between grace and justice. If we come down on the side of justice (we might even call it legalism) we expect fairness and a resolution of how things should be. We can be “put out” that people are late, money is late or whatever expectation has not been met. We can make our demands on the basis of “fairness and justice”. And we feel vindicated in our feelings of annoyance. Or we can choose to exercise grace – giving others the latitude that we wish for ourselves – smile and make the best of it. The problem in this scenario is one of attitude based on legitimate grievances. There is nothing harder for us to deal with than operating with grace when we are “in the right”. My biggest challenge is not to have the wrong attitude especially when I’m right. (Fortunately for me I don’t seem to be right often enough to have this problem.) It seems we all feel that we never seem to be in the right.

There is a major distinction to be made between legitimate failures (beyond reasonable control) to meet expectations and cold, crass not caring on the part of the other party. If you are involved in a situation like that you need to decide whether you can work under such conditions. But irrespective of the reasons for unfilled expectations God expects us to have His attitude. And it takes Him to give us that attitude because humanly we often feel justified in our negative attitudes. God is still in control – even when the unrighteous seem to be. The stakes in our lives are always higher than money, position, power or even our own way. What’s

really at stake is, is God being honored and lifted up – especially when we’ve been wronged?

As difficult as these unfulfilled expectations are there is a class of expectations that are even more difficult and insidious to deal with – unexpressed expectations. If only we were mind readers.

Unexpressed expectations cause more grief and damage to jobs, relationships and marriages than almost anything else. It is ironic that as difficult as unrealized expressed expectations may be to handle it is the unrealized unexpressed expectations that send us round the bend and cause untold difficulty. There is no rational reason for it – because the whole thing is irrational but if you examine your own life you find this disturbingly true.

Obviously, open and frank communications are the way to head off “unexpressed” expectations. The difficulty is often the common things that we assume people should understand as expected of them. Things like coming to work on time, turning in reports on time and a myriad of things that really are “normal” seem to fall into unexpressed expectations. If people have not been trained (and they are often wonderful in other areas) then we need to extend this training into areas that we assume should be “expected”. Is it a lot more work? Yes, but it is a lot less work than the emotional fallout with which we have to deal.

Very rarely does anyone ever read your mind or even pick up the subtle references you might make in regard to some common expectation. You have to screw up your courage and communicate your request (and expectation) in clear unambiguous terms. (This works wonders in marriage too!) You might

think people would be able to pick up clues about what you are wanting – save your breath in order to give straight forward requests.

The ultimate problem represented by expectations is the resentment built when they are not met. If you need a teacher to get reports done timely – say so directly and firmly. If you are hoping for a raise (directors are going to love me) you need to sit down and ask for it. You will also need to be able to understand why you may not be able to get everything you ask for – but there won't be any false expectations or hopes.

Again, above all, keep yourself from resentment – which will poison every good thing you hope to accomplish.

Brighten the Corner Where You Are.

Kathy Bowser, the retired head of Children's house of Boca Raton shares her experience one day of patting the back of one of her young students at nap time. Another older student came along and began to pat Kathy's back. One of the other young class mates came along and began to pat Kathy's back also. "Stop!" exclaimed the first student, "This is my work."

Note to Directors

Many of you have staff members who are interested in the Christian Montessori fellowship and we would love to add their names to our mailing list.

Cross Mountain Forum
www.crossmountainforum.com

We would like to extend an invitation to heads of schools to consider attending a Cross Mountain forum especially set up for Montessori schools. The forums are designed to deal with the challenges of running a school. More information can be found on our web site. However what cannot be found on the web site is a special forum and price for CMF members. We have set the Forum of January 22nd – 25th as a Montessori forum and we have reduced the price to \$675. Ask the Lord if this might not be an excellent investment in your continued ministry.

Conferences tapes available Edward Fidellow

That's a good question: If you can't wait for the next four month's newsletters you can get a quick overview of the major questions (and some great answers) often asked about Montessori.

Discipline: A totally different approach to help your thinking about what discipline really is (and should be). Try "Discipline is a positive force" to begin with.

The prepared environment: A refreshing look and reminder at what contributes to the success of a Montessori education. This talk helps keep the importance of the environment in view.

Independence: Developing independence has long been a Montessori tradition and success factor. Understanding what independence means for and to the child will better help you to develop it in the child.

Tapes are \$8each, \$6 for members.

Regional Seminars

Cost for regional seminars is \$125. There is a \$25 discount for early registration (three weeks before the seminar) and an additional \$25 discount for CMF members.

Consulting Services Available

Do you need a fresh perspective on your program? Consider combining a parent meeting, in service training and a school consultation in one visit to give your program that added boost to reach the next level of excellence. Contact us today to set up a visit.

Christian Montessori Fellowship
22630 East Range
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Available

Wonderful preschool teacher
AMI trained
14 years experience
Contact
Pam Belser
42 Rolling Hill Ln.
Old Westbury, NY 11568-1012
516-626-1756

Back Issues of the Cobbler on line at
www.christianmontessorifellowship.com

Contact us at
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Christian Montessori Fellowship

Membership Application

Personal

Name _____

Address _____

State, Zip _____

Email _____

Telephone _____

How long have you taught? _____

Level you teach : _____

Are you a: teacher _____ (Mark all that apply.)

administrator _____

owner _____

other _____

What is your church affiliation _____

Schools

Name of your school _____

Address _____

How large is your school? _____

In what kind of school do you teach:

Secular Montessori _____

Montessori School with Christian principles _____

Christian Montessori school _____

Is the school affiliated with a church? _____

Which Church _____

Is your school:

Non-profit _____ A proprietorship _____

Training

Who trained you: _____ What year did you take your training? _____

AMI _____

IMS _____

AMS _____

St. Nicholas _____

NCME _____

Other _____

MIA _____

What was the major strength of your training?

What would you have liked to see strengthened in your training?

What do you need for continued growth and excellence in your own teaching?

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 _____

Is there a need for training from a Christian viewpoint? Yes _____ No _____

Do you have an interest in attending CMF seminars near you? Yes _____ No _____

Join and support the fellowship by making your check for \$50 payable to: The Christian Montessori Fellowship or use your Visa, Master Card, Discover or American Express.

Credit card number _____

Exp. Date _____

Signature _____

Membership benefits

1. Discounts at conferences, seminars and forums.
2. Discounts on CMF tapes and literature
3. Membership directory
4. Membership certificate
5. Reduced advertising costs in the Cobbler
6. Discounts from selected vendors
7. 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.

8. Your membership will help you, and many others, to better serve your children in Christ's name by providing opportunities for fellowship, learning and encouragement.

9. 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.

Christian Montessori Fellowship Cross Mountain Forum

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