

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd – Fall Session 2016

Parent Updates - Week 1

Week1

Dear Parents and Grandparents

In Week One of the Fall Session 2016, the children were preoccupied with getting familiar (or re-familiar for returning children) with their Atrium space and the rules of the Atrium. (However, this was preceded by first visiting Jesus in the Tabernacle.)

In a Montessori setting, the main areas of practical life work involve care of self, care of others, and care of the environment. Additionally, Grace and Courtesy are part of the training that is provided to the young child.

Practical Life activities have the unique purpose of providing calm in an Atrium setting. To the adult eye, the activities may seem insignificant, simple or repetitive. However, the child who may be sponging water from one bowl to another, dry pouring, or polishing the chalice, is demonstrating deep concentration while engaged in what they are doing. They are cultivating a sense of accomplishment in the completion of their work; affirming their sense of independence in their choice of work, and developing a sense of order when they restore their work-- all while also improving their fine motor skills.

As such, much of the time spent on the first day was consumed with Practical Life activities meant to draw the child into the space that is the Atrium. They learnt how to walk slowly and speak softly. They learnt how to carry a chair in the Atrium, how to restore their work. The Atrium slowly became a place of peace, calm and gentle silence even in the midst of bustling work.

Returning children chose to revisit liturgical work that they were previously presented with. It is always awe-inspiring to witness a young child simply sit before the model altar that they have prepared, their eyes closed and hands folded in deep prayer. As Catechists we give the child the space and time to have their conversation with God (while also being sufficiently close to the lit candles on the model altar).

The children ended the session with a solemn procession to the prayer corner: each child carefully holding something precious and beautiful to place on the prayer table. They each said something beautiful that they were thankful for as we concluded the first Sunday at the Atrium.

God Bless,

Norma Dawes, Patti Hendricks, Suzanne Sheppard, Anita Kuriakose

Parent Updates – Fall Session Summary

Dear Parents,

This is a reminder that the last Atrium day for the Fall session of CGS is on Sunday, December 18th. We will commence in the New Year on January 8th.

As we enter into the 4th Sunday of Advent, we are looking forward to celebrating a great feast -- the Birth of Jesus. As such, we will have a celebration at the Atrium which includes the sharing of food. I would like to invite each family to send nut-free snacks with your child that they can share with the other children in the Atrium (Chips, crackers, fruits, cheeses, small sandwiches, veggies and dip etc are suggestions). If your child has an allergy, please send me a quick note. If they have an epi-pen, please have the child bring that with them (in an abundance of caution).

It has been a remarkable and joy-filled fall session at the Atrium. As there were many new children this year, the first few weeks were spent in finding a new rhythm for the Atrium and settling into a routine that works for our Atrium, the children and the Catechists. A typical Atrium day now commences with the children gathering downstairs and processing slowly to the Atrium singing a hymn they have learnt in a previous session or in keeping with the current season of church. The children continue processing around the entirety of the Atrium twice and slowly sit in a circle around a mat. We begin the Atrium acknowledging the incredible love that Jesus has for each of us and each child has an opportunity to tell Jesus that she or he loves him back. We do this in song.

We also follow this with presenting new material to the children that they can ponder and reflect on as they choose their liturgical, scriptural or practical life material to work on.

This session, the children worked very hard. However, the Holy Spirit worked harder and some of the most profound and moving work was completed by the children in the last few weeks of the Fall session. I will send a second email with the update of the children's work. The following is the first part.

Liturgical Gestures:

In the earlier weeks of the Fall session the children were either introduced to or revisited a few of the liturgical gestures. Two of the most common gestures is the Sign of the Cross and the Genuflection. Later the children will be introduced to the gestures of epiclesis, offering, the preparation of the chalice, the gestures of baptism, peace and much more.

Gestures have a very significant and powerful role during liturgy. The children have come to understand that gestures are prayers without any words ...they are movement with profound meaning. They know that in praying with a gesture they pray with their whole bodies, not only with their lips and hearts. In presenting the gestures, the children are called to reflect on what the gesture means. What are we saying when we make this gesture?

With the Sign of the Cross, we place the sign over our bodies...what does it mean? Whose sign is it? What are we saying when we place it over our bodies? The children sometimes respond by

saying that we are covering our bodies with Jesus. We belong to Jesus and Jesus belongs to us. The gesture of genuflection is equally profound...the child notes that we are making ourselves small in front of God. We show a humbleness of heart before God. It is a sign of honour, respect and the acknowledgement of the sacred. How beautiful it is to see a little child genuflect before the Tabernacle.

Nomenclature for Life in the Church:

At the Atrium, the children are introduced to church nomenclature so that they can fully participate in the liturgy and the life in the church. The Montessori teaching method embraces the view that children as young as three (and younger) are fully capable of using the correct names of materials and things that they are exposed to. There is no need to water it down. The child can say "genuflect" and "Tabernacle". Additionally they are able to name the various articles of the mass, the vestments of the priest, and name the liturgical seasons.

The children were presented with the Altar 1 materials (Altar table, altar cloth, candles, crucifix, chalice and paten). They soon learned to set up the model altar in the Atrium and lay out the various articles while naming them. The older children (or year 2 children) were introduced to Altar II (Tabernacle, ciborium, sanctuary lamp, lectern, lectionary). The Tabernacle is where the bread that becomes Jesus is kept. The children note that it is locked. The Catechist opens the Tabernacle to bring out the ciborium which holds Jesus. The model ciborium is empty...but the children are told that the ciborium in the Church holds Jesus. They notice the sanctuary lamp which, when lit, shows that Jesus is present in the Tabernacle. Jesus is present in the Eucharist. However He is also present in the Word of God -- the lectern is where the Priest and reader read the Word of God. The "lectionary" is the book with the Word of God.

The Altar work is one of the more popular works the children bring out. The work of the child includes drawing the various articles, gluing the appropriate cut-outs of the items and naming them.

The children were also introduced to the seasons of the church and the liturgical colours. By now, they are very familiar with the colours (purple, white, green and red) and what season they represent (preparation, celebration, growing time or ordinary time, and Pentecost.) The older children also were presented with the names of the various items in vestments of the priest (alb, cincture, chasuble, stole).

Biblical Geography

Biblical geography is presented to the children because it makes Jesus real. The children see and feel the land and the water on the globe and the topographical map. They can identify the red dot on the globe that represents Israel. It's a real land, like Canada. Jesus walked on that land. He was real and he lived in a real place. They learn to identify the three most important cities of Israel: Nazareth (where Angel Gabriel appeared to Mary); Bethlehem (where Jesus was born); and Jerusalem (where He died, was buried and rose again).

Some of the children also began work on the Puzzle map of Israel, where they learnt about the regions and waterways of Israel that provide a framework for the important events in the life of Jesus:

Judea - is the largest and most important region where Jesus was born (Bethlehem) and He died, was buried and rose again (Jerusalem)

Galilee - the Angel appeared to Mary in Nazareth which is in Galilee

Samaria - Jesus walked to Judea from Galilee

Perea - Jesus preached and healed in Perea

The lake near Galilee is called Lake Galilee -- this is where the disciples fished.

All along Samaria and Judea is the River Jordan -- this is where Jesus was baptised.

The River Jordan empties into the Dead Sea which is very salty and has no fish.

The children loved this work and out of this material came many iterations of drawings and gluing of the regions and waterways of Israel.

We leave you with samples of the work of your children.

God Bless

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Norma Dawes,

John Dawes

Suzanne Sheppard