



# The Lamplighter

SPEMS Monthly Parent Newsletter



February 2014

*The Montessori Way:*

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## Montessori and Faith *by John Lewis*

It takes special faith to be a Montessori parent, to believe in something that is not always instantly visible. The author of Hebrews wrote, "Faith is the assurance of things hoped for."

All Montessori teachers must begin with a faith in children that is sometimes contrary to popular belief. For example, it is not commonly supposed that children love to learn. While it is true that a child's natural hunger for knowledge can be blocked for various reasons, Montessorians hope for, look for, and wait for an unleashing of that trait in their students. We also have confidence that children possess amazing abilities to absorb needed information from the world around them. For this reason, Montessori teachers consider their most important task is preparing a stimulating learning environment.

When students are willing and interested in learning, their educational benefits will be not only more significant, but also longer lasting. However, interest and willingness cannot be forced out of children. As gardeners, teachers can only prepare the ground, plant the seeds, and water the soil. It is of little use to command the plants to grow and be fruitful. Therefore, Montessori teachers step out of a central position. By teaching the children to plan their own school day and choose their own work, we hope to encourage this internal enthusiasm. As servants, we provide a variety of good choices; as helpers, we assist in the work selected; as guides, we show the children how to learn. Montessori teachers abandon rigid plans in order to allow healthy, individual growth.

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## Montessori and Faith *(continued from page 1)*

As the students work, they are not all expected to progress at the same rate. Children cannot be lumped into convenient groups; they are all unique, with different strengths, weaknesses, learning styles, and times to learn.

For these reasons, a Montessori school is a special kind of place; but that “special-ness” also requires understanding and support from the parents. It is not always easy for parents to forego the long-standing customs and attitudes which have created systems such as grade levels, teacher-centered classes, and all the behavior strategies required to coerce bored children.

And then there is the current focus on testing as a final measure of a child’s progress. It is understandable that in this age of bottom-line pragmatism—with anxious comparisons of our kids to those in other countries—it is not unexpected that parents would desire proof of their child’s advancement. However, though records may show that certain materials have been scheduled, presented for memorization, tested, and graded, parent confidence may be based on short-term goals instead of real, life-long student benefits.

Unfortunately, in many American schools, certain important and inevitable questions are frequently ignored. Do the students merely gain bits of information, or do they obtain a love of knowledge?

Do the children possess the drive and ability to educate themselves for a lifetime?

In a Montessori setting, we expect good results. However, evidence of progress is sometimes hidden within a child for a while. Even Montessori guides can be surprised by progress that is not immediately visible. For example, I once had a little girl who began the year with no substantial reading ability. When approached about reading, she would make a face indicating that she had no interest in that area. I left her alone about it, feeling that when she was ready, she would let us know. She merrily went about her business, picking many different types of work, but doing almost no voluntary reading. The days went by and I was tempted to worry about her reading inactivity. However, something told me she was just taking care of things in her own way and in her own time. After a few weeks, I watched one morning as she began plucking handfuls of reading books from the shelves, only to sit and

thumb through them one after another.

Then she appeared at my side, announcing her desire to read to me. She was ready to begin reading instruction according to her own inner timetable. This kind of happening is actually quite normal in a Montessori environment.

Of course, the longer we teach, the more we come to expect good results. Montessori teachers become used to children being enthusiastic about school. But once in a while, we are reminded that most people expect children to dislike school. Sometimes, we have prospective parents observing the class, who—after witnessing the happy bustle of working children—will leave shaking their heads in disbelief. Others approach us with oft-repeated questions, “But how do they all know what to do? How do you keep them under control?” We try to explain that our goal is for children to control themselves and pick their own activities.

*It is always exciting when the children realize that [in a Montessori classroom] there is nothing to hold them back, not even themselves.*

Each new school year, Montessori teachers may have fleeting doubts about some of the children ever getting the hang of planning their own workday. However, despite slow starts, we soon see children that are comfortable with the Montessori individualized system of learning. The students quickly learn how to keep track of exercises they have done, how to get new work and lessons, and how to solve their own problems creatively. Soon they become ready for even more freedom and responsibility. It is always exciting when the children realize that there is nothing to hold them back, not even themselves.

So, dear parents, let us grow together in faith. May we continue believing and working together to provide an environment which enables children to surprise and delight us at every turn.

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**Editor’s note:** *John Lewis is a SPEMS Lower Elementary Guide; he has been teaching in Montessori & public schools for over 30 years.*

## Support SPEMS while you shop

Did you know you could support SPEMS while you shop online? If you participate in [AmazonSmile](#), the online retailer will donate 0.5% of your purchases to SPEMS.



[AmazonSmile](#) is the same Amazon you know with the same products, prices and service. To participate, simply go to [www.amazon.com/smile](http://www.amazon.com/smile). Login using your normal Amazon ID and password and when prompted, select SPEMS as your charitable organization.

### Are your student's files 'up do date?'

Lorna is working on ensuring all of our student files are complete and up-to-date.

The State of Texas requires that we have *current immunization records, medical release forms, emergency contact sheets, and pick-up authorization forms* on file. SPEMS can be cited for non-compliance by state licensing if our files are incomplete.

So please, if you have been notified that documents are missing from your child's file, please get them to Lorna as soon as possible.



### *News from the Toddler Room:*

## Sensitive period for potty training

Toddlers are becoming very independent between the age of 18 months and 2-1/2 years, and are usually ready for potty training. However, it is important to avoid power struggles and resist bribery. This is one area in which children are in total control. It is the child who is being trained...not the parent.

Signs of readiness include handling own clothes, being dry for several hours, and showing an interest in the functions of the bathroom. Children learn this by observation. Let boys watch their dads or male relatives in the bathroom. Start slowly at first by encouraging your toddler to sit on the toilet for a few seconds or minutes at a time. Relax and take your time doing this. Timing can make this easier. Try letting your child use the toilet after taking a nap or after eating and drinking.

### Here are some ideas we use to make it easier for the potty trainee:

1. Use clothes that encourage independence. Elastic-waist pants or shorts are best. Avoid buckles and belts.
2. Have potty-chairs or training toilet tops readily available.
3. Stay near home or a toilet during this transitional time. If you are not consistent, you can slow the process to the point of regression.
4. Only introduce and do toilet teaching if your child is ready.
5. Read interesting and relaxing books while they are sitting on the toilet.
6. The primary error during this time is not making it to the toilet in time. Don't worry about these little mishaps; just let the child put on new underwear.
7. Let your child pick out his or her new "big" boy or girl underwear.
8. Teach your child how to unroll toilet paper and wipe. (Girls should wipe from front to back.)
9. Teach your child how to wash hands.
10. Let your child flush the toilet when finished. (This can be the greatest reward for a child!)

Toddler guides are ready to create a routine that can be consistent both at home and school whenever your child is ready.

~Ms. Renee and Ms. Crystal (Toddler Room 1)





# Wells of Love

Start gathering up your spare change! This year, instead of traditional valentine celebrations, SPEMS students will be collecting pennies to help build a freshwater well for the people of West Africa's Azawak Valley.

These nomadic people live on the edge the Sahara Desert. In the rainy season, they drink the freshwater that gathers in the valley's many marshes. But in dry seasons, they often must travel 30 miles to find fresh, drinkable well water.

Amman Imman is a charitable organization whose *Wells of Love* program helps raise funds to build more water wells.

Look for *Wells of Love* donation containers in your child's classroom!



## Poetry Reading Feb. 23rd

Join us Sunday, Feb. 23rd at 3 p.m. in the Parish Hall for a special afternoon of poetry reading.

Primary and Elementary students will share some of the favorite poems they have been memorizing. Elementary students will also read their *original* poems.

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### Fundraiser buys water fountain and 4 picnic tables for campus

Donations and ticket proceeds from our Jan. 25 *Annual Spaghetti Fundraiser Dinner* topped \$6,500. These funds will allow us to install a much-needed outdoor water fountain on the pavilion, as well as add four new durable metal picnic tables to the campus grounds.

Our thanks to all the volunteers—parents, students and St. Paul's parishioners—whom helped make the dinner such a success.



### Children's choir to perform Sunday, Feb. 9th

The St. Cecelia Children's Choir will sing Sunday, Feb. 9th in the 10:30 a.m. service at St. Paul's Episcopal Church during the. Please come and hear our wonderful choristers.



## \*Registration for 2014/2015 school year begins this month

Enrollment of *current students* for 2014/2015 school year will take place though Feb. 28th. Siblings of current students can also be enrolled during February.

*Note: After Feb. 28th, any available spaces will be opened to families of children in the waiting pool. So don't put off your enrollment decision!*

Enrollment information will be sent home during the first week of February. If you have friends or family who are interested in placing children at the school, please encourage them to schedule a tour at their earliest convenience.

