One thing I resolved to do this summer was to take my one-year-old grand daughter, Lucy, to feed the ducks. I had such fond memories of taking my own children, Sarah and Christian, to feed the ducks along the River Thames in London so long ago.

Clutching our bag of bread, Lucy and I finally made it out to Breckinridge Park this past month and discovered a myriad of ducks along the riverside. Of course, Lucy ate just as much bread as the foul, but the excitement on her face when she heard the ducks “quack” and gobble the bread was precious!

I have been blessed to witness Lucy’s joy—her unbridled sense of awestruck wonder—many times this past year: I saw it in her eyes the first time she held a rose petal to her nose; I glimpsed it in her smile as she discovered and picked tiny flowers hidden in the grass of my back yard; I also saw it when she laughed and chased a butterfly flittering amongst my Salvia flowers; I could even sense her joy as she cheerfully gathered and presented me with several unremarkable pebbles from my front sidewalk.

As adults, we often forget how wonderful our world can be. For Lucy, for children, wonder awaits around every corner, if we allow them time to explore. Our dictionary has a rather simple definition of wonder. For me, the world has a very spiritual definition: Wonder is our capacity to recognize, appreciate and enjoy the many gifts of God—the beauty and marvels of His creation, and the mystery of the kingdom of God, both within us and all around us.

Aline Wolf in Nurturing the Spirit of the Child describes the gift of wonder this way:

“Wonder is a delicate seedling that one hopes will never be trampled on and never allowed to dry up. With careful nourishment childhood wonder will flower into a deep reverence for nature that can keep one’s spirit alive into a vital old age.”
Explore nature to nurture the gift of wonder (continued from page 1)

Young children are rich in the gift of wonder, but wonder must be cultivated for it to survive, to grow and flourish. Regularly providing children time outdoors—feeding ducks or otherwise exploring the natural world, is a great way to cultivate an nurture your child’s gift of wonder. Examining the shapes and colors of fall leaves, or the lacy outline of tiny snowflakes, or simply examining a garden spider in its web can create an intense state of concentration and wonder within your child.

Maria Montessori talked about his state of wonder as a deep meditation on detail that helped children grow in their understanding and knowledge of the world:

“The world is acquired physically by means of the imagination. Reality is studied in detail, and then the whole is imagined. The detail is able to grow in the imagination, and so total knowledge is obtained. The act of studying things is, in a way, a meditation on detail. That is to say [in this way] that the qualities of a fragment of nature are deeply impressed upon an individual.”—Maria Montessori, from Education in the World

Young children can teach us to look again at the world around us in wonder. Like Montessori, if we observe our children, we can learn from what they do. Like natural contemplatives, children truly become one with what they see, touch, hear, taste and smell. It seems that even the simplest of objects, “fragments of nature” so to speak, can awaken the sense of wonder in a child.

I encourage all parents to watch their children splashing in puddles, collecting sticks and rocks, or rolling down hill slopes. If you put children in a natural setting, you will see that they can find endless ways to explore and find “wonder” in the world. With luck, join them in their explorations and rediscover your own “gift of wonder.”

I’ll admit, exposing children to nature is becoming more and more difficult in modern urban areas. Buildings and roads are fast replacing forest and field. Many urban creeks and streams are now too cluttered with litter and debris to explore, and algae-covered local ponds sometimes harbor only mosquitos and disease-causing microbes and bacteria. Montessori expressed similar concerns 70 years ago:

“In the civilized environment of our society, children live far from nature and have few opportunities of entering into intimate contact with it. Does anyone let them run out when it is raining, take of their shoes when they find pools of water, and let them run about bare feet when the grass of the meadow is wet with dew?”—Maria Montessori, from Education in the World

A child’s need to observe the intricate workings of nature is now as acute as it was when Montessori first observed children. In our high-paced, modern technological environment, there seem to be fewer and fewer places where over-scheduled children are allowed the time, space and freedom to experience the simple wonders found in the natural world around us.

Thankfully here in San Antonio, we are blessed with many, many places to explore nature. Our many parks and greenway trails are easily accessible for family outings and hikes. The San Antonio Botanical Gardens, the local Audubon Society and the San Antonio River Authority host guided tours, sponsor birding events and offer waterway exploration “paddle trails.”

Perhaps now, more than ever, we parents and teachers need to give children the opportunity to observe reality, to give their minds time to settle and meditate on fragments of nature, to allow them moments to stop, look and wonder.

After all, the gift of wonder helps us all find and enjoy God every day and everywhere. Lucy and I discovered Him moving among the ducks just the other day.

Join us for class potluck picnics

Get to know the families in your child’s classroom by joining us for the class potluck picnics. The schedule is as follows:

- **Wednesday, Sept. 3** — Toddlers
  - Ms. Kristen & Ms. Cecy
  - Ms. Jenny & Ms. Monika

- **Thursday, Sept. 4** — Primary 2
  - Ms. Norma & Ms. Bea

- **Tuesday, Sept. 9** — Primary 1 & 3
  - Ms. Kristen & Ms. Cecy
  - and Ms. Jenny & Ms. Monika

- **Wednesday, Sept. 10** — Lower Elementary
- **Thurs. Sept. 11** — Upper Elementary

Bring your favorite dish to share. All potluck dinners will be held from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m. All potluck dinners will be held from 5:30 – 7:00 p.m.
Join us for International Peace Day Celebration Monday September 22

Join us at the Pavilion on Monday September 22, at 9:00 a.m., as the whole school comes together with songs, prayer and readings to celebrate the International Day of Peace.

Peace education is a huge aspect of the Montessori method and this special day is both a cause for celebration and a chance for reflection.

Maria Montessori saw the education of young children as the human race’s opportunity to recreate itself in a way that would eliminate war. As with most things, Montessori did not think that meant children needed to be lectured on the subject, but rather that they need to be given an opportunity to discover peace for themselves.

From a very early age, our students learn to think globally about the human race and its place in the entire system of our planet. As they get older and their thinking becomes more abstract, they learn more about the ways the different cultures have peacefully coexisted around the world.

Peace is also, essentially, a habit that Montessori students learn. Lessons in Grace and Courtesy help teach our students the habit of viewing and treating others with respect. Similarly, the Peace Tables we maintain in every classroom encourage students to forge understanding and peacefully resolve conflict. These lessons are present in Montessori classrooms from such an early age that the habits they create become as natural to our students as pouring water or sweeping the floor.

Our world has become much more connected: Countries thousands of miles away can be regular business partners in ways that weren’t possible even a decade or two ago. People are truly mobile on a global scale. We so often encounter situations in which we need to work with people of different backgrounds or cultures—people who often hold points of view far different from our own. This diversity of culture and opinion cannot be avoided, and in the Montessori classroom it is honored and celebrated.

Here at SPEMS, we strive to be a community where acceptance, encouragement and love awaken a child’s desire to live in peace—all while giving something back to God, each other, and the world.

After School Enrichment

Our after school programs engage children in various enrichment activities including Spanish, gardening, sports, art and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. A few spaces are still available. For more information contact the school office or visit our website.
Want to better understand Montessori? Sign up for our Journey & Discovery event

For most of us, the Montessori classroom is very different from our own educational experience and naturally prompts lots of questions. Our Journey & Discovery event on Saturday, Sept. 13 from 9:00 a.m. to noon is your opportunity to get answers.

This half-day seminar offers a comprehensive look at Montessori education theory and practice from toddlers to elementary. The day starts with a journey through classrooms spanning the entire Montessori curriculum from Toddlers to 12 years. Parents will then split into the group of their choice to fully discover the curriculum for Toddlers to 6th grade. This second half will include hands-on learning and an opportunity to talk with teachers at all levels about what happens in the classroom each day.

Journey & Discovery is a comprehensive parent-focused event. Our goal is to help you understand Montessori education the best way possible—by immersing yourself in it for a morning. Childcare will be provided, but space is limited so make sure to sign up early.

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First Day of School