



The Lamplighter

SPEMS Monthly Parent Newsletter



February 2015

The Montessori Way:

Inside

I wonder what's going on in the garden... 3
Young gardeners find wonder in campus garden projects...

Eat Italian on Feb. 28 4
Enjoy lasagna and more at our Italian Supper Feast...

'Big Think' is Feb. 27 4
Details about our Science Fair...

'This is how we roll' 4
Parent Lesson night is Feb. 19...

Choir to sing Feb. 17 4
Will appear St. Mark's Shrove Tuesday Supper & Talent Show

School will be closed for students on Monday, Feb. 16, President's Day.

Seven ways to love a child

A tired working mother stood in the classroom doorway, ready to depart with her two sons. Separated in age by two years, the boys were as different in appearance as they were in temperament, but they were great kids. They enjoyed math and reading, laughed hard and punched hard. They loved learning, loved life and loved each other. Mom's secret: "There are many ways to love a child," she said. "I keep it simple. I have expectations. I accept mistakes. And I celebrate the process."

Parenting is not consistent or predictable. Loving a child is not always fun or easy. Establishing a few flexible, healthy habits is a parent's best demonstration of love.

One: eat together

Research has validated what most parents once understood intuitively. Nothing is more valuable to a child's physical, emotional, intellectual and social health than a daily family meal. Sit at a table, turn the television off, and use utensils and napkins. It's a simple act with profound implications. The advantages for the life of a child far exceed the parent's investment of time and energy.

Two: keep it real

"Frozen" is a fun distraction on a cold rainy day. There are countless cable channels for children, educational videos, electronic games designed to challenge and stimulate young minds. However, *none of these devices compare to time spent walking, talking, playing or reading with a parent.* There is no substitute for green fields, real sports equipment, friends, playgrounds and fresh air with mom and dad or extended family.

Children do not feel loved in virtual worlds of a movie or video game. To thrive, children need to touch, move, feel and talk.

Seven ways to love a child *(continued from page 1)*

They should experience the joys of conversation, the disappointment of defeat, and the drama of human relationship. A child's fine and gross motor skills develop through the use of her hands, her mind and her body. Her vocabulary expands through the alternating, interactive use of her voice, her mind and her ears. She is successful socially, because she observes her parents relationship and learns how to love in the real world.

Three: invite mentors and partners

Grandparents are treasure troves of memories, ideas, observations, and cautions. Most grandparents remember some effective parenting techniques and will confess decisions they regret. Experienced teachers can offer advice that is age appropriate reflecting their years working with specific populations of young people.

Parents of older children can anticipate phases and speak with the advantages of hindsight. Parenting decisions are rarely quick or easy. Age- and person-appropriate expectations are seldom obvious.

Parenting without help is terrifying and dangerous. A brief, thoughtful conversation with an experienced mentor can be mind-altering—shifting a parents' heart from despair, confusion or anxiety to optimism and hope. Children learn about love through observation and imitation.

Four: read together

Start young and stick with it. Literacy is an essential foundation to academic success. Parents who read to—and later with—their children give them the best possible preparation for school, a firm foundation for learning, a ticket to travel around the world without leaving home.

Five: welcome failures

Parents who establish a friendly attitude toward mistakes and failures raise *resilient children*. Loving a child who has made a mistake, failed a test, or fell down on the field, means standing firm while natural consequences—even embarrassment—unfold. A child's confidence grows through independent experiences of failure, perseverance and success; knowing her parents will support her, even when she fails, will help her face

situations, not with fear, but the calm resolve of someone who knows that one can always bounce back from failure. Oddly enough, the most meaningful expressions of love for a child require parents to be silent and still, watchful, hopeful, but steadfast and smiling on the sidelines.

Six: assign chores

A child first acquires confidence and a sense of competence by contributing to the daily life of the family. Children who first experience work in their home understand that work and love flow simultaneously in happy families.

A 3-year-old can fold napkins; a 5-year-old can empty the dishwasher; an 8-year-old can wash the car. Chores and responsibilities should change as children age, increasing as the child grows in strength, knowledge and confidence.

Seven: maintain authority

Many years ago, I worked with a wise mother who had a precociously intelligent daughter—the only child in a loving marriage. Among many fine qualities, the mother was honest, open and absolutely committed to raising a daughter who would grow to be as strong as she was smart. At a parent teacher conference, she told me her daughter didn't like being told what to do. Faced with a direct instruction, she often told her mom, "I don't like you anymore. You're not my friend." Exaggerating her genteel Southern accent, this mother had a perfect, fixed response: "Darling, I didn't give birth to you because I needed a friend."

Healthy children challenge authority and test boundaries, arbitrarily and repeatedly. Most parents know this, yet feel surprised or even shocked when children continue to challenge or test them. Love, for a child, must include repeated expressions of parental strength and dominance—calm reminders that families are *not* democracies. Children grow up feeling safe, loved and secure when they know their parents are in charge, looking out for the best interests of the children and the family.

I wonder what's going on in the garden...

By Dana Spottswood, Gardening Guide

Have you ever spent time in a garden...just wondering?

When I look back on the writings of the great ecological hero *Rachel Carson*, I am reminded of how the love of gardening, like wonder itself, gets handed down from generation to generation.

In her masterpiece, *The Sense of Wonder*, Carson wished each child the gift of “*a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things that are artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength.*”

Nurturing wonder in our gardens

Nurturing wonder while nurturing our gardens has, indeed, been a source of strength for all of us. Where have we witnessed wonder these past few months? In the tasting of freshly made pesto, the washing of tiny tomatoes, the kneading of bread dough, frolicking with fallen leaves, discovering roots and shoots, raking mulch, pulling radishes, holding jumping baby worms in the palms of our hands, in the perfectly crafted beauty of dead butterfly wings, the dance of a praying mantis, and the fresh earthy smell of compost.

As Maria Montessori knew so well, these sensorial experiences of wonder lead to meaningful learning; and our lessons this past year have followed a few interwoven themes:

We began by discussing herbs and their uses (food-based, medicinal, and aromatic), and it soon became clear that our Parish Hall kitchen would serve as a classroom just as much as our garden beds. Indeed, our eager young chefs plan to compile a recipe book to highlight some of their concoctions! **(Look for sale copies at our *Italian Supper Feast* on Feb. 28).**

Another theme we've explored is “habitat,” as it applies to all living beings (plants included), with a specific focus on the life cycle of beneficial insects. After the New Year's arrival, we began a study of cereal grasses (better known as grains). A wheat growing experiment is now underway, and those passing by the kitchen late on Wednesday afternoons may have detected the aromas of freshly made bread,



Lower Elementary Student Ava Carr holds a bunch of radishes.

Indian pudding, granola bars, or *alegrias*—a popped-amaranth treat popular in Mexico. (And more aromas are yet to come!)

Elementary families have probably noticed the lush, colorful *Swiss chard* plants in one of our raised garden beds. Near the end of the year, we hope to compile a separate recipe collection of “Favorite Ways to Prepare Chard,” (If you have a favorite chard recipe to share, email it to dmspottswood@gmail.com. Also, feel free to pick a few chard leaves on your way in and out of the campus. We have plenty to share).

New herb garden

In front of the modular primary building, you may have noticed a new herb garden springing up around an old tree stump. The spiral design is derived from permaculture, which aims for permanent, sustainable home-scaled forms of agriculture that stack functions and make the most use out of tight spaces. In this case, shallow rooted herbs grow in the bottom layer while deeper, moisture-loving ones grow closer to the center.

Lastly, please know how fortunate we are to have the guidance of horticultural intern and youth garden enthusiast *Stephanie Patillo*. Stephanie is completing her degree at Palo Alto College and volunteers each Wednesday to assist in all aspects of the program, whether thinning seedlings, measuring ingredients, or conversing about connections between re-using everyday objects and bird migration. Thank you, Ms. Stephanie!

Italian Supper Feast



The Spaghetti Dinner is back...with

a new look and name! Join us at the **Italian Supper Feast** on Saturday, Feb. 28, from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. in the Parish Hall.

Proceeds will go towards the purchase of playground and gardening materials for the campus.

Tickets can be purchased before and after church services, or at the SPEMS front desk.

Science Fair:

'THE BIG THINK'

In conjunction with the Southwestern Association of Episcopal Schools (SAES), SPEMS will host a 'The Big Think' science fair in February.

Kindergarten and elementary students are invited to submit projects for display by **February 27**. A panel of scientific experts will review each project and provide feedback.

Students in 4th, 5th and 6th grades may also present their project at the SAES *Regional Science Fair* on March 20 at Good Shepherd Episcopal School in Dallas, TX.

Parents bring your friends and family to see the projects!



Parent Lesson Night Thursday, Feb. 19th, 6:00 – 7:30 p.m.

Don't miss this opportunity to see what your primary or elementary child is doing in the classroom. You will be able to participate in Montessori lessons as your child demonstrates some of the material he or she has worked with this year. **Please plan to attend with your child on this evening.**

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Wells of Love

Again, start gathering up your spare change for our **Wells of Love** fundraiser to help build a new water well for people in Africa's Azawak Valley.

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



St. Cecilia's Choir to perform at St. Mark's

Come see our St. Cecilia's Children's Choir perform at St. Mark's **Shrove Tuesday Pancake Supper & 11th Annual Talent Show** on Tues., Feb. 17. Dinner will be served at 5:30 p.m. in Gosnell Hall. Admission is \$5 for adults and \$3 for children.

*Registration for 2015/2016 school year begins this month

Enrollment of *current students* for 2015/2016 school year will take place through Feb. 28. Siblings of current students can also be enrolled during February. *Note: After Feb. 28, 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.



'Throw-a-Party' Fundraiser...**Help support St. Paul's Episcopal Montessori School while sharing your passions...**

The idea is simple: Host some kind of party or event at your home or at a local venue. Charge folks an appropriate fee to attend your party or event. Then donate the proceeds to help support the expansion of St. Paul's Episcopal Montessori School (and claim a tax deduction).

Yes, it might be a bit more work than baking cookies for a bake sale, or writing a check to purchase expensive candy bars or wrapping paper, but it's so much more rewarding. Not only do you get to share your knowledge and passions, you also get to know fellow parents and SPEMS community members!

For help planning your event—please contact Christina Tinker at christina@eat2livedaily.org.

Spring Carnival on Friday, March 27

Celebrate SPEMS 10th anniversary at our Spring Carnival, on Friday, March 27, at 3:30p.m. Join us for food, games, music and fun for the whole family!

Already on the calendar...

Introduction to Yoga for Adults, \$25 – Saturday, Feb. 7, 6-7:30 p.m. at Southtown Yoga Loft. Drink wine, relax with some yoga while supporting our school. RSVP by emailing rachel.olsson@gmail.com.

Other parent and family happenings...

Coffee, tacos and conversation—First Friday of every month in the Parish Hall 8:15 a.m. onwards. Get to know other parents and share news about the school.

San Antonio Botanical Gardens—First Friday of each month. Meet at the main fountain for snack before at 3:30 p.m. before exploring and playing in different areas of the Gardens. Contact Dana Spottswood 210-716-7934.

Thinking of Summer?

St. Paul's will again offer summer school for all ages from **July 6-31**. More information to follow.

Other options:

The Southwest School of Art Summer Art studio offers 1-2 week classes for students ages 5-11. Scholarships are available at www.swschool.org

The Episcopal Diocese of West Texas **Camp Capers** offers week long camps for students 3rd grade and up. Scholarships are available at www.dwtx.org/camps

