



# Nursery School News

THE NEWSLETTER OF ST. PAUL'S EPISCOPAL NURSERY SCHOOL

## Director's Dialogue

### Our Role During the Holiday

#### CALENDAR

##### December/January

##### **Friday, December 18**

Last Day of School,  
Christmas Vacation

##### **Monday, January 4**

First Day back to school

##### **Monday, January 18 –**

##### **Friday, January 22**

Registration week for  
currently enrolled children  
and siblings of currently  
enrolled children

##### **Monday, January 25**

Earliest deadline for new  
student registration

##### FEBRUARY

##### **Thursday, February 11 –**

##### **Monday, February 15**

No School  
Teacher In-Service  
Mid-Winter Break

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Christmas is upon us once again and I have to admit that as I pulled into the parking lot to run an errand at South Hills Village last Saturday I did feel a certain sense of panic as I gazed at the sea of cars. It made me wonder more than ever what our role as parents and teachers is in terms of our children during the Christmas season. Obviously it is a time when we all tend to be stressed to the max in many different ways. Our culture has commercialized this religious season beyond belief, and I am as guilty as the next person of being seduced into the excesses of it all – spending too much money on unneeded things, eating and drinking too much, doing too much and on and on.

But back to my original thought about what our role is in terms of our children during the Christmas season. Two lessons that I have learned from children over the past many years of working with them that apply to the holiday season are that ***less is best*** and that a goal of ***perfection about things in life is counterproductive***.

A rule of thumb during Christmas seems to be that more is better. Children easily become over whelmed and over stimulated if their environment is cluttered with too many things and too much activity. If you really take the time to observe children you will realize that they have an amazing capacity to genuinely enjoy, explore, and reflect upon things that may seem quite simple and perhaps unimportant to us in our fast moving, hurried and complex adult lives. We can truly take a lesson from our children where this is concerned. Rather than frantically adding more and new activities to our lives in an effort to make this, “the best Christmas ever,” perhaps we should allow ourselves and our children the luxury of enjoying and rediscovering simple family traditions which are familiar and enjoyable to us all.

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## Director's Dialogue cont.

The other lesson I have learned from children is that plans for perfection are a sure way to experience feelings of inadequacy and disappointment or even failure. Adults in our culture typically focus only on end results. We look at end products all too often and simply disregard the process of so many things and their meaning in our lives. How often are we bombarded over the Christmas season with articles in magazines and the media about "perfect Christmas decorations, perfect entertaining, or cooking the perfect Christmas dinner?" Anyone who has spent time working with children knows that they are much more interested in processes than "perfect" end products. In fact, children often change course in midstream when they are involved and enjoying an activity, which may lead to an end product that in no way resembles their initial goal or idea. Rather than obsessing and worrying about how something will turn out, they just enjoy being in the moment with a pleasurable activity.

So perhaps we should take a lesson from our children and simply hope for a "good enough" Christmas; one where we allow ourselves and our children the spontaneity and time to actually enjoy one another. If we protect our children from what may become our own inappropriate expectations which result from all sorts of preconceived ideas about what a "perfect" Christmas must be, as well as the excesses which the commercialism of this season may pressure us into, we will do ourselves and our children a great favor. Perhaps this is our best role in terms of our children during this Christmas season.

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## St. Paul's Episcopal Nursery School Outreach Project

You all received a flyer earlier this month explaining our 2009 Christmas outreach projects. There are two to choose from this year. I hope each of you will explain what the cans of food are for or the school supplies.

I believe that it is important for children to understand that there are people, and particularly children in our world who need our help, and that we care enough to make an effort to share some of our resources when we all have so much. It also helps them get out of the mind-set that Christmas is only about what we get – rather than what we give. So please take a few minutes to explain to your child why you are putting canned goods or school supplies under our tree.

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***There are people, and particularly children in our world who need our help.***

## Santa Breakfast

As I write this the Santa Breakfast is only days away. By the time this newsletter is printed it will have come and gone. In the mean time I would like to thank Suzanne Hetz for chairing the event and all of you who helped. It is a fun morning for all, and particularly for the children. Our own Margaret Hooton sings Christmas and Hanukkah songs, the puppets will be there and Santa himself - of course.

Thanks to everyone for making the event so much fun!

## Registration for the 2010-2011 School

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Registration for currently enrolled children and their siblings will be the week of **January 18 – 22, 2010**. Forms will be placed in everyone's mailbox prior to January 18<sup>th</sup>. Forms can be handed in or mailed in any time during that week in order to maintain your priority during that time period.

The deadline for the earliest date that all other priorities may be mailed in or handed in will be **Monday, January, 25, 2010**.

### Typical progression for students will be as follows:

Children enrolled in AM sessions will remain in the morning.

Children enrolled in PM sessions will remain in the afternoon.

Children will have the choice of remaining at the same days per week or adding 1 day per week – e.g. Tuesday/Thursday children may remain in 2 day per week classes or move up to 3 days per week (MWF classes). 3 days per week children may remain in 3-day classes or move up to 4-day per week classes.

If a parent desires to switch their child from morning to afternoon or vice versa they may request to do so, and if space is available we will grant the request. If a child desires to move from a 2 day per week class to a 4-day per week, or a 1-day per week class to a 3 day per week class, if space is available we will grant that request.

All currently enrolled children are guaranteed space following the typical progression. Other requests will be granted only if space permits.

## Fall Fundraiser

This year's Fall Fundraiser was an Oktoberfest – a new and different theme from years past. Everyone had a grand time and we made some money that will be put back into our nursery school operating program for the children.

Many thanks go to Melissa Stalder for chairing the event. Also, thanks go to Lisa Brown for chairing all of the communications, and Kari King for chairing the auction. Deb Wiles did an amazing job of chairing the food and Mel Woods was in charge of all of the fantastic Oktoberfest decorations. Melissa Bailey and Aimee Lamendola organized and put together all of the beautiful raffle baskets. Also thanks to Beth Bosco for organizing parent volunteers.

There are so many other people to thank, everyone who worked on a committee as well as each and every one of you who supported the school by attending the event, donated an auction item, or even just purchased a raffle ticket! Finally, a special thanks go to *The Elliots*, the amazing band who performed all evening – and they promised to come back next year!

It is important to remember that the primary reason that we have the fundraiser each year is for your children. All of the money that we raise goes back into the school in order to continue to offer the best possible early childhood program for all of your children.



## The Alliance for Childhood: The Essentials of Healthy Childhood

The Alliance for Childhood, a wonderful and well respected organization that promotes cutting edge early childhood research and addresses the importance of understanding child development, lists the following as essential of a healthy and happy childhood. It is easy to forget the *basic essentials* necessary for a good childhood in our busy and adult oriented world. Sometimes in our overly hurried, anxious and competitive culture we give our children so much “enrichment” that we leave out the basic essentials – the things that really matter most for a happy and productive childhood. And if we leave out the essentials, no matter how much “enrichment” and material things we give to our children, we will miss the mark as good parents. I thought these essentials were well worth reprinting here for you all.

- **Close loving relationships with responsive adults, at home and at school.** Human warmth and care is at the heart of nurturing children from infancy on up. It is easy to see this in the case of infants and young children. But a growing body of research indicates that adolescents are more likely to thrive in schools small enough for them to be known by name.
- **Direct knowledge of the living world of nature.** For the very young child, this means plenty of time to explore the minute miracles of the backyard or park. Elementary students can enjoy class hikes and camping with families or scouts. Adolescents, with a bit of help from adults, can thrive on extended wilderness experiences.
- **Time every day for child-initiated play.** Play evolves throughout life, beginning with infants and toddlers who play physically with fingers and toes and the objects around them. Make-believe play starts at age two or three when children begin to try on all the aspects of life, getting to know themselves and the world around them. In grade school, imaginative play advances to acting out original dramas and building forts and clubhouses. At this age, play also matures into rule-based games. In middle and high school, the imaginative spirit of play can grow into more mature forms of intellectual and artistic creativity.
- **Music, drama, puppetry, dance, painting, and the other arts.** These should be offered as cultural experiences and also as classes in our schools throughout childhood. They should be blended into academic subjects as a kind of yeast to the child’s growing imagination. A well-developed imagination enhances all forms of thinking, from philosophy and history to science and mathematics.
- **Hands-on lessons, handcrafts, and other physically engaging activities. Such activities literally embody the most effective first lessons for young children** in the sciences, mathematics, and technology. What is learned through the hands stimulates a large part of the brain and enters deeply into the life of the child.
- **Rich face to face language experiences, including conversation, poetry, storytelling, and books.** Reading books aloud with favorite adults is especially crucial for young children but is enjoyable at all ages. And the living relationship between the teller and the hearer of stories makes oral storytelling a compelling experience for adolescents and adults as well as children.
- **Time and space for children to reflect, create meaning, and experience a sense of the sacred.** Children have an innate sense of wonder and reverence for beauty and goodness. They experience gratitude for the sun, moon, and stars, for earth, water, fresh air, and the universe of living things. They hunger for beauty in color and form, both natural and fashioned by human hands, and this too nourishes a sense of the sacred.
- **Childhood is a time for learning about the essentials.** Childhood is about learning to express fear and to learn trust, to be serious, to be calm, and to celebrate with laughter and joy.
- **Children have the right to dream and grow at their own pace.** Children need people to respect, adults whose example and loving authority they follow. They need a range of experiences – tenderness and kindness, boldness and courage, *even mischief and misbehavior*. Children need to be introduced to a life of principles, and *given the freedom to discover their own*.
- **Children need time for reflection and space for curiosity.** Children need protective boundaries and freedom to create, and time to play, to work, to rest. The spirit of childhood calls for protection and nurture. *It is an essential part of every human being and needs to be kept alive.*

## NAEYC Conference – Washington, D.C.

Last month Marianne DeVito, Margaret Hooton, and I attended the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) Conference in Washington DC. It was an excellent conference and we all came back with new ideas and information to share with the entire staff.

Margaret was actually a presenter and I attended her workshop. She did an outstanding job, and as a result I am sure will be asked back to present next year. Your children are all so fortunate to have someone with her enthusiasm, knowledge, and skills to teach them music. Music is a wonderful, natural, and fun way for children to learn many early childhood skills.

I attended lots of excellent workshops and as a result of one entitled When Learning Comes Naturally: Nurturing Children's Connection to the Environment, I have ordered 3 DVD's that were produced by Sarah Lawrence College Child Development Department and the City College of New York in conjunction with Public Television. The films are about the importance of play for learning and children's connection to the environment, two concepts that are integrally related. Mel Woods and I are planning to organize a series of 3 parent education programs after the first of the year using these videos as teaching tools. I will be getting more information out to you all after the first of the year about these parent education opportunities.

It was gratifying to me that the overall trend in early childhood education is heavily moving back in the direction of play, now that the effects of NCLB have been clearly shown to be not only unsuccessful in improving early learning, but actually harmful. We have seen the counter productivity and waste of time that early and excessive testing and push down academics have on young children.

There was also a lot of emphasis on the role of self regulation – how it is learned through creative play – and how essential self regulation skills are for later learning. There is excellent new research out that is currently impacting early childhood education curriculum in a very positive way.

Finally I attended a keynote address given by Marion Wright Edelman – one of my all time favorite role models. She spoke about where we are headed in the future as a society. She emphasized how important it is that we not lose the victories and momentum that were gained in the past generation, particularly the gains made through the civil rights movement. She spoke of the importance of quality health care and education for all children and particularly those who are the most disadvantaged and at risk, and not leaving *any* child behind.

All in all it was an outstanding conference, and staying up to date with the latest information and knowledge about early childhood education and child development are important tasks for the staff and me in order to provide the best possible learning environment for your children.

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