

I was excited about seeing the royal wedding this past week. It must be

something about being female and a romantic, but I love weddings, and of course, I wanted to see the dress, the church, the wedding party, the handsome groom and all of the other ingredients that make the wedding a beautiful symbol of an important commitment between a man and a woman. I set the DVR for recording the event, but at 3:00 am I woke up and found myself turning on the television just in time to see the exchange of vows between Kate Middleton and her prince.

I chuckled to myself as I thought of all of my princesses and knights (the boys prefer knight to prince) that would be waiting for school to begin again this May. Any of you that have had a chance to peer into the classroom any morning or afternoon see all of the girls vying for “*the dress*” and the boys acting out their roles as heroes, battling the invisible evils that they instinctively sense must be vanquished. Dramatic play is a natural and important part of the preschool child’s development as they submerge themselves in the

archetypal roles that are the soul of who we yearn and strive to be. Our mothers and fathers are at the heart of our journey – our heroes, our mentors, our kings and queens if you may. It is fitting that as we end our year it is always with honoring our mothers and fathers with our special celebrations of the Mother’s Day Tea and Dad’s Pizza Night.

Running up so close to the year’s end has left me with three aspects of the Ten **Spits, Spats & Spurts** for Growing Preschool Success still left for discussion: cultivating wonder, avoiding stress and promoting hands-on learning. As I gathered my thoughts for the newsletter, I was pleased to discover that the three compliment the basic premise that children need play to learn. Play is the newest four letter word, and I am more and more reticent to discuss its importance without fears of relegating preschool learning to the unserious and irrelevant. Children remain unchanged, so let me make the case.

Every year almost on cue when spring arrives, the children turn over their attention to nature, literally turn over. Everywhere you see the children with cups

and spoons turning over the soil for roly polys. My favorite comment comes from an exasperated grandfather picking up his grandson with a cup of bugs ready for home. “Mom said no more bugs,” he pleaded, but the child is just doing what comes naturally.

Throughout the year we see children instinctively responding to stimulus that come to them as if from thin air. It is a natural drive to uncover, discover and understand the world around them. I call it wonder. Given time, space and materials, a child propels himself ever closer to knowledge that brings meaningful learning.

Something threatens this natural inclination today, the modern phenomena of “canned knowledge”. It comes in many forms, such as various electronics and the push to be literate before the brain is ready to take on those tasks. Premature or overuse of electronics makes the mind lazy; premature or over-preparation with rote knowledge makes the mind crazy and suppresses the important developmental stages that prepare the mind for the challenges of the scholastic learner.

In his most recent work, *The Unschooled Mind*, Howard Gardner calls the early learning of children up to age seven as the “intuitive learner”. This is a universal period that has specific neurobiological and developmental constraints but is unique to each child. Just as there is a wide range of normal for the infant who learns to crawl and walk, the readiness of a child to assume the demands of rote, ritualized and conventional understanding varies greatly during these early years.

Parents used to see the process as natural and normal and simply provided the appropriate stimulus. When you consider the amount of learning that has taken place with each child prior to formal education, we should all take pause in appreciation and amazement. Without instruction, children have mastered a language (in some cases two) and already have an understanding of the magic of words and numbers. Through everyday discourse and reading to your children, you have given them the foundation, providing the tools they need for learning.

What appears as merely play is actually the blossoming of a special time in early childhood where children transform

experience into symbols. Blocks become an opportunity to develop engineering skills; dramatic play becomes a time where imagination flourishes and lays the groundwork for relating to others and a glimpse into a future of working with others and the abstract thinking needed to create and understand; art becomes an extension of expression and imagination as children master the tools and skills they need for written communication and understanding. Wonder is at the heart.

In the middle of what often looks like chaos in the classroom, real learning is taking place on so many levels. It is one of the most stress free environments for children where their ideas and experiences are honored. Problems occur, but they are faced head on while the problems are still small. We help children recognize that problems are just an extension of life, a time for growing and understanding. One of the best aspects of childhood is that children never bear grudges. They are forgiving and loving. This is something to be celebrated and encouraged. Their unique view of life is always something for adults to glean, helping us to understand that life is about

relationships, work and duty with hurdles that we overcome with joy and acceptance.

Finally, imagination, growth and learning are cultivated in the young child through hands-on experiences. If it is not in the hand, it will not be in the brain.

Gardner tells us:

By the age of five or six, children have developed robust senses of three overlapping realms. In the world of physical objects, they have developed a theory of matter; in the world of living organisms, they have developed a theory of life; and in the world of human beings, they developed a theory of the mind that incorporates a theory of the self.

Gardner goes on to say that these overlapping realms of knowledge arrive whether schooled or unschooled by daily exposure to the family and culture, but children everywhere will become more skilled in those pursuits that engage their interests, efforts and are valued by adults and peers. The affirmation that children receive in an environment that encourages exploration of skills, talents, interests and materials allows each child to grow in self-confidence and knowledge.

Another reason I enjoyed the royal wedding is simple. It was an affirmation of the commitment of a man and woman to one another under the sacrament of the church. The Archbishop of Canterbury prayed that the couple be blessed with children. We must assure that children's best interests and wellbeing remain at the center of our concerns. It is why the staff and I feel so blessed to be a small part of this role.

Life moves along, and we are often bogged down by a troubled world. A sense that the heritage of faith, commitment and a future remains with us is a welcoming gift and buoys us. This month my husband and I will be attending the wedding of our nephew William, and I will experience the same excitement, enthusiasm and hope for the "other Will".

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CLASSROOM CORNERS

Springtime always brings a flurry of activity as we begin to wrap up the year.

This year presented unique challenges because Easter was so late in its arrival. It meant that as we prepared for Easter with our Lenten resolutions, we also began preparations for the upcoming Mother's Day Tea, and even the Marian Celebration, with special tasks to make mom feel as special as the children see her. It became quite a balancing act for all of us. I attended an Easter mass that **Fr. Chris Heath** celebrated, and he reminded us that Easter is just the beginning of the time that we can continue to make the changes in our lives that will ultimately bring us the peace and serenity we all hope for; therefore, this is the time to live out the hope of our Lenten resolve. With that in mind, staff, children and parents will endeavor to make this a fruitful and meaningful last few weeks of school with all we hope to accomplish.

Looking back at April much was accomplished, but I think the staff would agree that our preparation with the children for Easter was the very best yet. The Agape celebration was a wonderful experience for all of us as we recounted the events of Holy Week and finished with a re-enactment of the Last Supper,



Rayden, Vincent and Loren (T-Th Teddy Bears) lead their class during the Agape Celebration.

including the washing of the feet. The children were open, reverent and involved, and we were blessed to be a part of the process. We have much to be thankful for, including **Susan Matthews**, who has been our trainer for Catechesis of the Good Shepherd these past two years. The staff and I will complete two years of training in this exceptional faith program for children in June of this year. I hope you have heard, witnessed and felt the power of this religious education approach in the lives of your children and yourself. I



All dressed up for the Spring Parade, **Katz (T-Th Teddy Bears)** is all smiles.

hope you will take the time to thank the staff for the efforts in this regard. If you are interested, the office has information about training for others this summer.

The bunny with a message made an appearance as well. The children have heard rumors about the real identification of this big rodent. I would question the veracity of any such gossip. The bunny's highlight was a tender kiss from **Kevin Redderson** in the Afternoon Lion's class. It was better than a sack of carrots. We were all joyful as we told all that we met:

Jesus came because God loves us. We shouted and shouted the Good News!

I want to thank **Michelle Slattery** and **Deanna Ceriani** for helping us make the eggs a gold mine for children. Speaking of gold mines, I was remiss in thanking **Venee Tysler** last month for helping the preschool replenish the gold for the leprechaun raid. And of course, there are all the moms and dads who helped make our trip to the Santa Ana Zoo possible as we got to see first hand the family of Romeo and Juliet, the Capuchin monkeys, and the giant anteater. Many of our families have been amazed at the retention of children in talking about the Capuchin monkeys. It's all in the presentation. Give them a little rope and they'll swing like monkeys. God bless all of you for your help and love. May the joy of Easter season continue throughout the year.



**THROUGH THE
GRAPEVINE**

Here are the uncensored offerings for May. When asked how her weekend with the guinea pig Elvis was, **Scarlet Dutton** shared, "I think my dog made him nervous." At the Agape celebration the children were asked if they would share in the grape juice. "I want some beer," stated **Daryk Brunsting**. After the Spring Parade, **Cooper Murphy** wanted to know if we already had the parade. When told yes, she exclaimed, "All we did was walk." While the children participated in the washing of the feet, **Kate Ekizian** shared, "My grandma washes my feet; my mom washes my feet; my dad washes my feet; my brother washes my feet; my cousin washes my feet."



The T-Th **Dinosaurs** wash one another's feet during the Agape Celebration.



MOTHER'S DAY TEA

In honor of our wonderful moms, the preschool staff and children will be hosting a Mother's Day Tea on Thursday, May 5 and Friday, May 6 at 10:45 am in Knight Hall. The Afternoon Dinosaurs will attend on Thursday, and the Afternoon Lions will attend on Friday. Although the tea is held in Knight Hall, all mothers should arrive at the classroom at 10:30 am to be escorted by their children. Mothers and children of the afternoon classes should arrive at the classroom at 10:30 as well. Afternoon Dinosaurs will have class following the tea, so please send your child with a lunch (if they are still hungry after our array of goodies). This will be a free dress day.

Morning classes should bring a piece of fruit on the day of the tea for a special surprise. Afternoon classes should bring their fruit on Wednesday for preparation.

This is a very special time for mom and the preschool child. If you will be unable to attend, we encourage you to invite a

grandmother, sister or special friend. Please let the teacher know. We look forward to a day of fun.



FIESTA WITH FRIENDS

Please join the parish community for the annual Fiesta with Friends Friday, May 20 through Sunday, May 22. It will be a weekend of good food, music, rides and camaraderie.

T-shirts are available for sale in the school office. The week May 16 will be Fiesta T-shirt week. The children may wear the t-shirt every day to school.



MARIAN CELEBRATION

We will be honoring another mother in the month of May, Mary the Mother of our Lord. On Tuesday, May 24 at 9:00 am and Wednesday, May 25 at 9:00 am and 1:00 pm, the children will process to the grotto on the bluff to present a bouquet of flowers. Each child should

arrive at school that day with one flower. This will be followed by a dance around the maypole and games in the courtyard. This is a free dress day.



VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT

Each of you made a commitment at the beginning of the year to a volunteer commitment of no less than 2 hours for the Family Photo Fundraiser, the Golf Tournament, Room Mom or Book Coordinator. I appreciate the outpouring of help in making our preschool successful. Those who have not volunteered in some capacity will be charged \$75 that will be on a June statement. In some cases, you may have given a raffle item and / or purchased a minimum of Ball Drop tickets for the golf tournament. If this is the case and you are charged, please notify the office and the charge will be deleted.



PHOTO FUNDRAISER

I am pleased to announce that **Nicole Soltis** has taken on the responsibility for the Precious Moments Photo Fundraiser for 2011-12. If you are returning next fall and would like to help with this important fundraiser, please contact the office.



DAD'S PIZZA NIGHT

Dad's Pizza Night will be held on Wednesday, June 1 at 6:30 pm in Knight Hall. Decidedly a different flavor than the Mother's Day Tea, we will need the help of moms to make this work. I will need four captains: Decoration; Set-up; Serving; and Clean-up. I have selected a fun theme for the event, but of course, we need help to execute it. If you can help, please contact the office as soon as possible.



FACEBOOK

Stacie Pugliese and Sarah Foote are trying desperately to update me and

in turn the preschool. Stacie reminds me to let you know that we are now on Facebook and will update accordingly.



DATES TO REMEMBER

Please make note of the following dates for the May calendar:

1. School resumes on May 2 from our spring break.
2. The Mother's Day Tea will be held on Thursday, May 5 and Friday, May 6 at 10:45 in Knight Hall. Afternoon Dinosaurs will attend on Thursday, and Afternoon Lions on Friday. This is a free dress day.
3. The PREP Meeting will be held on Wednesday, May 11 at 1:00 pm in the church meeting room.
4. Fiesta T-shirt week be the week of May 16.

5. Fiesta with Friends will take place on Friday, May 20 through Sunday, May 21.
6. The half day scheduled on Friday, May 20 and the day off on Monday, May 22 has changed. School will be in session as usual.
7. The Marian Celebration will take place on Tuesday, May 24 at 9:00 am and Wednesday, May 25 at 9:00 am and 1:00 pm. This is a free dress day.
8. There will be no school on Monday, May 30 because of Memorial Day.



T-Th Teddy Bear monkeys look for other monkeys.