



Parent Pages

Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church*

* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

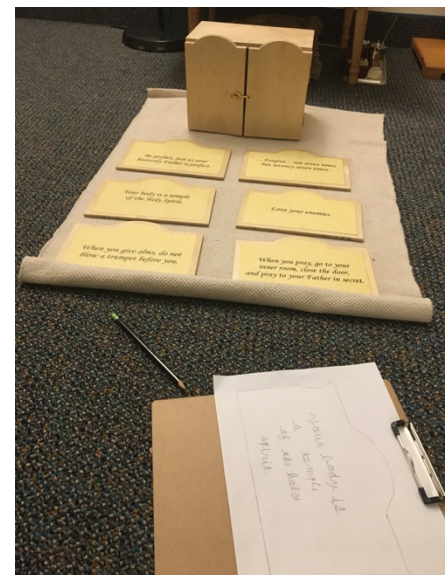
The Parable of the Good Shepherd

Of the many images or names for Jesus, the young child has shown us, again and again, that it is the Parable of the Good Shepherd which best captures what it means to be in relationship. The Good Shepherd "calls his sheep by name" and, recognizing his voice, "the sheep follow him." This beautiful parable, found in John 10, resonates deeply in the child who is asking, as do we all, "Who are you, Lord?" For years we enjoy with them the great gift of each sheep being called by name and we ponder how the Shepherd is so very good, returning again and again to the great love of the Shepherd for each sheep of His flock and the reciprocal love of each sheep for this Shepherd who gives all of himself to the sheep. This parable is the central presentation in the Level I, 3-6 year old, Atrium and is returned to and expanded upon through the three years the child remains in this space.

As the child moves into the Level II or 6-9 year old Atrium, he enters, according to Maria Montessori, into a new developmental plane. In many ways, he is a new child! He is more aware of the social world around him, including his peers, and has a new focus on morality as he begins to look at the world in terms of "fair or unfair," "right or wrong." This new child, hearing once more the beloved Parable of the Good Shepherd, begins to ask questions that fit his new plane of development: "How do we follow the Good Shepherd?" "What does it mean to follow Him?" "How do I know that I am following the Good Shepherd?"

The Maxims

It brings great comfort to the children, then, when we bring out a new material in Level II which helps provide "guides" to following the Good Shepherd and to remaining on the True Vine. The Maxims are a collection of short sayings of Jesus which help us to follow, to remain, and to live well. Most come from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters 5-7. They include: "Love your enemies," "Do to others as you would have them do to you," and "I did not say forgive seven times seven but seventy times seven times." There are twelve Level II Maxims with an additional five in Level III. The children enjoy discussing them, looking them up, copying and illustrating them and memorizing them, sometimes with their citations.



The child's response to the Maxims

Whenever the Maxims enter into discussion in the Atrium, which is almost every week, the conversation often turns to what our Atrium or our family or our classroom or our world would be like if we all just lived one of the Maxims. The first response is almost always, "Parousia!" and "the best place to live" often follows.



Recently a 9-year-old, encountering the Maxims for the first time, read, "Be perfect just as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:48). She said...

- "That means knowing that God created you special and just like He wanted, and you need to be that person."

Level III children between the ages of 9 and 12 who had pondered Maxims for many years were asked how they would explain what Maxims were. They replied...

- "Maxims aren't rules but they are something you can grow in."

- "They are like a quote from God."

- "Maxims are something God instructs you to do. They are not rules but more like priorities."

- "They are things that can make your life easier and are advice to help you get to heaven."

- "A maxim is like the word 'maximum' which means 'the

most' because they help you to be the best you can be."

The Maxims in the Home

Knowing Maxims becomes a source of joy for the 6-12 year old child. If you have a Level II or Level III child you might ask him if he knows any Maxims. Ponder with him what life would be like if everyone lived just that one Maxim. After listening to the Gospel reading on Sunday you could ask if that Scripture passage reminded your child of any Maxims. Reflecting on a day's events and choices in light of a Maxim can provide a gentle and beautiful examination of conscience. How have I lived, "Let your 'yes' mean 'yes,' and your 'no' mean 'no'" today? We can look up a Maxim in Scripture and consider the context in which it was given. What was Jesus speaking about when He said, "When you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret?"

