

Immaculata Catholic Montessori: *not just another Montessori option*

The Cathedral parish of St. John the Evangelist is preparing to open the diocese's first-ever Catholic Montessori. This early childhood program, set to open in September of 2020 at 815 North Hays, will be called Immaculata Catholic Montessori.

While most people are familiar with Dr. Maria Montessori and her lasting contributions to our understanding of early childhood development, few are aware of her deep Catholic roots and how her truly Catholic sensibility is at the heart of the Montessori experience.

Among Dr. Montessori's many admirers were Pope St. Pius X, Pope St. John XXIII and Pope St. Paul VI who noted about her message and method, "Teaching is no longer a matter of purely and simply transmitting conceptual data; rather it is an initiation to life, through the means of living example." This initiation into life, grounded in an authentically Catholic tradition has unfortunately been lost or forgotten within our own Catholic culture. For over a century, thousands around the world have benefited greatly from the insights of Maria Montessori's work and method. Now, we too here in the diocese of Boise at Immaculata Catholic Montessori have the unique opportunity to reap the fruits of the *Dotoressa's* (as she was called) profound insights in accord with their original religious intent. Immaculata, along with the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd that is already in place in our parish, will serve to fulfill within the Montessori approach Catholicism's proper place and scope in the early years of childhood formation—namely the 3-6 year old child. Montessori wrote, "True respect for the child recognizes an ideal which God wishes to make actual in him."

Anita Wolberd: As with all new endeavors, there also comes a story, and how Immaculata Catholic Montessori has come into existence is no exception. Local Boise resident, and the St. John's parishioner, Anita Wolberd, has been a Montessorian for over three decades. Wolberd is a master Montessori teacher and trainer who obtained her certification from Dr. Elisabeth Caspari who herself was taught by Dr. Montessori. Most recently, Anita Wolberd felt a call to help set up a Catholic Montessori program. Through God's benevolent grace, one conversation after another resulted in a connection with St. John's Director of Religious Education, Teresa Wittry, who through her own training in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, a Montessori-based faith formation program, initiated a personal study and investigation into Dr. Montessori's writings. This undertaking culminated in an enthusiasm and deep appreciation for this particular approach to early childhood education that places at the center of its pedagogy God and the child. After a tour of Anita's school, Teresa and Anita began intensively praying and actively searching to find a suitable location to make Catholic Montessori a reality for the Cathedral parish.

Immaculata Catholic Montessori: After continued prayer, reflection, and problem solving about space issues under the guidance of Cathedral Administrator, Deacon Daniel Gamboa, along with the ongoing support of both Bishop Peter Christensen and Fr. Mariusz, we are happy to announce that Immaculata Catholic Montessori will provide the standard for any future Catholic Montessori programs in the diocese. Preparations are also underway to offer accredited Montessori teacher certification in connection with Immaculata Catholic Montessori.

"It is possible to see a clear analogy between the mission of the Shepherd in the Church and that of the prudent and generous educator in the Montessori method, who with tenderness, with love and with a wise evaluation of gifts, knows how to discover and bring to light the most hidden virtues and capacities of the child."

-Pope St. John XXIII from *The Vita Dell' Infanzia*

For more information on Immaculata Catholic Montessori, please contact Teresa Wittry in the parish office at 208-342-3511 or teresaw@boisecathedral.org