

# Early Childhood News & Notes



Office of Catholic Education

Fall & Winter, 2011-2012

## Winter Solstice ~ Advent ~ Christmas ~ New Year's

The mid December solstice (December 22) marks the beginning of winter in the Northern Hemisphere and summer in the Southern Hemisphere. In the Northern Hemisphere, the gloomy winter solstice has been responsible for many symbols, ancient myths and religious beliefs over millennia.

In ancient Rome, the winter solstice was celebrated at the feast of *Saturnalia*, while in pre-Christian Britain, the end of December centered around the pagan *Yule log* in a fiery display to melt the heart of a cold and dreary winter.

In the midst of celebrating the winter solstice we celebrate the beautiful season of **Advent**. Each year, the Church gives us these days of waiting and watching so that we can prepare our hearts for Christ. Yes, we are busy with shopping for gifts, decorating our homes, and planning for our family gatherings. Yet, in the midst of all of this, the rituals and practices of the Catholic liturgies during this Advent season remind us that we need to spend time in thoughtful reflection in order to be ready for the coming of Christ on Christmas.

On **December 6th** we celebrate a special feast – the **feast of St. Nicholas**. Children of all ages love this annual festivity.

On this day we remember a fourth century bishop who is known as the patron saint of children.

Throughout history the feast of St. Nicholas has kept alive the stories of his goodness and generosity.

In Germany and Poland, boys dressed as bishops, begged alms for the poor—and sometimes for themselves! In the Netherlands and Belgium, St. Nicholas arrived on a steamship from Spain to ride a white horse on his gift-giving rounds. In many countries, December 6th still remains a day for gift giving and merrymaking. In the Netherlands St. Nicholas is celebrated on the 5th, the eve of the day, by sharing candies (thrown in the door), chocolate initial letters, small gifts, and riddles. Dutch children leave carrots and hay in their shoes for the saint's horse, hoping St. Nicholas will exchange them for small gifts. Simple gift-giving in early Advent helps preserve a Christmas Day focus on the Christ Child.

How will you celebrate this day with your children?



Each December we celebrate a special feast of Our Lady – the **Feast of the Immaculate Conception on December 8th**. On December 8th, 1854, Pope Pius IX defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception in *Ineffabilis Deus*. Since that time we have celebrated this feast in a special way.

For American Catholics the feast of the Immaculate Conception has special meaning. In 1864 the bishops issued a decree in which they named **Mary, the Immaculate Conception, as the Patroness of the United States**.

The feast of **Our Lady of Guadalupe**, Patroness of the Americas, is celebrated on **December 12th**.

We remember in a special way **St. Lucy on December 13th**. St. Lucy. Lucy's name means "light", with the same root as "lucid" which means "clear, radiant, understandable." St. Lucy is the patron saint of the blind and those with eye-trouble.

And then there is the blessed feast of **Christmas**. **"To us a child is born, to us a son is given"** (Is 9:6).



After Christmas, reasons for celebrating continue into the New Year. We celebrate the **Epiphany**, the feast of **St. John the Evangelist**, the **Holy Innocents**, the **Solemnity of Mary – the Mother of God**, the **Baptism of Jesus** and many more.

How will you celebrate these days of blessing?

## TEACHERS SHARING WITH TEACHERS

On October 21, 2011 fifty-five of our Early Childhood teachers had the wonderful opportunity to share ideas with each other. The session was held at the St. Basil Educational Center. Teachers came with a potpourri of ideas they wanted to share with their colleagues. It was a day filled with the learning of new ideas for the classroom.

Five of our Early Childhood teachers were the key presenters of the day. Sister Mary Jean Raymond, O.S.U. facilitated the morning session. Presenting with her were Pamela Rable, Joanne Marschke, LeAnne Anderson, and Susan Reardon. These teachers shared ideas on how to help children learn the life cycle of a butterfly, how to use exercise to strengthen and develop the bodies of the young children, and how to organize and implement a "reading-buddy" system with students in an upper grade within the school.



In addition to this sharing, about fifteen other teachers brought and presented ideas to use in the classroom. Needless to say, all of the teachers went home with a treasure trove of ideas to use in their classrooms.

Throughout the morning, the teachers were engaged in a number of "hands-on" activities so that they would know how to engage the children in the activity back at their own classroom.



Creating the butterfly life cycle plate.



Creating Ghosts for Halloween.



Locating a poem to print on chart paper for use in the classroom.

Using paper plates and tissue paper to create pumpkin faces.



## FEASTS TO CELEBRATE...

November 20	Christ the King
November 21	Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary
November 22	St. Cecilia
November 27	First Sunday of Advent
December 6	St. Nicholas
December 8	Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin
December 9	St. Juan Diego
December 12	Our Lady of Guadalupe
December 13	St. Lucy
December 25	Christmas
December 27	St. John the Evangelist
December 28	Holy Innocents
December 30	The Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph
January 1	Mary the Mother of God New Year's Day
January 4	St. Elizabeth Ann Seton
January 5	St. John Neumann
January 21	St. Agnes
January 24	St. Francis deSales
January 25	Conversion of St. Paul
January 26	St. Timothy & St. Titus
January 27	St. Angela Merici
January 28	St. Thomas Aquinas
January 31	St. John Bosco



Working together to learn new teaching ideas to be used in the classroom.

The workshop ended with an afternoon presentation entitled: **Easy, Effective Literacy** given by Allison Schmerler, Vice President of Abrams Learning Trends. In this session Schmerler provided the teachers with background information and lots of hands-on ideas about oral language development, phonological awareness, book/print awareness, and alphabet knowledge.

The day was a huge success with teachers going away with a wealth of ideas to use in the classroom.

### A Word from Scripture...

*And the Word became flesh  
and dwelt amongst us.*

*(John 1:14)*

## Words of Wisdom...

**"In early childhood you may lay the foundation of poverty or riches, industry or idleness, good or evil, by the habits to which you train your children. Teach them right habits then, and their future life is safe."**

Lydia Sigourney

## Tips for Developing Positive Relationships with Parents

In an article that appeared in *Edutopia* this past September, Elena Aguilar reminds us "that in our busy days of juggling papers, lesson plans and managing students, we can easily forget the group that could lend significant support in our charge as teachers – parents and families."

Aguilar suggest that teachers consider the following tips for improving connections with parents and families.

- **Smile When You See Parents** – Greet them. Make sure that at least 90 percent of your encounters are positive, warm, and friendly.
- **Communicate Often and In Various Forms** – Provide information about what is going on in the classroom. What their children are learning, what they have accomplished, what you are excited about, what the children are excited about, and the learning and growth you are seeing.
- **Listen to Parents** – Really listen. They know a whole lot about their own child.
- **Thank Parents** – Thank them for their support both privately and publicly. Recognize what they do to help your class and how that help is making a difference in your class.
- **Invite Parents to Celebrate and Break Bread Together** – Communities are strengthened when people come together in celebration. Find ways to share celebrations and break bread with the parents and families.

(Aguilar, Elena. "Twenty Tips for Developing Positive Relationships with Parents." *Edutopia*. September, 2011.)

## Professional Development Opportunities

**Teaching Religion to Young Children**  
February 10, 2012 ~ Ursuline Educational Center

**Early Prevention of School Failure (EPSF) Training**  
February 28-29, 2012 ~ Site TBA

**Making Read-Alouds Count  
in the Early Childhood Classroom**  
May 4, 2012 ~ Westside Irish-American Club

**Register Online at:**  
[www.ocs-ocs.org/ocel/register](http://www.ocs-ocs.org/ocel/register)

## Web Sites...

### Taking Another Look.

Check out the following Web sites. They contain loads of good ideas for learning experiences and activities in the classroom.

1. PreSchool Themes for every Season  
[www.preschooexpress.com/theme\\_station.shtml](http://www.preschooexpress.com/theme_station.shtml)
2. PreSchool Activities Galore!  
[www.kidschalkboard.com/](http://www.kidschalkboard.com/)
3. A to Z Stuff for Pre School  
<http://atozteacherstuff.com/>
4. PreSchool Resources  
[www.kidsparkz.com/index.html](http://www.kidsparkz.com/index.html)
5. PreSchool Link Express  
[www.preschoolrainbow.org/resources.htm](http://www.preschoolrainbow.org/resources.htm)
6. Sites for Teachers  
[www.sitesforteachers.com/](http://www.sitesforteachers.com/)
7. First School – PreSchool Crafts and Activities  
<http://www.first-school.ws/>

## SPECIAL DAYS TO CELEBRATE

November 21	World Hello Day
November 24	Thanksgiving Day
December 1	Eat a Red Apple Day
December 2	National Fritters Day
December 4	Santas' List Day
December 6	St. Nicholas Day
December 7	Pearl Harbor Day
December 8	National Brownie Day
December 9	Christmas Card Day
December 12	Poinsettia Day
December 13	Ice Cream Day
December 15	National Bill of Rights Day
December 20	Go Caroling Day
December 21	Humbug Day
December 24	National Chocolate Day
December 26	Boxing Day
January 1	New Year's Day
January 4	Trivia Day
January 5	National Bird Day
January 11	Milk Day
January 12	Work Harder Day
January 17	Martin Luther King Jr. Day
January 18	Winnie the Pooh Day
January 21	Hat Day
January 24	Compliment Day
January 25	Opposite Day
January 31	Backwards Day



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