

NEWSLETTER FOR NEW ZEALAND CATHOLIC EARLY CHILDHOOD CENTRES, KINDERGARTENS, PLAYGROUPS AND INTERESTED PARTIES OCTOBER 2013

GREETINGS

Tēnā koutou katoa, malo e lelei, talofa lava, ni sa bula vinaka, talohani, kia orana, fakalofa lahi atu and blessings and warm greetings to you all.

We are nearly at All Saints and All Souls, and then it's a short step to Advent and Christmas. May there be many blessings on you all as the year gallops towards its close!

A Further Update on the National Centre for Religious Studies (NCRS)

Permanent staff have now been appointed to NCRS. Dr Chris Duthie-Jung and Mrs Anne Kennedy will take up the positions of *Head of Partnerships and Director of the National Centre for Religious Studies*; and *Associate Director National Centre for Religious Studies, Curriculum*. We congratulate them on their appointments.

Chris moves into the position of *Head of Partnerships and Director of the NCRS* from his lecturing role at The Catholic Institute (TCI) where he has been the campus Co-ordinator for Wellington and the National Co-ordinator of the Masters of Ed Leadership programme. Anne comes to her TCI position as *Associate Director NCRS* from the diocese of Dunedin where she has been the Religious Education Advisor for many years.

Chris will be based in Wellington and move into his role over the next month and Anne will be based in Dunedin commencing her role on 14th October 2013.

We do not yet know which of the team will take on the early childhood curriculum. Wait for more news! Meantime, you can continue to contact NCRS about early childhood curriculum matters by using ncrs@catholicinstitute.ac.nz.

Talking to Children about All Saints

All Saints is a wonderful feast to remind children of their links with their relatives who have gone before them, who are now with God in heaven. While we sometimes think that only the canonised Saints should be remembered on All Saints, and that our own folks should be remembered on All Souls, in fact many countries follow the tradition of celebrating their relatives on All Saints, and we can do so. Halloween is such a mixture of pagan and medieval customs that it is good to celebrate All Saints as a counterbalance, and a "real" celebration. In many Catholic cultures a candle is lit to remember those who have gone ahead of us to God, to talk about them, to thank God for what they have meant to us, and to pray for them and to them. Your children's parents might like to build this custom into their family evening prayers on 1 November.

Celtic Spirituality

I know that some of you are aware of the books by John O'Donohue, and other writers drawing on Celtic spirituality. Thelma Chapman, of Christian Early Childhood Education Association Aotearoa, in a recent newsletter said that she too had been reading a book on Celtic Spirituality. Thelma notes that the book she was reading asks the following questions:

1. What did I really see today?

2. What criteria do I use to determine what I like to see and to avoid seeing what I don't want to see?
3. In what way do I see the world?

These seem to me to be three useful questions as we all notice, recognise and respond to people, large and small. You might find them helpful as you write up learning stories and other documents; and all of us might find them worth reflecting on as we finish our day. Thank you, Thelma, for sharing this.

And here is a blessing that you might use a little earlier in the day – I have stuck it on my computer!

Computers

I program my computer
with the love of God.
God be with me now
as I call words into being.
May they make real my work of love.
May they join the work of creation.
Called from nothing, uttered over chaos
bringing order.

(Esther de Waal, on the Spirituality and Practice website)

News from Island Bay

Some of you will remember that Aubert Childcare Centre, at the Home of Compassion Island Bay, had to close. We have recently had news that some of those associated with that centre are now hoping to set up a community-based kindergarten which will carry forward the Aubert spirit and vision. What a lovely initiative. We shall look forward to hearing about their progress.

Early Childhood Folio

I am very behind on my reading, but have just been going through the NZCER Press 'Early Childhood Folio' Vol 16, no 2, 2012. I was particularly struck by an article on 'The early childhood-school relationship: overcoming invisible barriers', which seemed to me to be very relevant to conversations we have all over New Zealand. If you do not subscribe to 'Early Childhood Folio', which is a real treasure, feel free to email me for a photocopy of this particular article. In another article Sarah Boyd interviewed researcher Geraldine McDonald, and I was struck by a reference to the development of the Kohanga Reo movement, and Dame Iritana Tawhiwhirangi's idea that it was a community development programme rather than an early childhood development programme. Of course, this is a major theme now in early childhood thinking, and I have written before about the way in which Catholic early childhood services can contribute to the development and education of parents in relation to their spiritual development and growth in Catholic faith – Jubilee Catholic Early Childhood Centre, Hamilton does excellent work in this regard.. Every article in this 'Folio' is a gem: I could comment on the remaining five, but at least I have, I hope, whetted your appetite.

Prayer and Young Children

Dr Gerard O'Shea, in a recent article from the Archdiocese of Melbourne, commented on Maria Montessori's awareness that children from the ages of 3-6 years seem to be in a natural 'sensitive period' for religious faith. Her insights were adapted by Sofia Cavalletti, leading to the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, which some of you know quite a lot about. Cavalletti claims that wonder is God's natural way of drawing children

to himself, when they 'attentively gaze at reality'. This focus on what is close up and real makes it easy to start a prayer session by asking children 'What would you like to thank God for?' It seems like a good starting point for adults too, with thanks leading to praise.

In conclusion....

Please share this material with staff and parents, and remember that your diocesan Catholic education office, NZCEO and NCRS are all available to assist you as needed.

Best wishes and many blessings to you all. I keep you all in my prayers, and trust that you keep each other (and me and the team at NZCEO) in your prayers!

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