



Introducing Dawn & Catherine, co-workers in faith-fuelled settings

Catherine and Dawn share my faith and that of Maria Montessori. Together we reflect on our Oaklea 'faith journey' which began for Catherine in 1999. As we consider how this began, we notice the nudges and guidance needed to take this step of faith. Oaklea was not overtly faith-based, but was (and IS) fuelled by faith.

Sensing something distinctive

Whether it is word of mouth or the reluctance of a child to leave at the end of a visit, visitors and parents often remark that there is something distinctive about the Oaklea settings. Dawn explains how she was drawn to work with us as she saw her own children respond and flourish in the nursery.

Staff too (irrespective of faith) recognise the distinctive flavour of the setting as set out in its Vision. Oaklea has never been an overtly a faith-fuelled organisation, but nonetheless many comment on its distinctiveness. Catherine reflects that it is a recognition in some way of our underpinning belief that *every* child is unique, wonderfully made, so precious and able to thrive in a loving, facilitating environment.

Training

For all of us, there was a profound connection with Montessori's faith as we began to train. The whole approach 'fit' with our own endeavours as parents. Montessori's faith initially drew her to the disadvantaged children in the slum regions of Rome. As she developed her approach, the fundamentals remained - valuing the uniqueness of each child and seeing spirituality as integral to their holistic development.

Managing change

Caroline, Dawn and Catherine began working together when Oaklea was a small home-based setting. They prayerfully and practically supported the idea that Oaklea needed to grow to survive. The big CHANGE came as a new business entity (a social enterprise) enabled it to be the first Montessori Children Centre linked 40-place day care setting. This was an extended time of prayerful seeking, persisting, knocking on doors, having them close, not giving up and trusting that the right door would open. Which it did!

Celebrating diversity

As a Christian faith-fuelled provider, we have taken care to celebrate, honour and include the rich diversity in our world and society. Using topics, Continent folders and Artefacts Boxes, we celebrate other faiths and practices respectfully and openly. Respecting family beliefs and preferences, takes many forms, not least inviting family members to share stories, artefacts, photos...



Christian festivals, such as Christmas are simply celebrated. Because our faith is so dear to us, we are careful to always respect the wishes of families. Nothing was assumed.

Prayer

Prayer undergirds everything. Catherine recalls how we quietly and unobtrusively prayed over our key children, staff, business decisions, families...

With the gift of hindsight, we now sometimes meet young adults who attended Oaklea. God has been at work in their Absorbent Mind years. To know we have been a significant part of their journey, quietly praying over them is a joy. To see some, now young adults, step into adulthood with self-belief and strong sense of purpose is such a privilege.

Supporting frontline work

It is invaluable to have trusted 'others' who cover people of faith living and working in a pluralistic society. For us, these have been:

The CIC's Christian non-executive directors who prayed over the organisation, their decisions and brought 'rescue' in many a crisis.

Dawn has her discipleship group, who faithfully prays for her along with other trusted friends. She also carries a holding cross in her pocket at all times, a tangible reminder that she is never alone. Caroline's close friend, described herself as 'Oaklea's Godmother'.

And finally...

Through these reflections we hope many will be encouraged and confident to step out into faith-fuelled work with young children. We believe that young children spontaneously absorb *everything* in their environments. What an honour to bring love, joy and peace into these places and so support their spiritual development.

Catherine, Dawn & I have been called to live out our faith through nurturing children in the lea of the Oak. There is no greater privilege than parents entrusting their precious children into ours (& GOD'S) care!

Further information, practical guidance and advice are available through

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SET 4 Delving *a little* Deeper
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Audio 2 – Faith Fuelled Settings

Companion Notes

Set 4; Audio 2
with Catherine Theodosius
& Dawn Lewis

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