



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.

Practical Life and the Elementary Child

Education, from a Montessori perspective, is an aid to life. The purpose of a Montessori environment is thus to aid the child to develop his fullest potential, becoming who God created him to be. This development or construction of the person is achieved through work. The Montessori emphasis on the work of the hand recognizes the dignity of the human person. In Genesis 1:27ff we hear that God creates man in His image and that man is thus called to care for and transform the world through work, assisting creation in also reaching its fullest potential in glorifying God. In the Atrium, Exercises of Practical Life (EPL) allow the child to participate in purposeful, real world activities which allow him to engage in the work of the hand, caring for himself and for the community. These activities also assist him in developing independence, concentration, and responsibility.

Practical Life in the Level II and III Atria

In the Atrium, the elementary aged child encounters God's Word in the Bible and His action in the liturgy through presentations from the adult, but it is through his personal work that he is led to focus, concentrate, and listen for the voice of the One who speaks within. Providing EPL activities helps to prepare the child for this deep work and also acknowledges that man is body-soul, receiving truth through the senses, and incarnating it through work. EPL provides opportunities for the integration of the whole person: body, mind, soul.



- **"Care of Self" and "Care of the Environment":** In the atrium, there are materials for care of self (Kleenex, a bathroom pass, pencil sharpeners) and care of the environment (dusting cloths, a broom, flowers). These activities allow the child to participate in the care of the Atrium space and thus care for those in this space with him.
- **Grace and Courtesy" and "Control of Movement":** Because the elementary aged child is both community focused and developing a sense of morality, the grace and courtesy exercises offered reflect this development. Inviting input from the children in developing a list of how to care for the environment and how to share that responsibility both affirms their developing reasoning mind and invites the children's collaboration in seeing this space as their own.

- **“Preliminary”**: Preliminary activities prepare the child for future work. In the Level II and III atria the skills that will prepare the child for the work of the Atrium include looking up Scripture in the Bible, planning communal prayer, and proclaiming God’s Word. Preliminary work also includes using a calligraphy pen, planning out the steps in a big project, and booklet making.

Practical Life in the Home

The elementary aged child in the home is ready for, and in need of, a wide variety of EPL activities. In particular, this child can begin to take on some of the Care of Self and of the Environment work that allow him to contribute to the larger community of the family. As a parent, perhaps you would like to think through your family routines, considering both what skills your child has and what skills they will need as adults. Where can you invite your child to greater responsibility and service? The suggestions listed are for children ages six through twelve and could be introduced as appropriate within that range.

- **“Care of Self”**: simple first aid, sewing a button, laundry, packing a suitcase.
- **“Care of the Environment”**: vacuuming, mopping, bringing in the mail, putting groceries away, organizing one’s room, cleaning a bathroom, animal care, planning and preparing a meal, raking leaves, sweeping the garage, shoveling snow, cleaning the family vehicle, fixing a bicycle.
- **“Grace and Courtesy”**: “How to greet a friend or visitor,” “How to answer the telephone,” “How to change the subject politely,” “How to reach out to a friend you haven’t seen in a while,” “How to give and accept polite reminders,” “How to help a younger sibling,” “How to write a thank-you note,” “How to offer help.”
- **“Control of Movement”**: learning a new artistic skill through sewing, wood carving, felting or playing a musical instrument, practicing skills needed for an athletic sport or activity.
- **“Community Service”**: Organize activities for siblings, assist in making a meal for someone in need, plan a family outing, assemble “blessing bags” to keep in the car to be given to a homeless person, gather items that could be given away, plan a song or skit to perform for family or record for someone far away, planning and leading family prayer on a daily or weekly basis.

