

MODG Directors

- **Laura Berquist:**
Director of MODG
- **Margaret Hayden:**
Director of Development
- **Steven Hayden:**
Business Director
- **Mari McAlister:**
Director of Policies & Procedures
- **Mary Mellein:**
Director of Teacher Review Program
- **Cindy Sale:**
Director of Teacher Assisted/Directed Program
- **Sue Solorzano:**
Director of Professional Development

Inside this issue:

Discussion: Practice & Purpose	2-4
Family Site Feature	5
Enrollment Booklet Feature	5
College Planning Feature	5
Hope in History	6-7
March for Life	7
Expected School-Wide Learning Goals	8

Mother of Divine Grace Newsletter

Volume 15, Issue 3

September 2015—Fall Issue

Discussion: Practice & Purpose by Laura Berquist

Discussion is very important in our program. We know that to make a position your own, you need to be able to articulate it. We also know that it is through discussion that a teacher most certainly comes to know her students' minds. But sometimes we hear objections to discussion as a method of learning: People say, "Lectures are a better method of learning, because the student has the truth clearly laid out for

blind leading the blind." The right response is two-fold: First, there is a cer-



Madonna with John the Baptist and Donatus
by Andrea del Verrocchio

him, rather than a discussion wherein one has the

tain aspect of teaching that cannot be done as

well with lectures, namely the explication of the most fundamental ideas, and second, there are essentially lectures at the basis of every discussion, as a matter of fact.

As to the first, Dr. Neumayr, one of the founders of TAC, says, "Each one of us brings certain fundamental ideas to education which must be made explicit before learning can advance. Discussion is the optimum means to bring them forth. The

(Continued on page 2)

modgbooks.com

Mother of Divine Grace School now has a bookstore: modgbooks.com! We carry almost 400 books used in the MODG syllabi and are continuing to expand our offerings. We are committed to

carrying the essential and many of the supplementary texts including many texts that were previously out of print. Enrolled families receive a discount on materials keeping our prices competitive with major sup-

pliers such as Amazon.com. Since opening in early August we have processed almost 2,000 orders, from almost 1,500 clients, including over 1,100 of our own MODG families. Thank you for your support!

Discussion: Practice & Purpose, Continued

student must, as it were, give them birth; the teacher, as a good midwife, only assists the labor. Tradition calls this the Socratic maieutic, from the Greek word



*Madonna with Seated Child by
Andrea del Verrocchio*

for obstetrics, because the basic ideas we use in education come forth from our own minds, not from the teacher's. . . . Nature sees to it that we all grasp certain fundamental concepts and distinctions about reality — ideas we are hardly aware we have — that allow us to judge all other ideas put forth about reality. Genuine education leads the mind forth to see these seminal ideas openly before it applies them to further notions. Every science and every discipline is rooted in these basic ideas. No matter how far we may advance in a subject, whatever we find to be true and sound resolves back into the first notions. . . . No lecture can plant these

into our minds. They are already there. The task is to bring them out. Here discussion is vital. . . . A good teacher is able through the right questions to make us aware of our most basic ideas in the light of which we are able to make judgments about other things."

So we want to be thinking, while we are discussing with our students, whether in our homes or in a classroom, "What principles is he invoking to make that point? Could it be so basic as the principle of contradiction?" "What is he assuming is true?" Then you want to help him see what his foundational ideas are.

There is no substitute for this process. Each person has to make explicit those fundamental common notions, such as the principle of contradiction, or the axiom that a whole is greater than its parts, which he has in order to proceed well in the intellectual life. That is what you are aiming for in your discussions with your students. You want them to see that this statement agrees with that, or it doesn't, that this concept includes others, or not.

Dr. Neumayr says, "This is why Socrates searched the souls of his disciples with questions. If any responded saying 'I have heard such and such ...' he would invariably reply: 'But what do you think?' [We should remember that.] He was not asking for their opinion; he was asking just what they really thought and knew

about things. It is not easy to say accurately just what we really think. Often upon hearing a response, Socrates would ask, 'But don't you also think such and such about it? How do these two ideas fit together?' And so the discussion would go until the disciple began to harmonize his own thoughts."

So the discussion method provides an opportunity to make explicit the first common notions on which all intellectual progress is built, and it allows the teacher to help the young student integrate those common notions with the first intellectual steps that are built on it. We want our students to harmonize their own thoughts.

As Dr. Neumayr says, there are no short cuts in this process. "Neither computers, calculators, audiovisual techniques, nor even lectures can make us see these all-important truths that are in our souls. A student may be able to take up technology in its latest form without having to go back to the first inventions and repeat all the labors of his ancestors. But this is not so in liberal education. In this way it is more like moral formation. Our parents may be courageous and just, but we cannot take up where they left off; rather we must go through the whole experience of acquiring virtue as they did. No short cuts. So too in genuine education. We ourselves must do it from the bottom up. It is as basic and unchanging as human nature.

Discussion: Practice & Purpose, Continued

There may be short cuts to 'know how' and technical skills, but not to wisdom." Discussion is necessary to come to wisdom.

As to the second point, that there are lectures at the basis of every discussion, the fact is that in our discussions we are usually discussing a text. The text provides a presentation of truth, which the discussion helps the student penetrate. After the discussion he can go back to the text with a better understanding, and he will see things in that presentation that he didn't see before.

Now, there is the practical consideration of how to get the discussion started, and how to keep it going. This is going to vary from stage of formation to stage of formation. There are certain factors, though, that are universal.

The teacher has to be open to and supportive of ideas. If a student knows, or thinks, that the teacher will say, in effect, "That isn't true", or "That won't work", then most students will not talk.

This doesn't mean, though, that the teacher should just be absent, or that he should make it seem two contradictory statements are both fine. Rather, he should direct the discussion. When George says, "Alexander the Great was crazy. He thought he was a god. He let the Persians worship him," and Tom says, "Alexander was the wisest of all

ancient leaders, because of the way he treated conquered peoples," the teacher shouldn't make a judgment, at least immediately. He should ask Tom and George what they think about the two statements. He should open up the question to the floor, "Was Alexander crazy or was he wise?"

Then the teacher shouldn't really comment on or evaluate every answer as it comes, because, if he does, what could be a discussion will develop into a conversation between one student and the teacher. When there is one student and the teacher, that's ok, but in a group setting it's better to say something like, "That's interesting! Do you think that fits with what George said?" or "Hey, George, isn't that interesting? Does that fit with your idea?" Or, "Great thought! That reminds me of what you said earlier, Annie. Could you restate what you said about x?" or "That is a really good start to our consideration. Let's note that, and see what the other possibilities might be. Remember, you aren't committing yourself to anything yet, we are just laying out the possibilities." Even with a one on one conversation, the teacher has to be careful not to shut down the exchange of ideas.

I like to remind the students that a discussion is an external deliberation. We all have to deliberate before we come to judgment. There are two parts to the process of arriving at the truth. First you consider the various alterna-

tives, and one of those eventually emerges as clearly true, or most likely of the possibilities you have considered. Then your mind comes to rest in that answer. In other words, then you make a judgment.

When you are working alone, the deliberation takes place internally, as you 'mull' over the possibilities. When you are working together with others, the deliberation takes place externally, and you have more experience to draw upon. Then the judgment comes, internally of course, but also, often, externally, by consensus. You



Madonna of the Book by Sandro Botticelli

all see the truth you have been seeking.

What you want is for the students to start actually carrying on a deliberation. This is an art, and they have to practice to perfect

Discussion: Practice & Purpose, Continued

their art.

Discussion questions are not reading comprehension questions. Now, reading comprehension questions at the beginning of a discussion period can loosen things up, especially for younger children, and set the stage for a more theoretical question, but there is just one right answer for a reading comprehension question, so the student either gets it right or doesn't. That is not a discussion. "When was the battle of Zama?" or even "Who were some of the major characters in the Punic wars?" will not generate discussion, though they might be



Madonna and Child with St John the Baptist by Sandro Botticelli

useful in getting the students used to answering questions orally.

Discussion requires questions which are more open-ended; there have to be a number of

possible answers. These could be questions that are personal: "Which character seems more real to you and why?" Or they could be questions that require more sorting out to find the answer: "Who is the main character in *Antigone*?" Or a question that calls for judgment: "Was it a good political move on Creon's part to forbid the burial of Polynices?" "Was *Antigone* right to bury her brother?" Or "Was Alexander the Great crazy or was he wise?"

The first question (Which character seems more real to you and why?) is 'safer' and therefore better to use with younger students, or students who are getting used to discussion, while the second (Who is the main character in *Antigone*?) is a better question in itself, as it requires exploration of the story, and of the definition of tragedy, but it leads to a real, objective, conclusion. The last three are taken from the ends of rhetoric: the expedient or inexpedient (Was it a good political move on Creon's part to forbid the burial of Polynices?), the just or unjust (Was *Antigone* right to bury her brother?) and the blameworthy or praiseworthy (Was Alexander the Great crazy or was he wise?).

Discussion also flourishes when it is in an untimed setting. If you get a real discussion going, it's best if you can continue into the next period, or take it up the next day, or be willing to stop without arriving at judgment. If you have only one hour, and you have to get to the answer in that hour,

the teacher will have to stop the discussion at some point and make a judgment. That can be done, successfully, but ongoing discussion is a good way to build real intellectual habits of inquiry.

So to sum up:

- 1) The teacher has to be open to and supportive of ideas.
- 2) The teacher shouldn't comment on or evaluate every answer as it comes.
- 3) The teacher should direct the conversation to include other students, when possible, so as to facilitate external deliberation.
- 4) The questions need to be open-ended in the ways I mentioned.

I want to note here, that as in other teaching and parenting techniques, the positive gets you further than the negative. Really be open to and supportive of ideas. When someone has an interesting thought, pick up on it. Say that it is good, or interesting. Say that you never thought about that before. Restrain yourself from saying, too soon, that it is right or wrong. You can say, "Wow! I want to think about that! Let's see how that would fit with X." The bottom line is you want the student to see that deliberation, working with ideas, comparing various ideas to one another to make sure they harmonize and to help one come to the truth, is the whole point of discussion. It's ordered to wisdom, not just to information.

Family Site Feature: Family Calendar

Educating your children is rewarding, but can be a busy and intense experience. It can be a challenge just to manage the class times, calls, and lab meetings for your children's learning support, teacher services and lab courses. MODG has now added a family calendar collating all of these meetings and presenting them on a single page to help busy parents!

You can find your personalized

calendar on the family site. Click on "Family" in the menu bar and choose "calendar". You can view upcoming meetings for the month or the week (toggle between these on the right side of the screen). The week display presents the duration of meetings and shows any events that occur at the same time.

The calendar is color coded either by student (default) or by type of course (learning support

classes, teacher services meetings, lab meetings, and consultations).

We also have a calendar feed that you can subscribe to in the calendar app of your choice allowing you to easily collate MODG events with the rest of your schedule! The calendar feed is in the upper right corner of the page; we have provided directions for several popular calendar apps.

Enrollment Booklet Feature: Online Forms

MODG now has an online enrollment booklet. You can find this on our family site under Resources in your menu bar and under your name in the upper right corner. Every form found in our paper booklet is available online. Simply click on the link and print! The online booklet is presented in an easy-to-use scroll format. The scroll moves chronologically through the year — or

click the three horizontal bars in the upper right to open an interactive table of contents to see the whole booklet at a glance.

Each section of the booklet has an overview along with links to pertinent forms. The forms that you need are provided along with the context in which they are used. Here are examples of what you can find online:

- *Getting Started* - Academic Honor Code
- *New Students* - Student Survey
- *Organizing Your School Year* - Sample Schedules
- *Grading Student Work* - How to Grade & Rubrics
- *Submitting Grades and Assessments* - Elective Credit Forms
- *Transcript Information* - Proposed Plan of Study

College Planning Feature: College Prep in High School

MODG has an online handbook dedicated to college planning. We encourage all high school students and their parents to check out our online College Planning pages (found on the family site; click on your name in the upper right corner). We have advice for parents and students allowing you to draw on the collective experience of MODG's staff, consultants, and teachers with thousands

of graduates over the past 20 years.

College preparation is broken down by year. Students are given a checklist for each year of high school reminding them what should be done each year to help them remain on track.

We have detailed directions and links for students maintaining

NCAA eligibility, applying to military schools, seeking scholarships and negotiating the oftentimes complex work of college financial aid!

College applications can be scary but MODG is committed to helping you navigate this. Our students have been accepted to the top programs in the nation!

Hope in History by Michaela Berquist

Current events can paint a somewhat bleak picture. Whether one looks at world events, national politics, or vocal groups within the Church it is easy to be distressed and even on the brink of



despair. But history can provide both consolation and a healthy perspective.

As I child I generally found history a disturbing subject, with its litany of wars, brutal conquest, gruesome assassinations, famines, plagues, and natural disasters. The portraits and photographs adorning the margins often seemed doomed to either villainy or an early death. At times the past was presented as little more than a succession of tragic events. It was much easier to turn to literature and enjoy the happy endings of fiction and fairy tales despite the danger of conceding that a happy ending belongs to the world of fantasy rather than reality.

In college I first encountered the idea that history is the study of cause and effect within particular human events. Man studied tragic and epic human events in order to avoid the bad and reproduce the good. A seed of hope, quickly followed by frustration, was found within history. Why did we seem so blindly doomed to repeat the

same mistakes time and time again, and why did the innocent always pay the price? Age, of course, helped me to see that I too shared the human proclivity for repeating mistakes, despite knowing and wanting better. But time, and Chesterton, gave me a better perspective on history and the human condition.

When you have read and re-read enough of history you realize that there is no mistake man has not committed before, no modern travesty not already recorded in ancient words. Without becoming deadened to the evil of the present, one realizes that we have been down this road before. We are not approaching doomsday - at least not any faster than we were a decade, century or millenia ago. Savage barbarians have overwhelmed civilization, western civilization itself has become savage and nearly disappeared, heresies have seemed unstoppable, the world has been plunged into darkness before and no doubt will be again. Hope lies not in the particular civilizations or cultures which rise and fall, but in individuals, first and foremost Jesus Christ and then in those men, both great and small, who follow Him. Each man has the free will to do what is right, and in virtue of the merits of Jesus Christ to be the stuff of martyrs, of legend, of hope.

In Chesterton's epic poem, "The Ballad of the White Horse", he presents the image of Alfred, a man who learns to have "joy without a cause", and "faith without a hope". Alfred is a king within a

land overrun by violent pagan barbarians, bereft of military support, reduced to begging for his next meal and yet, with the inspiration of Mary and faith in the cross of Christ, able to raise an army, rouse that army from a crushing defeat and win a stunning victory culminating in the conversion of the enemy king! The historical context makes this all the more staggering when one realizes that Guthrum, whom Alfred pardons, befriends, and converts, had repeatedly betrayed him. Alfred does seem "ignorant in his bravery", but therein lies the Christian paradox. Alfred's joy and faith lie in Christ crucified, the folly of Gentiles, stumbling block to the Jews. It is through recognizing the fundamental reality of the cross of Christ that Alfred is able to convert Guthrum, and the novice his-



torian is pointed back to an earlier moment. Alfred is a Saxon, a descendent of the previous wave of barbarians who had overrun England a few centuries before, pagans who had wiped out the Christian Romanic-British culture

Hope in History, Continued

and plunged England into one of her many dark ages. Alfred's Christianity is the fruit of a preceding generation's hope without a cause. Without the forgiveness and steadfastness of Patrick and a thousand other Irish missionaries throughout the intervening centuries, the Anglo-Saxons would not have been Christians and would not have been able to bear the fruit of so great a king as Alfred. And lest we paint too rosy a picture of the Church in Alfred's world, his ancestors had been converted by Irish monks on the brink of schism from a Roman Church they hardly knew. For the British fidelity to Rome came with a knife in the back or a knife at the throat, and Christians allied with pagans to fight their fellow Christians. This turmoil produced Alfred.

Alfred is great for many reasons, as Churchill points out, "The ninth century found it very hard to understand this behavior when the kingdom was fighting desperately against brutal marauders ..." and yet therein lies his greatness. The true Christian seeks not to win an earthly good, but rather the greatest heavenly good. And not just for himself but for whichever man stands in his path - this is true love of neighbor. Alfred offered Guthrum the same hand of charity that had been extended by joyful, faithful Christians among the conquered Britons to his ancestors among the conquering pagan Saxons. For Christianity means accepting that "we be never quit of them," whether it be heresy or a hoard.

A central tenant of Christian doctrine is seeing that we have free will or, in the words of Chesterton, "that God put man in a garden and girt him with a sword and sent him forth a free man that he might betray his lord." The scary side of this is knowing that we are capable of the greatest evil and must ever guard against our own sin. The merciful side of this is seeing that there but for the grace of God go each one of us and thus to see in each enemy a Guthrum to be recalled to the love and mercy of Christ. It is simultaneously consoling and frightening to realize that what matters are our own actions. Frightening because in death we can not blame anyone but ourselves for our shortcomings. Peter will ask only what we did with what we were given. Consoling because once we realize this, we need not fear the "nameless sin". Whatever the task in front of us, did we, with Christian principles and free will, do our best? Christ died on the cross and changed the world, Alfred extended true Christian love and

forgiveness to Guthrum and changed England. Rather than fuss about what others are doing wrong, we must focus on what we are doing and see that we do what is right.



We are nameless men, but like Alfred, we know that we have joy without an apparent human cause; we can carry the cross of Rome and, God-willing, we will never tire of human shame. We may never convert a Guthrum, but we still have a "song to sing", and no matter how bleak our current events get, we know that "by God's death the stars shall stand and the small apples grow."

March for Life by Marika Ellis

January is around the corner which, for many of our high school students, means it's time for the unofficial Mother of Divine Grace Formal Winter Ball! Our 5th annual Ball will be held in the D.C. area the day prior to the March for Life on Thursday, January 21st, in Arlington, VA, in a lovely ballroom and will include dinner, dancing and (hopefully) a 45 minute Swing Dance instruction. Modest gowns/dresses and snappy suits are required, along with your dancing shoes and

eagerness to meet and spend a memorable night with your classmates. The room, same as prior years, does have a legal, maximum capacity so reservations will be held on a first-come, first-paid, first-served basis. Please email familyellis@comcast.net requesting more detailed information on attire, music, cost, chaperones, etc. Looking forward to seeing many of you again and meeting new freshman along with those who'll be joining us for the first time!

MOTHER OF DIVINE GRACE SCHOOL

407 Bryant Circle, Suite B1
Ojai, CA 93023

Phone: 805-646-5818

Fax: 805-646-9921

Email: mtberquist@gmail.com
www.motherofdivinegrace.org

**"FOR THE SOLE
TRUE END OF EDU-
CATION IS SIMPLY
THIS: TO TEACH
MEN HOW TO
LEARN FOR THEM-
SELVES; AND WHAT-
EVER INSTRUCTION
FAILS TO DO THIS IS
EFFORT SPENT IN
VAIN."**

**DOROTHY SAYERS
LOST TOOLS OF
LEARNING**



A Tradition in Independent Study

Mother of Divine Grace School was founded in 1995 to provide parents with the information, resources, and support necessary to educate their children according to the classical tradition. Laura Berquist's book, *Designing Your Own Classical Curriculum*, had aroused the interest of thousands and she responded to their requests by developing an independent study program and offering home schooling consulting services. As with her book, the emphasis of the study program and the consulting services is to help parents to teach their children the tools of learning. Located in Ojai, CA, Mother of Divine Grace School serves over 4,600 students.

Mother of Divine Grace School offers a Catholic, classical approach to home schooling. It is a program that has been developed by "trial and error". In other words, it has had a test run. Mother of Divine Grace School understands the challenges that homeschoolers face and thus offers different levels of service. Mother of Divine Grace School wants to meet the needs of each individual family, and realizes that these needs will vary from family to family. The consultants, teachers, lesson plans, materials, standardized testing, and assessments can provide families with clear educational goals, the appropriate level of support, as well as the needed structure and flexibility. These will lead to academic success.

Mother of Divine Grace: Expected School-Wide Learning Goals

By the time students leave Mother of Divine Grace School, they will be

Active Learners

- ♦ MODG students possess the knowledge to perform independent research.
- ♦ All of the MODG students have the opportunity to do self-directed projects using a variety of resources.
- ♦ MODG students are able to recognize, articulate, and implement their own learning styles to enhance the learning process.

Effective Communicators

- ♦ MODG students are able to read and comprehend diverse written materials.
- ♦ All students demonstrate rhetorical and analytical skills in their written work.
- ♦ MODG students express themselves with confidence in written communication.

Independent Thinkers

- ♦ All MODG students are able to analyze information, form their own opinions, and provide evidence for those opinions.
- ♦ MODG students consider multiple perspectives when drawing conclusions.

Multifaceted Individuals

- ♦ At MODG, students pursue a wide range of academic and personal interests.
- ♦ Through interdisciplinary studies, core requirements, and elective credits, Mother of Divine Grace students develop an awareness of themselves as members of a universal Catholic community.