My *Montessori Shoes*:

Equipping the Feet of Ministry

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Congratulations! Today is your day.
You’re off to Great Places! You’re off and away!
You have brains in your head.
You have feet in your shoes.
You can steer yourself in any direction you choose.
You’re on your own. And you know what you know.
And YOU are the guy who’ll decide where to go.¹ (emphasis added)

These ministerial feet in ministerial shoes travel many miles.—they travel to various places and in assorted directions. They meet a multitude of people in all stages of life—they encounter joy and success, but also tears and strife. They encourage—they support—they comfort—they challenge—they teach—they lead. They walk the road of ministry—the journey of fulfilling the baptismal call to be prophet, priest, and king in a cosmic, interconnected universe where God, nature, the self, and the other move together in a dynamic dance of perichoresis—proceeding around and continually transforming one another in a circular relationship of revelation.

These ministerial feet take the first steps...left...right...left...right...they walk up hills and down steps. Sometimes they are quick—sometimes they are slow. At times they are seemingly alone—often they are ‘one’ amid a flurry of feet. These feet support and carry the complete self—organism, psyche, soul—off and away to the Great Places of encounter with God, nature, self, and others.

Left foot, Left foot, Right foot, right.
Feet in the morning, feet at night.

¹ Dr. Seuss, Oh, the Places You’ll Go, (New York: Random House, 1990), 1-2.
Left foot, Left foot, Left foot, Right.
Wet foot, Dry foot, Low foot, High foot.
Front feet, back feet, red feet, black feet.
Left foot, Right foot.
Feet, Feet, Feet

How many, many feet you meet...²

Ministerial feet need ministerial shoes. The shoes that surround and protect these feet empower the wearer to travel this complicated road of ministry. They lend the needed support to walk these many miles and serve the many, many feet they meet. They complete the outfit of ministerial life and illustrate the fashion sense of the minister. Just as there are many feet to meet, there are many shoes from which to choose. The shoes that the minster opts to wear provide needed direction and the sense of being grounded in theory and philosophy. "With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet,"³ the minister steps out into the world to share the Good News and live as a child of light.⁴ These steps are the beginning of a path of ministerial life—a life that is empowered by the chrism of salvation and leads this "member of Christ who is Priest, Prophet, and King"⁵ along a path that moves within and ever toward the heavenly kingdom. It is a path that is greatly inspired by the words of Maria Montessori, "We shall walk together

³ Seuss, Oh the Places You'll Go, 2.
⁴ See Ephesians 5:8b.
on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe and are connected with each other to form one whole unity."  

My ministerial shoes are Montessori Shoes. Maria Montessori's cosmic view of the world and her vision of the child as the "maker of man"7 and "well-spring of love"8 are part of my very consciousness and steer my feet on the path of ministry—they are my equipment for navigating God's call of continuous self-discovery and personal transformation, as well as my ministerial influence in the world.

The realization of my own role as beloved, as made in the Divine image, directs my path as I look upon the child—upon the one who is and the one who is to become. It calls forth a deep desire to go out and share the love that I feel—the love of God that dwells deep within me—to share it not only with the child, but with all children of God—all those called into relationship with God and with one another. I feel what St. Paul wrote, "For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God...you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit itself bears witness to our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:14-17). I know what I know—I know that I am called—called by love and called into love.

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6 Maria Montessori, To Educate the Human Potential, (Adyar, Madras, India: Vasanta Press, 1961), 8


8 Ibid., 289.
This love — this agape love — is the kind of love that steers one in the direction of wholeness and transformation — it decides to go the way that is selfless and self-giving. It is given out of love, because it is love. It is a love that seeks only goodness and beauty. It is a love that builds love in others and seeks to spread itself out into all the corners of the world — to each person, to each creature, to the whole of Creation. It is a love that is only born of God — it is rooted in the heart of and mind of the Creator and poured forth into all of Creation.

"Beloved, let us love one another, because love is of God; everyone who loves is begotten by God and knows God...Beloved, if God so loved us, we also must love one another...his love is brought to perfection in us" (1Jn. 4:7, 11, 12b). As illustrated in these words from St. John, it is a love that is dynamic — that takes these ministerial feet into all corners of the community, engaging in each situation so as to build God’s Kingdom one step, one foot at a time.

Slow feet, Quick feet.
Trick feet, Sick feet.
Up feet, Down feet...
Small feet, Big feet...
His feet, Her feet...
In the house and on the street,
How many, many feet you meet...⁹

No matter where these ministerial feet go — no matter what other feet they meet, they fit snuggly into my Montessori Shoes which have soles of this agape love.

Maria Montessori’s deep love and respect for the child guided her observation and allowed her to discover the child, the hidden manifestation of the human person and the secret potentialities of self-transformation and self-creation. She did not see childhood as merely a stage of development, but rather "a hitherto unimplemented social factor in the building up of human society."\footnote{Maria Montessori and others, The Child in the Church, ed. E. M. Standing (1929 Catechetical Guild Educational Society, repr. Chantilly, VA: The Madonna and Child Atrium), 75.} She saw the formative nature of the human person emerge from the spiritual embryo, the unique characteristic that sets the human person apart from the animal world.

This postnatal work is a constructive activity which is carried on in what may be called "the formative period," and it makes the baby into a kind of "Spiritual Embryo." Man seems to have two embryonic periods. One is prenatal, like that of the animals; the other is postnatal and only man has this...If the work of man on earth is related to his spirit, to his creative intelligence, then his spirit and his intelligence must be the fulcrum of his existence, and of all the workings of his body. About this fulcrum his behavior is organized, and even his physical economy. The whole man develops within a kind of spiritual halo.\footnote{Montessori, The Absorbent Mind, 61.}

When God fashioned the human person out of the clay of the earth, and "blew into his nostrils the breath of life,"\footnote{Genesis 2:7.} this psychic energy was born—this spiritual halo enveloped the human person and began to take root in the depths of this living creature made in the image and likeness of God.

Recognizing, respecting, and nurturing this psychic energy, this spiritual halo, this image of God within each person is the role of the minster. It is a role that takes the

\footnote{10 Maria Montessori and others, The Child in the Church, ed. E. M. Standing (1929 Catechetical Guild Educational Society, repr. Chantilly, VA: The Madonna and Child Atrium), 75.}
\footnote{11 Montessori, The Absorbent Mind, 61.}
\footnote{12 Genesis 2:7.}
ministerial feet to a new height and a new depth, to a new breadth and a new width.\textsuperscript{13} It is what Maria Montessori identified as the true nature of a teacher and what she believed would transform the world, "Now what really makes a teacher is love for the human child: for it is love that transforms the social duty of the educator into the higher consciousness of a mission." Duty and responsibility become \textit{mission}—identifying the self with that of Christ to be \textit{Priest, Prophet, King}. Motivated by \textit{agape love} the minister seeks to become the agent of grace—freeing each person’s psychic nature and unlocking the deep resonance of the Divine spirit within each human person.

This, in turn, transforms the world; for all Creation is interconnected and interwoven together: "Free a child's potential and you will transform him to the world."\textsuperscript{14} All Creation reveals the Trinitarian God—"For in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). The freeing of each person's psychic identity—the use of the human person's creative intelligence becomes progressive incarnation. It continues the work initiated by the Creator, made "flesh" in the person of Jesus, and empowered by the Holy Spirit. The psychic spirit within each human being connects with the Spirit that hovered over the waters (Gn. 1:2), with the Spirit that came upon Mary (Lk. 1:35), with the Spirit that rested upon Jesus at his baptism (Lk 3:22), with the Spirit that Jesus


breathed on the Apostles after the Resurrection (Jn. 20:22), with the Spirit that filled those gathered at Pentecost (Acts 2:4).

Out there things can happen
and frequently do
to people as brainy
and footsy as you.
And when things start to happen
don't worry. Don't stew.
Just go right along.
You'll start happening too.15

The spirit within the human person makes things happen—taking what is deep within each person and causing the happening to move from the self, to others, to the world out there. "I will put my spirit in you that you may come to life, and I will settle you in your land. Then you shall know that I am the Lord" (Ez. 37:14).

My Montessori Shoes awaken the ministerial life within me and settle me in the "land" of service—making things happen both around me and within me. Each step in my Montessori Shoes is a part of God's great plan—not only God's plan for me, for the child, and for the world, but also God's plan for each person I encounter—for all those many, many feet I might meet.

So be sure when you step.
Step with care and great tact
and remember that Life's
a Great Balancing Act.
Just never forget to be dexterous and deft.
And never mix up your right foot with your left.
And will you succeed?

15 Seuss, Oh The Places You'll Go, 7-8.
Yes! You will indeed!\textsuperscript{16}

As I walk in my \textit{Montessori Shoes}, I am called to step with \textit{great care}. I am called to be \textit{dexterous and deft} as I encounter the \textit{child} and the psychic life present within each human person. I am called to manifest the \textit{agape love} that Jesus embodied as he walked the world in his \textit{Christological Shoes}.

\begin{verse}
You're Off to Great Places!
Today is your day!
Your mountain is waiting.
So...get on your way.\textsuperscript{17}
\end{verse}

My way begins and ends with a prayer—a prayer for the life of each child—a prayer for my walk in these \textit{Montessori Shoes}. May my feet meet Christ in each and every step that I take and in the \textit{many, many feet that I meet}. The words of Maria Montessori echo within me as I step out each day in my \textit{Montessori Shoes} and live the \textit{ministerial life}, "\textbf{HELP ME, O GOD, TO ENTER INTO THE SECRET OF CHILDHOOD, THAT I MAY KNOW, LOVE, AND SERVE THE CHILD IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE LAWS OF THY JUSTICE AND FOLLOWING THY HOLY WILL.}"\textsuperscript{18}

\textbf{Amen}

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 50-52.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., 55-56.

\textsuperscript{18} Montessori, \textit{The Absorbent Mind}, 286.
Bibliography


