

Published in
The Tidings
May 8, 2009

‘God is a changer’

Butterfly metamorphosis teaches kindergarteners metaphysical lesson.

By R. W. DELLINGER
Staff Writer



On a breezy, cloudless SoCal Friday in April, with the roar of jet planes from nearby LAX screaming overhead, 33 kindergarten kids at Visitation School in Westchester helped release five Painted Lady butterflies — one at a time — after saying a final public prayer for them.

Parent Jessica Echeverry, who spearheaded the four-week metamorphosis project, carefully

coached each Painted Lady — regally adorned with orange, white, brown and black colored wings — out of their comfy mesh cylinder home with the students crowded around as she passed the insects from finger to anxiously-held-out finger.

To boisterous schoolyard cheers and clapping, the first butterfly flew away at precisely 12:03 p.m. The noise level was even louder for #2 and #3, drowning out the planes as they flew away. But #4 did a half-dozen tight loops — like she/he didn't really want to leave the red brick parochial school at 88th Street and Emerson Avenue — before finally taking off for good.

And who could blame #4?

For four weeks — from tiny nearly invisible caterpillars to hanging-upside-down golden chrysalis to beautiful butterflies — the insects had been lovingly watched, measured, written about, fed and prayed over.

“We observed them, we prayed for them, we learned about the cycle and how it repeats itself,” said Echeverry. Her son Darien, a six-year-old kindergartener at



Visitation, had suggested his whole class do the hands-on life science experiment after his family had done its own trial run.

And his eager-beaver classmates wound up filling out observation sheets about



what stage the insects were in, how they looked by drawing pictures of them, along with measuring their growth with special “caterpillar” rulers. Then once the caterpillars had done their final molt revealing the chrysalis, they were put inside the special cylinder habitat until they came out as full-fledged butterflies and were dotingly fed orange slices for the nectar they crave.

“Our motto, our message, through all of this was ‘*God is a changer*’— that he changes things and makes them as he needs them,” the Sunday school teacher said. “I wanted the children to have a more hands-on experience of new life. I wanted to focus on the Resurrection, the fact that we change in Lent. That’s why we decide to give something up or to do something more.

“I wanted for them to see that change and touch it and be a part of that. What better creature to do it than with a butterfly. And we acted it out. They changed themselves from laying on the ground pretending to be an egg and rolling on the ground like a caterpillar, then pretending to be a cocoon and finally lifting their arms and flying gracefully around the classroom.



“So they got it,” she added with a gratified grin. “Absolutely. Absolutely.”

Kindergarten teacher Leslie del Prado looked forward to the weekly caterpillar-to-



butterfly lessons, too. The seasoned educator describes them as interdisciplinary, combing biology, math, art and religion.

“It was great because Mrs. Echeverry did a craft, they painted butterflies,” she said. “She also taught them information about the butterflies, and then she would review it at the end of the lesson: ‘What did you learn today?’”

“So it was a wonderful experience for them. And the kids said, ‘We want her to come back.’ They just loved it.”



The only melancholy moment came as “release day” approached. The teacher tried to prepare students for this day by asking them if they thought the butterflies would want to live in the net cage for the rest of their lives.

“And they said, ‘No, we have to let them go. We have to let them be free,’” del Prado said. “Still, there were a lot who were sad because they took care of them for over a week. So I think they felt a connection to the butterflies.”

Harley Lampkin did. But the six-year-old was happy, too. “I liked it when they flew away, ’cause they looked beautiful when they went into the air,” he mused.

Nearby, Gerardo Guzman, 5, was nodding with his lips pursed in a satisfied expression. The kindergartener had held one on his finger before it flew away into the blue yonder. When asked if the monthlong experiment had taught him anything about God, he nodded again. “That the butterflies, they lay eggs and then they start over,” Gerardo said. “And when they lay eggs and die, they go to heaven. Then the eggs start over again.”

