

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd



The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd takes its name from the parable and image of Jesus that seemed to appeal most to young children, no matter what their race, gender, or socio-economic status. The statue above is representative of the one of the earliest known Christian images, discovered in the catacombs of Rome.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a meeting ground of two mysteries: the mystery of God and the mystery of the child. An interpersonal relationship is always a mystery; it is more so when it involves a relationship with God; when the relationship is between God and the child the mystery is greater still. (*Sofia Cavalletti, RPOC, p. 30*)

Children's Religious Formation

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is an approach to the religious formation of children that is based on the conviction that God and the Child are in relationship. Our role as adults is to protect and nurture this bond. In the Catechesis we present age-appropriate themes from the Bible and our liturgy with manipulative materials the children use to internalize and ponder the great mysteries of our faith. We try to put the child in touch with those "sources" through which God reveals and communicates Himself in living form; namely, the Bible and Liturgy, in balanced proportion. (*Rebekah Rojcewicz, RPOC, p.28*)



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Developed by Sofia Cavalletti, an Italian Hebrew scripture scholar, building on the work and methods of Maria Montessori, the Catechesis seeks to give children the guidance and vocabulary which enable them to become aware of their relationship with God and give expression to it. With the Catechesis we help each child to continue to fall in love with God while building community among peers.

Creating an Atrium:

Part of the Deep Formation Process of a Catechist is the creation of the Atrium. The atrium is a calm and peaceful place where time seems to slow down. Children and catechists listen to God together through silence, scripture, liturgy, song, formal and informal prayer, ordinary practical life exercises, and movement. In this setting, and given the opportunity, children often reveal profound things about God that no one has ever told them. The materials and movement are an aid to their reflections on scripture and liturgy and their rich relationship with God.



Most of the materials in an atrium are made by hand by the catechists and faith group associated with the atrium. Making materials by hand and searching for particular items are a deep part of the formation process of the catechists who train approximately 90 - 120 hours for each level

The Catechist

The role of the adult in the atrium is secondary. It is the child's own inner guide and teacher, the Holy Spirit, which directs the mind and heart. The importance of the catechist is to place materials within reach and share scripture that fills a particular longing at each stage in a child's spiritual life. Geography materials of Biblical geography helps place Jesus in time and space.

The Atrium



Children need their own place to work with these essentials and many other key elements of our faith. This place is called an atrium. Montessori coined this term recalling the part of the Early Christian church building where catechumens would gather in preparation to join the church. Each atrium is specially designed with child-sized furniture including a prayer table for gathering, a model altar, as well as materials to deepen their familiarity with more parables and the Mass itself. After being presented with new material in a small group,

children are free to choose work which particularly speaks to them to foster the growth of their own relationships with God.

The atrium is a place where the child comes to know the great realities of life as a Christian, but also and above all, it is a place where the child begins to live these realities in meditation and prayer. There is nothing of the academic classroom about the atrium; it is not a place for religious instruction but religious life. (*Sofia Cavalletti, RPOC, Good shepherd sheepfoldp. 56*)



Developmentally Structured

Each level of the child's work explores the fundamental theme of covenant, God's call and our response, as reflected in the Bible and as lived in liturgy.

At Level I the 3-6 year-olds have the capacity to receive and enjoy the most essential elements of our faith: the mysteries of the Kingdom of God, the announcement of God's love given for us in the person of Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

At Level II the 6-9 year-olds focus on the image of the True Vine, deepening their relationship with God, family, friends and the larger community as they prepare for and celebrate communion, broadening their understanding of Mass.

At Level III 9-12 year-olds listen to the Old Testament, following the history of God's plan for salvation, linking all people together in communion. They begin to ask, "What is the Reign of God, and what is my place in it?" It is a primary question which lays the foundation for a lifetime commitment to God.



Sometimes, when a catechist, pastor or Director of Faith Formation first realize that CGS is not a program that can be ordered from a catalogue and that the training for just one level may take from 1 to 2 years, it may seem like a daunting (maybe even impossible) task lies ahead. Yet the overall



experience of studying the Catechesis, making materials, learning to interact with children and understand them in a wholly different way than one was used to, and listening to God with children, often becomes one of the most powerful, life-changing and formative faith experiences of a catechist's life. CGS training has often been likened to the formation process of religious orders. Things that take time to do and learn often result in greater depth of understanding. Indeed, to be a CGS catechist is a calling, and listening to God together with the children, and through the children, becomes a holy and transcendent experience.



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