

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd New Parent Handbook



CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD
SHEPHERD

Generally a day in the Atrium will include:

- A presentation of a part of the Bible or Liturgy given to the children by the Catechist
- A significant period of time for children to work with materials of their own choice on their own
 - A gathering time of worship at the prayer table

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Glossary of Terms

There are some terms used regularly in the Catechesis that may be new to you. Becoming familiar with these words will make it easier to understand the work being done in the Atrium.

Catechesis—A word first used in the early Church to describe the instruction people received in preparation for Baptism. In our context, the Catechesis is the way children are prepared to participate fully in Christian community. Sometimes CGS—Catechesis of the Good Shepherd—is referred to simply as Catechesis or the Catechesis.

Catechist—The catechist is an adult who guides the children. This person is not the teacher in the traditional sense. Instead she prepares the space where God and the child can come together. She creates materials, presents them to the child, and then participates with the child in a sense of wonder about God. It usually is used for persons having completed at least 90 hours of formation.

Assistant—The assistant is a catechist who participates with the lead catechist in creating materials, preparing and maintaining the environment, and observing the needs of the children. Assistants may or may not have completed a formation course.

Atrium—Another word from the early Church, it was the name of the room-sized entryway into the Church where people new to the faith were instructed for Baptism. In the Catechesis, the Atrium is the room that is prepared for the children. It is not a classroom. Instead it is a place of religious experience, community, and worship.

Materials—Many kinds of materials are found in the Atrium. They are often handmade, and are usually beautiful. **The most important thing about the materials is that they are closely linked to the Bible and liturgy.** Children work with the materials to meditate on the stories of our faith and to reflect on the traditions of our worship. Examples of materials found in the Level I Atrium include small figures of Mary and the angel for the Annunciation, Jerusalem mustard seeds for the Parable of the Mustard Seed, and a small Baptismal font and Paschal candle to explore Holy Baptism. Level II materials mirror those of Level I and become more involved, a response to the growing curiosity and ability of the child. Level III materials build on the foundation of Levels I & II but are geared toward the emerging abilities and needs of the 9-12 year old child. The central work in this atrium is called “The Plan of God.”

Presentation—A presentation is made by the Catechist for the children. The Word of God is proclaimed through a scripture reading or a description of an aspect of the liturgy and a demonstration of how to use the associated materials.



What CGS looks like:

- there are many different areas where the children may sit and receive lessons or work, as well as 3 different ages of child who are instructed not simply according to age, but also interest and ability.
- the catechist rarely presents to more than 3 or 4 children at a time. The child's activity, beyond the presentation he or she receives, is chosen by the child from a variety of choices that are offered. In this way, the child is generally the director of the class time, choosing work that corresponds to his or her interests and abilities.
- Each trained catechist has an "album" of presentations, 50+ presentations per level, complete with direct and indirect aims laid out-- these are the goals of what we want the children to achieve and how we measure our success in the presentation. The material from these presentations is drawn from liturgy (the Mass) and scripture.
- the CGS catechist falls into two categories: lead catechist and assistant. The lead catechist is someone who has undergone a 90-hour formation/training course (over 2 weeks of formation) for the level in which they work. Each level is a pre-requisite for the next, so if someone is a lead catechist in Level III, she or he has completed a 90 hour training course for Level I and a 90 hour formation course for



Level I, as well as 90+ hours for Level III. It does not necessarily mean that the catechist is "experienced," yet, and it is definitely a learning process to catechize in this way, but generally catechists will return year after year to serve and often get to serve the same child for multiple years.



- the material is presented on a 3 year cycle and is presented according to the age and ability and interest of the individual child as much as possible. A material is never "done," and a child who wants to delve more deeply into geography or the parables or the bible work may always choose to do so.
- a good catechist is a "co-listener" with the children to the Word that she or he proclaims. The true catechist in the atrium is the Holy Spirit, and adults come to learn and be led with a listening, rather than instructing, stance before the child.



How CGS was developed over the course of the last 60+ years

CGS began simply. The foundress, Sofia Cavalletti, was a well-educated scholar of the Hebrew Scriptures, and was asked to help prepare a friend's child for First Holy Communion. She took this role very seriously, and collaborated with other women, especially Gianna Gobbi, who had great interest and experience with child development research and success of Maria Montessori, this group of women developed what we know today as Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. It has been over 60 years now of observing what lessons and parables most resonate in the heart of the child, and what work leads them to desire holiness and develop spiritually according to their great potential.



How CGS meet the developmental needs of the 3-6, 6-9, and 9-12 year old child

It is worth pointing out that while CGS begins with the needs of the 3 year old child in mind, it continues to grow and change to meet the needs of children in their own unique developmental stage. The need for repetition in young children is more than met in the Level I atrium by the work presented there, while the need but lack of desire for repetition is met for older children by varied works on the same topic. Many of the materials in a Level III atrium can be as difficult or simple as the child needs them to be, and the extension works (e.g. research that the child may do) are directed exactly where the child is. This is why one never really outgrows the material in Level III (I know I haven't), but the way in which it is used changes.



How CGS follows the guidelines of the General Directory for Catechesis

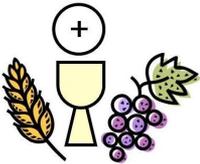
The GDC and the NDC are both followed very carefully by the content presented in CGS. The difference is merely in the method and approach. We have a catechist in our Level II (1st grade-3rd grade) atrium who had taught 2nd grade faith formation for years and she was impressed at how everything that was covered in the book was woven seamlessly into the CGS approach. I have templates covering exactly how our presentations work to meet these guidelines available for parents who want them.

Why CGS is respected worldwide and used by the Nashville Dominican Sisters and Missionaries of Charity

When asked why the Missionaries of Charity have gone to using CGS in their schools as well as in the formation of their own sisters, the superior of the order (after Mother Theresa's death) replied, "Contemplation." The Good Shepherd approach, facilitates contemplation in the child... more than just thinking about God, it is a communication with him, and a driving force behind the desire for holiness.

Suggestions and Information for Parents

As a parent, you can support this important work by bringing your child to Sunday Mass and to the Atrium each week and arriving on time as much as possible. New presentations are made to the children almost every week, and we delve further and deeper into the faith as we go along. Your child's participation in CGS is a preparation for and a deepening of his/her participation in the mass.



Going to the Atrium is more like going to Church than going to school. Just as talking about what you did or felt at Mass might be difficult, children may not be able to put into words what has happened there. Especially for the youngest children, the beginnings of CGS are really a cultivation of concentration and silence. The fruits of this approach, however, are seen even in the youngest children.

You can support your child's work in the Atrium by offering affirming comments about your child's time spent growing with God. Also, pointing out elements of the liturgy that correspond with things we are learning in Atrium can be helpful. When you have questions about what your child is doing in the Atrium, there are many resources at your disposal: talk to a Catechist to learn more, check out a book from our CGS parent library, or go online at www.cgsusa.org.

You may also wish to check out our blog:

<http://allsaintscgs.blogspot.com>

This will give you a snapshot of all 3 levels and what we are doing over the course of the year!

God Bless!

Mandie DeVries, Director of Religious Education,
and CGS Catechist

