

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is an approach to the religious formation of children, 3-12 years of age. It originated in 1954 with the founding of the children's center or "atrium" in Rome, Italy by Sophia Cavaletti. Inspired by Montessori principles of education, it now extends to many countries around the world. The Sisters of Charity are now using this method to share the Good News with children in places it is often difficult to see God's goodness. Atriums can be found in home, parish, and school settings.

What is the atrium? The atrium is a room which is dedicated to the spiritual formation of our young parishioners. Here at All Saints, the atrium is the circular room which is located at the end of the corridor leading between church and school. It is the specially prepared space where the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd takes place.

The catechesis is based on the conviction that God and the child are in relationship. The child has a deep need to experience and a special capacity to enjoy the presence of God. What sets the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd apart from most other methods of learning is that it has no "textbook" but rather many "hands on" materials. Using a Montessori-based approach, materials handcrafted by our parishioners help the young children learn about the Mass, Baptism, Bible Geography, History of the Life of Jesus, the Kingdom of God Parables, Practical Life, Art, and Prayer.

How does it work? Small groups of children come together for a weekly session in the atrium, which introduces them to the Bible and the Liturgy—the two pillars of our faith. The weekly sessions, led by an adult catechist and assistants, begin with just 30 minutes as the children are oriented to rhythm of the atrium. In time, the sessions last for up to 90 minutes.

Another essential aspect of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is the adult catechist. Catechists participate in several hours of formation related to three developmental levels, ages 3-6, 6-9, and 9-12. Renee Timbrook (Levels I and II), Sandy Vascik (Level I), and Megan Eberly (Level I) are active catechists here at All Saints. Fr. Kent (Levels I and II) and a number of other parishioners have also completed the formation program.

This school year, our parish will offer an expanded experience of the atrium for our three, four, and five-year-old parishioners who are not yet enrolled in kindergarten. Kindergarten and 1st grade children enrolled in our Parish Religion Education Program (PREP) will also be using CGS as their catechesis program for 90 minutes each week. The children of All Saints School, grades pre-K, K, 1st, and 2nd, 3rd, and 4th grades will have at least an hour of time in the atrium. All Second graders will have time in the atrium as part of their sacramental preparation experience.

We are so thankful for this wonderful program and the gift of the atrium. It is truly a blessing to have a special, quiet place where we can come together and listen to God. "Be still and know that I am God" Psalm 46: 10