

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is a Montessori-based method which helps children ages 3-12 to discover liturgy, scripture, and prayer in a beautifully prepared environment known as the Atrium. The Atrium is in the former classroom on the lower level in Gesu School.

History

During 1954 in Rome, Hebrew scholar and theologian Sofia Cavalletti made a discovery that changed her life. She saw a way of being in the presence of God that is both unique to the child and a gift to the adult who stops long enough to notice. With her Montessori collaborator, Gianna Gobbi, Dr. Cavalletti began a lifelong service to children that is helping children worldwide to encounter and explore the mystery of God.

CGS is an approach to the religious formation of children that is rooted in the Bible, the liturgy of the church and the educational principles of Maria Montessori. Children gather in a room specially prepared for them, called an atrium, which contains simple yet beautiful materials that they use to draw near to God. In the early church, the atrium was the place where the catechumens were prepared. For the child, the atrium is a place of preparation for the involvement in the larger worshipping community.

The Child and God

We believe that there is a deep bond between God and the child, which produces the desire to draw near to God. The adult's role is to prepare the environment and to present materials that elicit the child's response. We listen with the child and together we ask, "God, who are you? How do you love us?"

A Joyful Journey

Everything we do in the atrium helps the adult and child experience and express joy. Prayer is the aim of the atrium, and our joy becomes a spiritual practice. In the atrium, adults are not traditional 'teachers', but rather co-wonderers with the children. "I wonder how the tiny mustard seed is like the Kingdom of God? I wonder what power is inside the mustard seed that makes it grow so large?" Together, they enter deeply into the Light and Love of Christ.

Bible and Liturgy

We explore the scriptural and liturgical traditions of our faith, lifting up those aspects that experience with the children have proven to be most essential. For the youngest children (ages 3-6), these include prayer, Eucharist, Baptism, Parables of the Kingdom of God, Biblical geography, infancy narratives of Jesus, and the Paschal mystery. Older children (ages 6-12) continue these meditations and receive an introduction to Bible study, salvation history, moral parables, the sacraments, Old Testament studies, and each person's place in the Plan of God.

Child and Adult Formation

The CGS curriculum is broken into three developmental levels that build upon one another: Ages 3 to 6, 6 to 9, and 9-12. Adults take part in substantial formation courses at each level to learn who the child is and how to ponder with the child the mysteries of God's kingdom. Catechists across the US and around the world commonly express how this work has profoundly deepened and enriched their own faith journeys.

Formation courses occur in all regions of the USA by the national association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. There is also a wide selection of books and other resources to help those who wish to learn more about the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and children's spirituality available from the National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.