

Curriculum: **Catechesis of the Good Shepherd**

Publisher: The National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd
(Sophia Cavaletti, originator) www.cgsusa.org
PO Box 1084 Oak Park, IL 60304 (708-386-8032)

Denomination: Independent (Roman Catholic in origin)

Foundational doctrine: To involve adults and children in a common religious experience in which the primary values of childhood are predominant, especially those of simplicity, contemplation and joy. It is an approach to the religious formation of children. It is rooted in the Bible, the liturgy of the church, and the educational principles of Maria Montessori. Children gather in an "atrium," a room prepared for them, which contains simple yet beautiful materials that they use. *Catechesis is the passing on of things of faith from one person to another by word of mouth in relationship and through active involvement – using as our guide, Christ Jesus Our Lord. God and the child have a unique relationship with one another, particularly before the age of six.*

Scriptural/Theological Content: Materials on the life of Christ and his teachings help make the mystery of God concrete for the child. Selected parables (especially The Good Shepherd) serve as keys to unlock the mystery of the kingdom of God and to nurture the child's natural sense of wonder. Through the arranging of the chalice, paten, etc., the child becomes familiar with the articles of the Mass, entering a relationship with God in the liturgy. "Help me fall in love with God by myself."

Articulation: Throughout all levels, the child encounters the essentials of the Faith. All levels include presentations on the Sacraments, the Bible, Geography, Infancy and Passion Narratives, Prophecies, Parables, Maxims in a manner developmentally appropriate. Presentations begin with an introduction to the Atrium, The Parable of the Good Shepherd, then lessons follow the Church year.

Interest / Abilities of Teachers: The adult's task is to prepare the sacred space (Atrium) for the children so that they can respond to the holy relationship between child and God, first proclaimed to them through Jesus, the Good Shepherd. There are three levels of retreat-like courses, focusing on children ages 3-6, 6-9, and 9-12. Everyone begins with the Level I course, which is foundational to becoming attuned to the religious life of the child. All courses cover age-appropriate themes for children from the Bible and liturgy, the purpose and use of the handmade materials, an introduction to the atrium, experience in presenting materials, and help in preparing a personal handbook (the "Catechist Album"). Courses are offered throughout the country and in varied formats

Learning Activities, Format & Media: The materials in the Atrium are attractively displayed inviting children to explore and deepen experiences at their own rhythm. Shelves include maps of Israel and miniature environments representing the elements of the parables and historic events from Scripture. There is an altar and related furnishings conveying the centrality of Eucharist and Baptism. In the Montessori tradition of experiential and tactile learning, children are given time to respond contemplatively and creatively to scripture by drawing, painting, or working hands on with materials that relate to the scripture (seeds, altar linens.)

Setting: The Atrium is a place for religious life, for community and worship – not a classroom for instruction. It is a sacred space set aside for children, which can be compared to a retreat house facilitating recollection and silence.

Inviolable Principle of Choice: The child is invited to internalize and respond to a presentation by working with the materials themselves. The catechist does not give answers or impart information, but presents the reality and asks questions. The catechist assists in the child's own discovery of the meaning.

Age group differentiation: Level 1 is ages 3-6; Level 2 is ages 6-9; Level 3 is ages 9-12

Home Involvement: None noted, although the parish as a whole must embrace the Catechesis in order for it to succeed. It becomes an integral part of the life of the whole parish because the Atrium is a worship space that must be respected.

Language: Convictional language is used throughout as children learn religious language and explore their personal relationship to God.

Sociological: Each child is seen as an individual equal in the eyes of God

Attendance Pattern: The central themes of the Catechesis are repeated every year, going deeper into them more each time, according to each child and to the group. The program depends on the moment of the child and of the group; therefore sporadic attendance would decrease the effectiveness of the program on an individual which would not effect another child who was regular.

Cost: For training, registration fees \$250-500. Materials are made by the catechists. Scripture booklets average \$30. Supportive books available from Liturgy Training Publications <http://www.ltp.org/m-7-catechesis-of-the-good-shepherd.aspx>