

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd



Frequently asked Questions

What exactly is the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a catechetical program for children ages 3-12 years. It started in Italy in 1954 and has spread throughout the world. It is designed to help children nurture their relationship with Jesus and learn about the Catholic faith in a developmentally appropriate way. It is based on the educational principles of Maria Montessori, Sacred Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church, and the spiritual needs of the child.

Who started the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a work of two Italian women, Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi. Sofia Cavalletti was a Scripture scholar and Gianna Gobbi was a trained Montessori teacher. They met together after being asked to prepare some young children for First Communion. Together they began working with the children and responding to their interests and spiritual needs. Over the next 60 years, they prepared materials and environments that spoke to the children and helped them in their spiritual life.

Is the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Catholic?

Yes. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is fully in line with the Catechism of the Catholic Church and is steeped in Catholic belief and tradition. The curriculum used in the Catechesis is primarily based in Scripture and Liturgy. From age 3 on, children are initiated into the life of the Church by studying the liturgy, reading Scripture, and living a life of prayer.

What is an “atrium”?

The atrium is the specialized environment that is prepared for the children. Essentially it is a classroom, but the term atrium is used to emphasize that it is more than just a place of learning. It is also a place of prayer and contemplation, where adults and children together listen to the Word of God and celebrate the presence of God, the gift of Jesus, and the continued presence of Jesus in each other and the church.



Why are there several grade levels in one room together?

All the atrium environments have children from 2 or 3 grade levels. This encourages learning from each other and more clearly represents the church and family community. The environments encourage children to work and learn in small groups and large groups.

What textbook is used?

There is no textbook that is used in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Learning takes place in multiple ways throughout the session together. Many materials are in place for the children to use and to explore the topics of the curriculum. There is a schedule of presentations and topics that the children are introduced to over the years they are in a particular environment. The catechists follow a detailed lesson plan for each presentation they give or material they introduce. In addition, many reference books are available for the children to explore topics of interest. The Bible is used frequently during sessions. The curriculum for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is fully in line with our Diocesan objectives for each grade level.



Are there any tests the children take to make sure they are learning?

No. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd does not have tests or quizzes to “measure” learning. The primary goal of any catechesis is to nurture a relationship with Jesus. This cannot be measured with questions and answers. The Catechesis seeks to give children and adults the opportunity and means to strengthen their relationship with Christ, understand the love God has for each of us, and contemplate how we live out our response to God’s love in daily life. The responses of the children, their art work, and their intense concentration in the atrium show that our goals are being met.



Why are some children “pouring beans” or “polishing wood” in the atrium? What does that have to do with catechesis?

These types of activities are called “practical life” and are an integral part of the atriums for the younger children. Activities such as pouring beans, polishing silver, arranging flowers, etc. are designed to help young children begin to “center” and concentrate. These materials help develop small and large motor skills, encourage independence, develop concentration, and lead children to peace and quiet—all essential skills for prayer life and a preparation for contemplations. They meet a developmental need of the young child to practice “practical” skills and imitate the world of the adult.

