



St. John the Baptist Catholic Church

Religious Education Department

CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

What is CGS?

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is a Montessori based approach to Catholic religious education where children can grow in their relationship to God through a deep engagement in Scripture and liturgy. The beauty and mystery of God's Kingdom are revealed through Gospel readings of the Parables, Infancy Narratives, and the Paschal Mystery Narratives. The child is prepared to enter more fully into the life of the Church and participate in the Holy Mass.

An atrium is a place where we prepare our hearts, minds and bodies to learn about God, our Church, and the Liturgy. It is a specially prepared room that contains beautiful, mostly handmade, materials that the children work with as a way of meditating upon the historical events of our faith and reflecting upon the significant aspects of our liturgy. All materials are all designed for little hands to grasp and manipulate easily.



Materials such as interactive maps of Israel and a three-dimensional model of the city of Jerusalem help situate Jesus as a real person in time.

"Help me come closer to God by myself."
— Sofia Cavalletti



Origins of CGS

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is the result of an unexpected, but joyful, journey that brought Sofia Cavalletti, a Hebrew scripture scholar, and Gianna Gobbi, a Montessori educator, together in Rome. Over a long period of time, they carefully observed children and discovered that, even from the earliest age, children eagerly seek religious experience and find fulfillment in it only if they are helped to live this experience in its deepest, most essential elements. They observed that children have an innate religious potential and relationship with God that can be actualized through work in a special environment called the atrium. Our work, as catechists, is not to "pour in" information, but, instead, to facilitate the child's relationship with God in an environment that nurtures this relationship and prepares the child for fuller participation in the liturgy, especially the Holy Mass. We provide a peaceful, reverent setting and plant seeds that are nurtured by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. We ponder these mysteries with the children, always wondering what He wants us to know.

The child's natural sense of wonder is a powerfully attractive force that advances the child towards the object of his astonishment. It takes root in one who is able to settle and rest in things. — Sofia Cavalletti

CGS Schedule

St. John the Baptist currently offers Level I and Level II Atria sessions.

The levels are grouped by age:

Level I: 3-6 years **Level II:** 6-9 years

Children attend one session per week.

- **Level I sessions are offered**
 - **Sundays at 8:45 a.m. and 10:45 a.m.**
 - **Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.**
- **Level II sessions are offered Wednesday & Thursday evenings at 6:30 p.m.**

- All children enrolled in St. John the Baptist Catholic School attend weekly CGS sessions through Level II.
- CGS is offered to all children enrolled in our pre-school as an optional program.

A typical atrium session consists of:

- A presentation originating from the Bible or Liturgy
- A period of self-directed, quiet work as an aid to contemplation and prayer
- A time of worship in the prayer corner.

Level I Atrium

Jesus said to his disciples: "Let the children come to me; do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these." -

Mk 10: 14



I am the Good Shepherd, and I know My own and My own know Me, even as the Father knows Me and I know the Father.

The Level I atrium fosters the 3-6 year old child's innate relationship with Jesus using the Parable of the Good Shepherd. The reality of Jesus in this image affirms within the child the covenant relationship that exists between the Good Shepherd, Jesus, and his

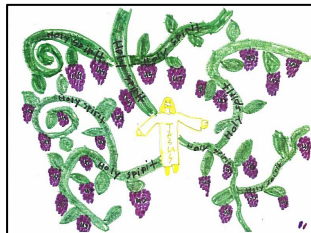
sheep. We wonder about these sheep that Jesus calls by name, feeds and protects, searches for when lost, and rejoices when found. The treasure hidden in the parable – of who these sheep could be – is for each child to joyfully discover on his or her own.

As the child is orientated to the atrium, we present lessons in grace and courtesy as well as controlled movement and practical life activities, such as pouring and transferring, to assist in the development of fine and gross motor skills and in preparation for more advanced work specific to the atrium. We also introduce nomenclature and gestures that are part of our life in the Church, such as the Sign of the Cross, Genuflection, and articles of the Mass, as well as the liturgical calendar and colors of our Church year.

The Good Shepherd lays down his life for his sheep.

Level II Atrium

"The Bible exceeds the limits of the created world because it speaks of a covenant that unites humanity to the whole of creation and to God himself... and is revealed through the incarnation event when God becomes human. This great cosmic reality is what satisfies the immense thirst of the older child." - Sofia Cavalletti, Religious Potential of the Child, 6-12 Years Old



The Level II atrium focuses the 6-9 year old on the image of Jesus as the True Vine. As children become more morally sensitive and aware, the loving relationship with the Good

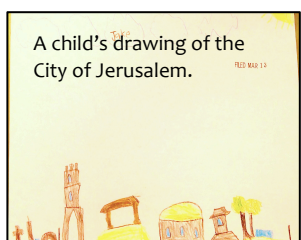
Shepherd is cultivated, nurtured, and transformed into branches and fruits on the vine. The unity and vastness of salvation history is revealed as we ponder the gifts of the natural world and wonder, "Who prepared all this for me?" Parousia, the time when God will be All in All, is the culmination of God's covenant with us. What is our part in this relationship? How do we remain on the vine? To respond to the child's need for guidance, the moral parables (i.e., The Good Samaritan) and parables of mercy (i.e., The Prodigal Son) along with the Maxims and Summary of the Law, offer models for comparing his or her own behavior with Jesus' examples.



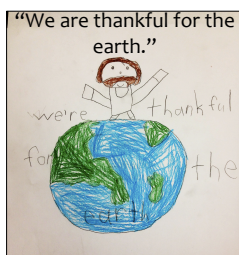
I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit. – John 15:5

The Atrium and the Child's Work

Each week begins with a presentation pertaining to sacred scripture or other aspect of the liturgy. The children then choose to the work they wish to do. They can work with one of the presentations, often in the form of a three-dimensional model or they can create artwork related to what they have seen or heard in the atrium. Especially in the younger ages, the artwork children produce often reveals their responses. Additional work also includes caring for the atrium environment in the form of "practical life" activities, such as cleaning and polishing, folding linens, or watering plants. The atrium setting allows the child to explore truth, beauty and goodness of the Church and contemplate the Kingdom of God, which is the culmination of God's love for each one of us. It is a place of peace and reverence, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation and prayer.



A child's drawing of the City of Jerusalem.



"We are thankful for the earth."



We love God



"Numerous drawings demonstrate how the children enter the parables message and how it resounds within them; the most apparent effect they derive from it is a serene peace..." – Sofia Cavalletti