

***The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd at St. Therese Parish  
New Parent Orientation***

***This approach*** to faith formation is grounded in the belief that children come to us already steeped in love and in relationship with God. As parents and educators, we see and respect God in the child and we know that the child belongs to God, not us. Deep spiritual needs of the child are met by the core bonds with their parents and more deeply satisfied and matched by the global, limitless love of God. The Good Shepherd introduces our God who loves unconditionally. God, as the Good Shepherd, calls us and knows us each by name. The Atrium is a place for children to enjoy this relationship.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has been developed through careful observations and research. In the Atrium, we use an indirect means of teaching as catechists. Discovery and meaning is made personally by each child in their own time and respectful of all involved in learning. In the Atrium, as in the teaching milieu of Jesus, questions are answered with presenting another question.

***Our method*** uses the Mass, the liturgical calendar, church history, Biblical geography, narratives, and parables. Atrium sessions involve both group presentations and independent work. There is a rhythm and pace, a time to contemplate, put away and say goodbye. Our Atrium begins with children ages 3-5 years old. Young children have natural capacities for awe and wonder, work and concentration, and the love of silence. The Atrium extends their encounters with liturgy and scripture. The catechists help prepare children for listening, proclaim scripture, and offer pondering questions. They gently intervene with individual children as needed, observe children, take careful notes, and track each child's individual work.

***Work areas*** in the Atrium help to nurture the child's relationship with God and prepare them to fully participate in the Mass. Practical Life, Biblical Geography, Baptism, The Prayer Corner, The Liturgical seasons and Church year, the Altar work, The Kingdom Parables, The Good Shepherd, The Cenacle/Last Supper and the Infancy Narratives. Works in the Atrium build upon other works and children re-visit themes from year to year based on the liturgical season of the Church year.

***Atrium Terminology*** We use different language in the Atrium and refer to "materials" which are found objects or hand-crafted. Children "work" instead of "play" with the materials in the Atrium. This is rooted in the Montessori and Christian principles as what gives dignity to the human person. Our language helps to draw reverence to our space and purpose. Practical Life is the initial area and is considered the basis for other works in the room. The educational philosophy suggests that this area provides a transition from the world outside into the Atrium environment. It offers a way to slow the body down with rhythmical movements of familiar tasks. Montessori discovered that children enjoy activities that give them self-confidence and are useful in everyday life: Care of Self (hand-washing), Care of the Environment (watering plants), Control of Movement (how

to enter the room), Fine Motor skills (pouring from a pitcher), and Grace and Courtesy (how to ask for help).

***Procedures.***

-As much as possible, please bring your children no earlier than 5 minutes before the session and pick them up no later than 5 minutes after the session ends. This allows for the time needed by catechists to prepare for and clean up after the session.

-After greeting your child's catechist, please help your child learn to place her or his shoes in cubby, hang coat, and wash hands.

-A change of clothes may be marked with your child's name and kept in your child's shoe cubby. We recognize that children may have bathroom accidents and feel more comfortable in a set a familiar clothes.

-Assist your child in using the bathroom located up the entry stairs and through the kitchen of the Parish Center. Other bathroom breaks will be taken by children individually, assisted by a catechist or other parent as needed.

-Please say goodbyes at the bench outside the Atrium door. We know that it will be difficult to leave your child in the first weeks, especially if they are reluctant. The catechists are aware separation anxiety may arise and will work with the parents to help make the transition for each child as smooth as possible.

***Attendance.*** Regular attendance in the Atrium is most beneficial for your child's experience. We are interested to know why your child might miss a session and ask that you call their catechist or leave a message in the Atrium voice mail to let us know, 206-325-2711 ext. 21 or call the Administrative Assistant at 206-325-2711. Please keep your child home if he or she is not feeling well or running a fever. In the event of a communicable disease, it is important that we inform other parents so that they can be aware of any significant symptoms.

***Catechesis of the Good Shepherd at St Therese Parish***  
***Background Information***

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a Christian, educational process for children ages 3 through 12 in which they experience and form an authentic faithful relationship with God.

The Catechesis is grounded in scriptural and liturgical study framed by Montessori's principles of education. This allows children to hear the Gospel through the use of sensorial, rich materials that represent essential proclamations of the Christian message. The catechist's role is to prepare the environment (the Atrium) and to make presentations which "call forth" the child's response rather than to "pour in" information.

The Atrium is a place of community and worship rather than a classroom for academic study. It is a place to be with and enjoy God, listen to the work, and to pray. It is designed to reflect the beauty of creation and God's abiding love. The materials in the Atrium are attractively displayed inviting the children to explore and deepen experiences at their own rhythm.

The vision for this faith experience began in 1954 with Dr. Sofia Cavalletti, a Hebrew and Scripture scholar. With the theological moorings of Hebrew scholarship, Scripture studies and Roman Catholic liturgy and doctrine, Cavalletti and her co-worker, Gianna Gobbi, a Montessori-trained educator, developed an approach which not only appealed to the profound religious intuition of children, but which evolved from the children themselves. Cavalletti and Gobbi found that whatever the culture, the children have vital religious needs and that they respond in similar ways to the most essential elements of the Christian message.

To learn more about the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, please visit the website: [cgs@cgsusa](mailto:cgs@cgsusa) or please reference *The Religious Potential of the Child* by Sofia Cavalletti or *Listening to God with Children* by Gianna Gobbi.