

ALL ABOUT THE ATRIUM

A NEWSLETTER FOR FAMILIES OF THE CHILDREN IN THE CGS ATRIUM

This month your child(ren) will enter a specially prepared environment called the ATRIUM. The Atrium is not a classroom, but can be likened to a retreat house for children.

Why is it called “Atrium” anyway? The word “atrium” actually means “portico, or porch entrance to a large house.” The Atrium was a term given to this space by Maria Montessori. It was chosen because in the ancient church, the atrium was a gathering space between the Church Proper and the street. It was the place where the catechumens, those preparing for initiation to the Church, would receive instruction. The Atrium has a similar purpose for our children, as it is a place to help them enter into full, conscious and active participation in the liturgical and communal life of the Church.

What is a “prepared environment”?

The prepared environment is a Montessori concept that the environment can be designed to facilitate independent learning by the child. In a prepared environment, children work with materials of their own choice and at their own pace. They experience a combination of freedom and self-discipline in a place especially prepared to meet their developmental and spiritual needs.

Where can I read more about the Atrium?

32 Points of Reflections

Several of our characteristics, or points of reflection (found on our website <http://www.cgsusa.org/about/>) offer insight into life in the Atrium:

#3. The atrium is a community in which children and adults live together a religious experience which facilitates participation in the wider community of the family, the church and other social spheres.

- The atrium is a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation and prayer.
- The atrium is a place in which the only Teacher is Christ; both children and adults place themselves in a listening stance before his Word and seek to penetrate the mystery of the liturgical celebration.

Listening to God with Children by Gianna Gobbi offers a clear and beautiful explanation of Montessori principles and how they merge with the religious formation of children. You may purchase a copy of on our website: <http://www.cgsusa.org/products/listening-to-god-with-children/>

Mustard Seed DVD is a documentary about the history, theology and method of CGS. It offers a tour of an Atrium and shows a typical day in the Atrium. You or your parish may be interested in purchasing a copy from our website at <http://www.cgsusa.org/products/mustard-seed/>

The atrium may be compared to a retreat house; as such it should be a place that facilitates recollection and silence, even in its external aspects of wall decorations and other furnishings. It is desirable that the atrium be “Mass-centered,” that is, a place where special prominence is awarded to the material relative to the Mass; a place where the baptismal font stands out in the area assigned to Baptism. The Gospel should have a position of honor and be located alongside the parable materials and materials relating to the historical life of Christ.

- Religious Potential of the Child by Sofia Cavalletti, p 56

For Your Reflection

1. The Atrium is a prepared environment for the child. How is our home environment “prepared” for the youngest members of our family?
2. If I had to make a list of ways my home environment reflects my faith, what would be on my list?
3. Do I have a favorite piece of sacred art? What is depicted and how does it enhance my prayer life and my relationship with God? What sacred images are available to my children in our home?

