



All About the Atrium

CGSUSA Parent Newsletter

Infant-Toddler Catechesis

When asked what her hopes were for the future of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Sofia Cavalletti said, "I hope very much that the catechesis will go younger and younger" (*Essential Realities*, 7). In the United States this movement to take the catechesis to children younger than three has been growing and expanding with several seminal formation courses being offered for catechists who wish to serve the child from prenatal life to age three. Like the atrium for other age groups, the toddler environment is designed to be a developmentally appropriate room where very young children can live their relationship with God.

Parents are the first and most important catechists of their children and home is where the child first hears the Gospel message through the love and care of parents and family. Toddler atria support parents in their role as catechists and takes special care to provide what the young child needs physically, emotionally, intellectually, and spiritually. Children from birth to

age 3 have three particular "sensitivities" that guide and influence their development and learning: order, movement, and language. Young children thrive on routine and 'sameness.' This sensitivity to order helps the child to discover and make sense of the world. It is important that children feel comfortable in their environment and that they experience little change without prior preparation.



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The toddler atrium is simple and beautiful to allow the child to know what to expect and where to find what he or she wants. A toddler environment also allows for continuous movement and development of large and small motor skills. Children are free to move about the room and choose activities with which to work. Materials and activities on the shelf are designed to aid the child in development of motor skills. Tables, stools, and shelves are low to the ground, allowing the child to become independent and self-reliant. Children learn language by absorption. As the child listens to people, the sounds and words are stored in a special part of the brain. Language just seems to emerge from the child, beginning with simple sounds, then words, and finally full sentences and thoughts. The toddler atrium speaks to this sensitivity to language by surrounding the child with the rich language of the church. The names of sacred vessels are presented. Songs are sung, and as we know, music helps the body and mind work together. Music also allows the child to express joy. The Word of God is read and spoken in prayer. The language of gestures (movements) are also presented to the young child, such as the Sign of the Cross.

In the toddler atrium, children learn through purposeful movement and discovery. This helps to provide a foundation for the succeeding atrium environments, as well as nurturing the child's relationship with Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

In the book *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey**, Silvana Quattrocchi Montanaro, MD and Gianna Gobbi discuss ways to support the spiritual life of the child from prenatal life through age six. They offer information on the prenatal life, as well as many practical suggestions for creating a general environment at home, as well as a religious environment, "Put a sacred image of the Risen Christ, or the Mother of God with the child Jesus, close to the crib and point it out to your child. (For example, the works of Giotto or Fran Angelico are suitable for their solemnity and beauty of design.)"



**The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey* may be purchased at www.cgsusa.org