



Consiglio Notes

A Summary of the Consiglio Gathering

Rome, Italy

September 2-8, 2017

Prepared by Karen Maxwell and Mary Mirrione

It is always an amazing opportunity for us to gather with our sister catechists in the world to share our experiences with Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. The International Board (Giunta) has four members who also come from four associations, **Francesca Cocchini**, (Italy), **Nora Bonilla** (Colombia), **Tere Loyo** (Mexico), and **Rebekah Rojcewicz** (United States).

The Consiglio is comprised of six associations. Each association sends two representatives. They are: from **Italy**, Patrizia Cocchini and Sandra Pollastri, **Colombia**, Maria Teresa Lopez and Amanda Jimenez; **Australia**, Anne Delsorte and Mary Hare; **Germany**, Deborah Presser-Velder and Marta Guóth-Gumberger; **Mexico**, Maria Aurora Zorilla and Avelina Muguerza, and **United States**, Mary Mirrione and Karen Maxwell. This year two guests were invited representing Canada, Susan Perna from the Association of CGS Canada and Anna Boyogoda of Archdiocese of Toronto.

Deborah Presser-Velder, who is well-versed in Spanish, English, German, and Italian did most of our interpretation from Italian or Spanish to English or vice versa. Most of the group is bilingual although some speak even more languages than two. Patience is required for this process of our meeting because we must be essential in our communication so that our thoughts can be shared with all.

On Saturday, September 2, 2017 we gathered where the atria from Sofia's home now reside – Francesca Cocchini's apartment. Two small rooms contain the materials for Levels I, II and III. All 18 of us found a place to sit in the Level II – III atrium at small individual tables where the children work. The original Blue Unity Strip lines one of the walls. It has a patina to it from loving use over the years. Francesca began with a brief reflection on a child's drawing of the Parable of the Talents and the Maxim telling us that this is the reason we work for the child.

Tere Loyo gave us an overview of the week's agenda while Rebekah reminded us about who we are as a Consiglio saying that the Consiglio "emerged out of the organic life of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. It grew out of the same seed as our origins. Because it was part of that seed, that original seed, this is a work of community. It is a community of adults and children and also, a community of adults working together."

Francesca then gave a wonderful reflection on **Wonder** beginning with the first being, God,

who is full of wonder. We walked with Francesca through the scriptures to see the various aspects of wonder. It was beautiful and thoughtful. This reflection has been published as an article in a 2018 Annual CGS Journal.

Our time table for the day is Italian. We met in the morning from 9:00 – 1:00; took our lunch break from 1:00 – 4:00 and then regathered for additional meeting from 4:00 – 7:30. Although we started at Francesca's for our gathering we met from Saturday afternoon until Friday morning in a large room of the Ursuline Convent/Pension where we were staying.

International Council Statues

We looked at the **International Council Statues** with considerations for slight revisions to points 2, 4, and 7 as we clarify the organization of the Consiglio. The Consiglio's identity primarily is a sign of unity and one that seeks to provide help as needed to those offering Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. We also looked at the roles of the Board, the Giunta della Catechisi del Buon Pastor and the representatives of the Consiglio and the particular tasks of the Consiglio.

The greatest importance of the Consiglio's identity is point #2 – **The International Council (Consiglio) of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a sign of unity of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd which is present in various countries through the Associations which have been formally established according to the guidelines of the Consiglio.** Francesca stated during a session on Organizational Issues that "we cannot overstate enough the greatest importance of unity."

As a result, our discussion then moved to finding an organizational form that would aid our communications towards this unity. Nora shared that Sofia and Gianna in 2001 also considered the organization of the Consiglio by envisioning the Consiglio as a circle in the middle and out from it like spokes on a wheel were the different associations. Then she shared that Gianna thought about forming zones all united under the Consiglio and the International Board. Sofia, she said, thought this was too much structure while Gianna thought it was very clear. Nora proposed for us to consider the zones and expand it to include other areas of our work in Africa and Asia. Mary Mirrione offered the image of the True Vine for understanding our organization with a trellis of communication, formation, and the vine (Consiglio members) growing on the trellis. This was a big conversation that we will need to return to as nothing was decided at the time of the meeting.

We were asked to share three strengths we feel our associations have with CGS in our country and three challenges. Each country shared. Here is a sample of one each:

- Italy strength – Priests becoming interested in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and asking for courses. Italy challenge – Haven't formed formation leaders in a systematic way.
- Germany strength – Has a new website. Germany challenge – Slow growth of CGS in Germany, difficulty in finding children and part of this has to do with the way the church functions.
- Australia strength – Outreach of CGS to other countries and a common vision for the work of CGS in Australia integral to the 32 Points of Reflection; Australia challenge – isolation as a country even within the country, impacts getting from place to place;
- Colombia strength - support they are receiving from the Bishop and they have a stable team of formation leaders; forming new formation leaders; Colombia challenge – have atria opened for Level I but having challenges getting CGS developed in Level II and III in parishes because of lack of space;
- Mexico strength – Children happy to come to CGS because have a space to enjoy the work and live with experience with love; all books of CGS are translated into Spanish and available to all catechists. Mexico challenge - when children finish first communion they don't return to the atrium, maybe due to the parents not wanting to bring them; many catechists don't finish making their own albums.
- Canada strength – greatly increased the number of children they serve; # of atria built, increasing the membership of their association; serving First Nations people; Canada challenge – size of Canada; learning to work together again after a rift with Toronto and Canadian Association.
- United States strength – have an established structured for handling formation courses and recognizing formation leaders; United States challenge – of growth in meeting the demand for formation, formation leaders who lead with consistency and staying true to the legacy of CGS.

Catechist Album – Reflection by Rebekah

Album Writing in Courses Discussion

What is the purpose of the Catechist Album? Rebekah shared a reflection on the Catechist Album and began by answering this question in saying that she believes the catechist album is primarily to help catechists, ourselves, those that we train, to remain on the level of essentiality when we are with the children. Sofia, spoke often how this is for the adult – to remain simple, to say little, to remain on this level of essentiality with the child. She went on to discuss further our approach in courses for helping adults write album pages which included some discussion

about how she has handled album pages in courses and the difference between a group album and a personal album. Following this reflection each country association shared how they handle album pages. Several – Australia, Mexico, Germany and Canada – found similarities in the way they handle album pages to what Rebekah described which is largely how we handle album pages in our country. It was interesting to ask Anne Delsorte and Mary Hare if they form people in the courses they do in Asia and Africa in the same way when translations are involved. In Italy, it seems that the norm is more to write the personal album. In Colombia, they are experimenting with assigning album pages in courses. For Level I courses, the formation leader gives 60% of album pages and asks participants to fill in Level I presentations as they receive them. In Level II they give 30% of album pages and the rest participants write up. For Level III they want to ensure a deeper study of Level III and so they give all the album pages out but then want the participants to read all the sources. These are album pages that have been revised multiple times. They have chosen to have one unified album and one unified way to give this work. They are observing and experimenting to see if this is a good way to do this.

Ecumenism – Francesca

Francesca offered a PowerPoint presentation on Ecumenism in Italian, which was translated for us giving us a broad perspective of divisions that have occurred with Christianity over the centuries. There has been divisions: among Jews – those who believed in Christ and those who didn't, and she cited Ephesians 4:1-6 ..."striving to preserve the unity of the spirit through the bond of peace, one body and one Spirit...", and then she identified all the divisions among Christianity from the second to the fourth centuries and the councils that followed them. She also listed the great schism of 1054 between the Catholic Church (Church Occidentale) and the Orthodox Church (Church Orientale); another schism in 1184 in western Christianity, in the 1500s with Luther, Calvin, and the Church of England. Francesca also noted initiatives toward union and the movement towards Ecumenism including discussion about two Ecumenical Commissions.

Francesca has participated in many Ecumenical Councils. She told an interesting story about being invited to a meeting for "Women in the Future of Religion" in which Francesca was with a woman who was a Jewish rabbi, a woman who was a Muslim, and woman who was a Lutheran pastor. The Lutheran pastor read from Numbers 27:5-11 which occurs before Moses died and the people were to enter the Promised land. By Jewish law it is customary when a father died inheritance of land passed to the sons, not the daughters. In this case, five daughters of Zelophehad came before Moses at a meeting of the whole community, telling him that their father died and did not have a son. They asked if the property belonging to the family could be inherited by the family to honor the father. The five daughters only asked for the honor to be

given to their father. Moses in prayer “lays their case before the Lord,” who then speaks to Moses saying that the plea from the five daughters is just and that Moses should give them the inheritance. The Lutheran pastor asks, “How is it possible that divine law has been changed?” This story connected with those who gathered at this meeting, offering a word of hope. Francesca ended by telling us that “we must pray for the ecumenism of the whole world. Pray for this unity. It can only be a gift from God.”

Formation of Formation Leaders

One of the biggest topics of discussion was around Formation Issues and Formation Leaders. Rebekah has drafted a letter which was shared with each country. We shared the letter with our membership and formation leaders in November of 2017. In essence, we are facing several key issues worldwide and this Consiglio gathering offered us the opportunity to discuss and make some decisions that empowered the associations to better work together to respond to these issues. Some of these issues are:

1. There is too much disparity in the way courses are given in various parts of the world (number of hours, amount of time dedicated to the participant’s personal work, expectations regarding album pages)
2. Formation leaders are being invited to another country to give a course but there is a lack of communication between the formation leader and his/her own association as well as with the association most closely connected to the course site causing confusion and discord among catechists and associations.
3. There are countries that may have begun to organize themselves as an association but haven’t fulfilled the requirements of an association as outlined by the International Council and there is no formation leader approved to do training.

This was a far-ranging discussion; the following new directives were developed:

1. For all catechist formation courses, offered in the name of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, anywhere in the world, at least one of the team members must be a recognized formation leader who is faithful to the 32 Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and the formation guidelines of the Consiglio.
2. Recognition as a formation leader in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd must come through one of the International Consiglio member associations: Colombia, Mexico, USA, Italy, Germany and Australia.
3. Those wishing to become recognized formation leaders in countries without a Consiglio member association shall apply to one of the Consiglio member associations. Certificates will be issued by the corresponding Consiglio member association and will

bear the Consiglio logo indicating compliance with the formation standards of the Consiglio.

4. When a formation leader is invited to lead a course outside of her/his own country, the Consiglio member association who recognized the formation leader needs to be informed of the invitation who will also in turn inform the Consiglio member association located closest to the course site. The formation leader leading a course will be asked to submit a brief report on the course being offered.
5. The Missionaries of Charity will be asked to contact one of the Consiglio member associations when they want a course. If any other courses offered involve the Missionaries of Charity, the formation leader needs to inform the Consiglio member association.

I Am the Good Shepherd Discussion – Francesca _A brief look

Francesca began this discussion by reading two entries from Sofia's diary about *Io Sono*.

January 1965, "I have been asked by the Vicariate of Rome to prepare a program for the school with a guide for teachers. This is a very, very great work, very passionate." Sofia's entry continues, "I have found the director of the catechesis office someone who is docile and who is open to receive any proposal. I cannot find anything better than this."

April 1965, "I am so happy to be able to give the Good Shepherd and Baptism to all the children of Rome."

This is the way that Sofia and Gianna began to work on *Io Sono*. Years later, Sofia revised these books shortly before she died.

Nora: It is beautiful to see that in the first book of Sofia she writes that this is catechesis and this is not catechism. More or less at the time when the first album of *Io Sono* came out, they had been in the atrium 16-17 years. When Sofia gave her first course in Mexico in 1976, she gave Nora and others there some of these guides to work with. They were very important aids for us. Sofia said often that the work with the album isn't the same work as the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd which is done in an atrium. Gianna said it was a way to evangelize but it was missing the Montessori piece so therefore, it was not complete. The courses that are being offered for *Io Sono* in Mexico and Colombia include additional study in Montessori's work for catechists.

Infant-Toddler Catechesis Report – Rebekah

Rebekah reported on the Infant-Toddler Catechesis with an overview of its history and the recent courses she has worked on with Elizabeth Calanchini and Jennifer Bell. She identified the course as a seminal course. Part 1 explored the first environments of the child, 1) Life with God beginning with God, 2) Reflection on Marriage where new life comes from, and 3) The life in the womb, and 4) The environment of the home and family. The second half of this course focuses on the Toddler Community, 18 months to three years. She said, it is clear that the environment needs to be rich and beautiful in practical life so that the toddler can come into that richness. Rebekah also shared that Elizabeth has worked with a Toddler teacher in a Montessori school for three years to see what catechetical announcements are a match for the child. "This is an area that is still experimental. We are not there yet. Need to continue to explore and experiment. The purpose in this experimentation is not to create Toddler atria around the world." In the next year, Rebekah, Elizabeth, and Jennifer want to call forth catechists to share experiences of working with toddlers and in gathering experiences see what specific guidelines can be outlined for working with Infants-Toddlers in Catechesis.

Maria Theresa Lopez (Tere) from Colombia has worked on a booklet for families based on Montessori principles. She has also been working in this area of Infant-Toddler Catechesis. In 2008 they invited Silvana Montanaro to design a course for parents who are expecting a child that would include information about the development of the child. We were reminded of Sofia's words, "slow, simple, and small." Slow work has to be done.

The Adolescent – Francesca and Patrizia

Patrizia and Francesca spoke about the work of the Adolescent and why this work was interrupted. All the children who came to the atria at Sofia's were from different parishes. They knew that these adolescents need to form groups so Sofia felt it was impossible for the adolescents to come two hours a week to her home. One of the great needs of adolescents is to have a social work to serve that is useful. It was also impossible for Sofia and Gianna to provide this work since it needed to happen in the lie of the parish community.

Patrizia said, "This is the reason, why we stopped doing this work. It doesn't mean we don't have profound knowledge to share." Sofia did have a structured course that they gave for preparing adolescents for confirmation. At the beginning, she entrusted the formation of adolescents for confirmation to a liturgist who studied with Sofia and with Eugenio Zolli. She felt it was very important to develop lessons on the liturgy of the Mass. She also thought that preparation for confirmation would begin after the three levels of Catechesis and would be two years based on the Bible and Liturgy without materials but based on reading. It would also be structured to the needs and capacities of adolescents and include problems that adolescents face on relationships and belonging. She gathered catechists who were 20-30 years of age and in order to not lose any of the ex-bambini she included them as well since they were in this age

group. She invited them to be prepared as catechists who would serve the adolescents in preparing them for confirmation. We also learned that Francesca and Patrizia are considering the possibility of forming catechists with this age group. Would an association offer a course like the first three levels or initially would there be a course offered in Rome by Francesca and Patrizia? Later that day, Francesca held up three books, journals, and told us that these were Sofia's journals and writings on formation for the adolescent. There is so much potential here. We were all encouraged to be thinking about what is needed for the catechist to work with the adolescent.

Missionaries of Charity

Mary Mirrione offered the Consiglio a written report on the work of CGS with the Missionaries of Charity and we had a brief time to discuss some of the issues arising because of the rapid spreading of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd with the Missionaries of Charity – mainly the issue about the mobility of the sisters who take a course in CGS in one place and then move elsewhere and our ability to help keep track of this. We discussed the value of offering formation in CGS systematically especially in places where the MCs have their noviate houses. The five noviate houses for the MCs are: San Francisco (where we have already been offering training), Rome, Nairobi, Philippines, and Kolkata (where we have also been offering courses.) We also noted the value of who the sisters need to contact when attending courses not organized specifically for them.

Reports

We heard specific reports on Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in the following places in the world. Kenya and East Africa – Mary Hare (Australia), Slovenia – Marta Guóth-Gumberger (Germany), Canada – Susan Perna, and Rebekah gave a report on Europe and the retreat she had this year in England for catechists serving in countries of Europe and Great Britain who are not part of an established association.

Some extra delights:

On Sunday, September 3, we went to Mass at the Convent of the Camaldolese Sisters – where Sofia and Gianna also held the First Sacraments Retreat with the children. Francesca showed us the room where the children have their retreat each year.

On Thursday evening, September 7, we participated in a Celebration Mass for Sofia. Francesca and Patrizia invited catechists in the area as well as those adults who were children in the atrium with Sofia and Gianna. Following Mass, we gathered to hear some of the experiences of those who had been in the Rome atrium with Sofia and Gianna, the ex-bambini. Francesca had also brought some of the journals Sofia had from the children's First Communion experiences and other notes.

With all of this said and all that we are doing, we also must keep in mind that our work of the United States Association of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, like all our associations, is still a mustard seed work. It may appear that we are big as an association but we are in the eyes of the world, very small and in many ways hidden. Our challenge is to remember daily that it is the Good Shepherd's work we do, and remember how precious that work is; how full of mystery in its unfolding. We are deeply grateful for Sofia and Gianna, who with the children, have helped us listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd and to follow Him.

Respectfully submitted,

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