

An Open Letter to Parents of 3-6 Year Olds from a Parent of Teens

*Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me and do not hinder them,
for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven."
Matthew 19:14*

When I was 14, and getting ready for my confirmation, I was asked to select a Bible verse that 'spoke to me.' Little did I know then just how important this passage would serve me in my life.

I have been very blessed to be the mother of three amazing children. I have watched my babies grow into three strong and independent teens. Sometimes I wonder how my husband and I got so lucky. Sure we've had some of the 'normal' teen drama and I'm sure there will be more to come, but we have also witnessed the way in which the Holy Spirit has touched each one of them.

How did this come to be? Well you may doubt what I am about to tell you, but this much I know...I have watched and heard them say and do things that I know for a fact came from being children of the Good Shepherd.

I'm sure many of you have heard of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd here at our parish. It is an amazing faith formation for children – especially for the youngest of them. I am talking about the 3-6 year olds. When our children entered the atrium (the learning room for the catechesis) their eyes filled with wonder and excitement. The entire room was a spiritual and delightful place for them to be. The environment was so calm and so serene – not like any other I have ever experienced – especially for children so young. They were shown so many wonderful things and in such a tranquil setting. I was fortunate to be an aide for those first few years. I watched children walk slowly into the atrium and quickly 'get to work.' They practiced setting the model altar – they loved when an adult would light the candles and they could extinguish them. They colored vestments, herded sheep, mixed dough and touched mustard seeds. They learned beautiful songs and shared wonderful stories. To be able to see the face of God in a child is a blessing.

I can sincerely say my kids are better prepared for the world because of their time spent in the atrium. They know how to work independently, they know how to be compassionate, and they know that they are never alone. They have learned that it's ok to ponder, to be still and to listen to their heart. They can work on their own and have the self-confidence they need to do it all by themselves. Trying to instill these values at such a young age is a tough task. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd will help you do

just that. It will teach your precious children that each and every one of them is very important. It will allow them to experience the wonder and awe in their own way. It will be a blessed time that will place values deep in their soul - values that will one day help them to be strong and independent teens. I truly believe that with all my heart.

Even now, as my kids are pulled in so many different directions, and just getting them to church is sometimes a task in and of itself, I still see glimpses of that earlier time. I see the value they place on each other as well as themselves. I see a beautiful soul that knows right from wrong. I see how they put others first without compromising their own being. They have been given the foundation needed to see them through the difficult years ahead. They know they are children of the Good Shepherd and that they are loved. What more could a mother ask for?

Let us hold each other, and our children in prayer,

A grateful mom