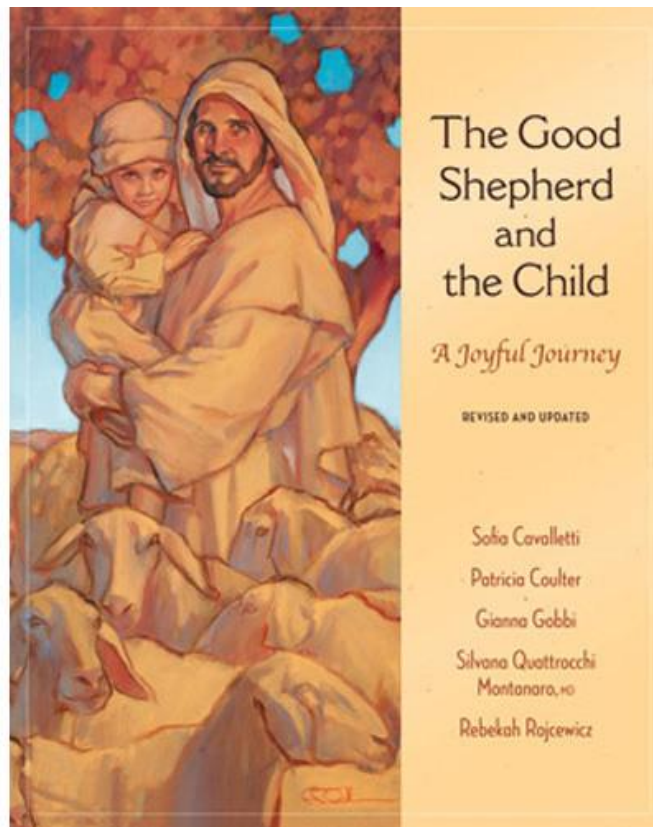




The United States Association of

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd



*The Good Shepherd and the Child:
A Joyful Journey, revised and updated*
Book Study
Questions for Conversations



The United States Association of

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey, revised and updated Book Study

As we begin, let us pray:

Beloved Good Shepherd send your Holy Spirit, Giver of all good gifts, to us and fill our minds and hearts. Give us the gifts of knowledge and understanding and the grace to use them wisely. Help us to more deeply recognize the religious potential of children and in doing so may we “assist the involvement of children and adults in a common religious experience in which the religious values of childhood, primarily those values of contemplation of and enjoyment of God, are predominant.” We ask this in Your most Holy Name. Amen

Foreword to the first edition and Preface to the second edition pages v and vi

- What struck you as you read the forward and preface?
- The forward reminds parents, teachers, and volunteers that they are challenged to “become as little children.” The preface echoes those words, that we are to “change and become like them” (Matthew 18:3). Recall how you have learned from and been guided by the children to become like them. What is the biggest challenge and the greatest grace you have experienced in this endeavor?
- “The youngest children lead us to the deepest mysteries of our faith.” (page v) When have you encountered the deepest mysteries in the Atrium?
- In speaking about Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi’s discovering for adults, “The most important tool they offered for adults to aid their journey with children toward God is that of the formation course for catechists.” (page v) How did your formation prepare you to enter into the mystery? What richness and treasures did you discover in your formation?

Introduction pages 1-4

- What struck you as you read the introduction?
- Had you read the introduction before? If so, was there anything you read in the introduction that was new for you this time?

- “Our theme is God’s covenant with young children and a way of being with children that helps them to live their relationship with God.” (p 1) The covenant relationship is found in the Bible and is the core of the Christian message. How have you experienced the children living the love and joy of this covenant?
- On page 2, Dr. Sofia Cavalletti asks some difficult questions in terms of early childhood formation. How has your understanding of these questions and the answers to these questions grown via your knowledge of the child, your formation, your observation of children, and your work in the Atrium?
 - Do young children need religious education?
 - Do young children have the capacity to live the relationship with God?
 - Is it important for their growth as a whole person?
 - If so, when and what and how do we tell them about God’s covenant of love with them?
- “Every action a parent does to or with the child, however mundane it may seem, is truly education. All that a parent is becomes a powerful influence in the child’s present and future formation.” How has reading this book helped you understand parenting as a ministry, or as Silvana calls it, “service to life.” (p 2-3)
- The introduction gives an essential overview of the book. Is there a particular chapter you are looking forward to the most?

PART ONE

Chapter One: God and the Child Together pages 7-13

- What struck you as you read the first chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- Sofia Cavalletti invites the reader to reflect upon the following questions. (p 7) Do young children have the capacity to live in relationship with God? Does religious education respond to a vital need in the child’s spirit? Is it something they are asking of us? or is it only something we value and therefore impose on children? Does the absence of some form of religious formation affect the young child’s harmonious development or not? Does religion enrich or complicate their lives? Her answers to these questions were found in (1) the child’s own response, and (2) observation of the child. How has your journey with the child brought you understanding and clarity in this regard?
- In the remaining pages of this chapter (p 9-13) Sofia Cavalletti describes characteristics she has discovered in the young child. What resonates with you as you read about the special religious needs and capacities of the young child? What do you recognize about the children in your home, at your Church or school, in your Atrium environment?

Chapter Two: Helping the Child pages 14-21

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?
- Dr. Silvana Montanaro describes the prenatal life through age three. How has this assisted you in understanding the needs of the youngest child? How has it helped you in your role of the parent? What has drawn you in to further live your call to “become like a little child”? (p 21)
- “By reflecting on these developmental factors, we see the way the child invites us to look within ourselves so as to understand ourselves better and our world too. This is how the child draws us along a path of personal growth and offers a precious opportunity to discover or recover our own hidden talents the Gospel tells us about. And, I believe, this is the reason Jesus placed the child before us as a model and an opportunity for taking part in the Kingdom of God.” (p 21) How has the child lead you to know about the Kingdom of God?

Chapter Three: Practical Suggestions pages 22-27

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?
- What did you discover about the environment of the home? How has this assisted your understanding of the role of the family, and the role of the Church / catechist?
- What did you discover about the religious environment and the materials in these pages?
- Is there anything within this chapter that caused you to turn a careful eye to your own home, or want to reevaluate the layout of your Atrium?

PART TWO

Chapter Four: Sources of Nourishment pages 31-34

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?
- In this chapter, we read about signs, wonder, and parables. How does this chapter help you understand this method?
- Have any aspects of this method been revealed in your role as a parent (or grandparent)?

- “When speaking about God with children it is valuable to keep in mind that the message we are announcing is addressed not only to the child but to us as well.” (p 34) Do you allow your heart and mind to be open to this message? If not, what is distracting you?

Chapter Five: Jesus, the Good Shepherd pages 35-38

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?
- The children listen to the voice of the Shepherd, who calls them by name. “The element of the parable that most strikes young children is the fact that the shepherd knows and calls each sheep by name.” (p 35) What has this parable reawakened in your own spiritual life? Your prayer life?
- “The Good Shepherd image resonates so deeply within young children and recalls for them the intimacy and security of the maternal womb. This is often expressed in the children’s words as well as in their drawings. The message of the parable is so powerful that it can help a young child recapture lost peace...” (p 36) What struck you as you read Michael’s story (p 36-37)?
- Read the four brief paragraphs under “Doctrinal Content of the Parable” on p 37. How have you seen the child enjoy the presence of the Good Shepherd in their life?

Chapter Six: Presenting The Good Shepherd to Children pages 39-47

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?
- The Parables and the Psalms offer the children insight into who the shepherd is and how he cares of the sheep. What connections have you noticed the children make between the parable and Psalm 23?
- What notes will you make on your album page(s) upon reading this chapter? How has this chapter assisted you in your understanding of this presentation and the materials?
- Children’s responses (p 46-47) include their work with materials, their comments, and their artwork. When was the last time you observed the child (outside of your Atrium environment) and what have you discovered in your observation about how the child works with these materials, how they have responded to the shepherd, and what they have drawn?
- This chapter references many of the children’s artwork. Was there something in their work that particularly struck you? Do you have a favorite piece of art from your own Atrium that you would like to share with the CGSUSA Book Study?

Chapter Seven: The Mystery of Life: Parables of the Kingdom pages 48-56

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?
- What notes will you make on your album page(s) upon reading this chapter? How has this chapter assisted you in your understanding of this presentation and the materials?
- “In order to help cultivate the capacity for wonder we must serve young children “good food and not too much of it.” And there is no more delicious and nutritional food for contemplating the miracle of life than the shortest parables of the kingdom, which are found in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.” (p 49) What responses have you witnessed from the children as you present the kingdom parables? How has the idea of “good food and not too much of it” impacted your work with children?
- How does *The Unfolding of the Mustard Seed Meditation* on page 53 offer you a glimpse of how the mystery of the kingdom permeates all of creation, even ourselves?

Chapter Eight: Baptism: The Gift of Life pages 57-62

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?
- “The Baptism of infants is part of the most ancient tradition of the Church. This practice implies a recognition of the child’s capacity to live in relationship with God, even from the time of infancy.” How has this chapter helped you more fully see and enjoy the gifts of Baptism? How has this chapter helped you proclaim to the children the signs and symbolic language of baptism?
- We read on page 57, “Liturgical signs “speak to us” both through our senses and our spirit. Dr. Maria Montessori spoke of the liturgy as “the magnificent teaching tool of the Church.” Signs speak a language that is rich in meaning and impact, and children need to be introduced to this language as they would to the mother tongue or other languages.” What liturgical sign has allowed you to encounter the Mystery?
- What notes will you make on your album page(s) upon reading this chapter? How has this chapter assisted you in your understanding of this presentation and the materials?

Chapter Nine: The Eucharist: Meeting the Good Shepherd pages 63-72

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?

- What notes will you make on your album page(s) upon reading this chapter? How has this chapter assisted you in your understanding of this presentation and the materials?
- What does the Bible say about the liturgy? How has this chapter helped you understand the bond between the Bible and liturgy?
- Choose one of the following and reflect upon how *The Model Altar, Liturgical Colors, The Liturgical Calendar*, and any one of the *Gestures of the Eucharist* have assisted the child in fuller participation in the Mass.
- Looking at each of the gestures, choose one to ponder: what Mystery of God is addressed in this particular gesture? What Mystery of the Child is addressed in this particular gesture?

Chapter Ten: Celebrating Life in Christ: Christmas, Easter, and Pentecost pages 73-86

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?
- What notes will you make on your album page(s) upon reading this chapter? How has this chapter assisted you in your understanding of this presentation and the materials?
- Which of the prophecies or infancy narratives gave you a new understanding of the incarnation? of the person of Jesus Christ? of the role of Mary and Joseph in the plan of God?
- During the presentation of the Last Supper, we focus on the words that Jesus said over the bread and over the wine, words that had never been spoken before. What is the response of the child to these great words of love? Have you considered how the material allows the children to be present at that event?
- “What is proclaimed in the Bible is lived in the liturgy. Helping the children to experience this reality offers them an opportunity to enjoy more fully the relationship they have with God and others. This is especially true in the Liturgy of Light. It is one of their atrium experiences that remains most vivid in the children’s memories, even when they become adults.” (p 82) How have you seen this lived out in your community?
- Consider the gifts received during the Pentecost Celebration. How does that particular, or living that gift build the Kingdom of God on earth?

Chapter Eleven: Prayer pages 87-92

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?

- How has the simple diagram on page 87 impacted your understanding of prayer, the prayer of the child, and your own prayer life?
- What have you observed about the prayer of the child?
- “Silence is an essential element of prayer. Silence is not simply the absence of noise; it is deeper stilling of the body, heart, and mind so as to listen and to open oneself more fully to God. We are invited to *Be still. and know that I am God* (Psalm 46:10). The cultivation of silence is a very important dynamic in their religious formation of children. Many adults are surprised to discover how much children enjoy silence.” (p 90) How has silence impacted the prayer of the children in your atrium?

Chapter Twelve: Moral Formation pages 93-96

- What struck you as you read this chapter?
- Was there anything you read in the chapter that was new for you this time?
- What do you think is the most essential point of this chapter?
- How have you come to understand the word “moral” in light of this chapter? How do you apprehend “Our ‘doing’ is an outgrowth of our ‘being.’” in speaking about moral formation? (p 94)
- Moral Formation begins with a relationship. The youngest child has the greatest capacity for relationship. This relationship with God is grounded in love. They hear how much God loves them. The Good Shepherd calls his sheep by name. They hear his Voice. That parable lays the foundation for the moral life. Have you considered the connection between the moral life and the parable of the Good Shepherd?

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd pages 97-100

- What characteristic is easiest for you/ your children/ your parish to live in the Atrium? Why?
- What characteristic is most difficult or challenging for you/ your children/ your parish to live in the Atrium?
What is one concrete thing you could do to move toward making this characteristic a reality?
How would living this characteristic make a difference in your life? the life of the child? the life of (or culture of) your parish community?
- Is there a characteristic that you heard or read today, as if for the first time? Why do you think it struck you today?
- Is there a characteristic that reminds you of a moment with a child? Or a story from a Formation Course? Have you added that account to your album page?

- Which characteristic would you have liked to ask Sofia about, what would you have asked her? Is there something more you would like to hear about a particular characteristic?
- If you could make one characteristic into a prayer card to keep on your desk (or prayer table) so that it would be in front of you each day, which one would you make or illustrate? Why?
- Which characteristic inspires or excites your work as a catechist?
- The first characteristic speaks of the religious life of the child. How do you understand the “the religious life of the child”?
- How would you share that with a group of parents, your pastor, another catechist?
- After rereading the 32 Characteristics, do you have a new understanding of your role as a catechist? Does it prompt a change or shift in you, either in your own attitude or in how you are in the Atrium?

Appendix B: A Brief History of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd pages 101-103

- Have you written your parish or your region’s history in this work of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd? Begin to create a timeline, include dates, names and photos. Please consider sharing this with CGSUSA! Send information cgs@cgsusa.org