

APRIL 2021 –
A SPECIAL ISSUE

CGS in Quarantine

***"The light shines in the darkness and
the darkness did not overcome it."***

John 1:5



The United States Association of
The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

PRAYING WITH THE CHILDREN

Who lead us to the Kingdom

THE QUARANTINE LETTERS

Some of the CGS correspondence
from the year

REFLECTIONS FROM QUARANTINE

On living a year in pandemic

Proclamation from the Easter Vigil

Liturgy of Light

*Dear brothers and sisters of Christ,
On this most sacred night,
in which our Lord Jesus Christ passed over
from death to life,
the Church calls upon her sons and daughters,
scattered throughout the world,
to come together to watch and pray.*

*If we keep the memorial of the Lord's
paschal solemnity in this way,
listening to his Word and celebrating his mysteries,
then we shall have the sure hope
of sharing his triumph over death
and living with him in God.*

From the Editors

Welcome to this CGSUSA special issue of letters and reflections from the past year in quarantine due to the global pandemic of COVID-19. As we enter into our second year of living this, we pause to gather a collection of the conversations and reflections we, as catechists of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in the United States, have shared.

As we arrived at our holiest of weeks, this Palm Sunday's Gospel began with a small memory of the woman who anointed Jesus before He was to enter into His Passion, Death and Resurrection. She did what she could for Him, what she was "obliged to do": a small, loving gesture of an unprofitable servant. Jesus recognized the gift and said He would never forget this good thing she did for Him.

We offer this issue in the spirit of this "unprofitable servant." We present you with a small "alabaster jar" of the beautiful fragrance the children's deep love for God shared by many catechists around the country. The fragrance of their love is seen in the art and prayers of the children and the ponderings of the catechists who continued to spend time with the children during this deadly pandemic.

When we entered into quarantine last Lent, no one knew what to expect. We wondered how we would now live out our purpose to assist the involvement of children and adults in a common religious experience in which the religious values of childhood, primarily those values of contemplation and enjoyment of God, are predominant. We immediately set out to support the domestic church, the family. Would it be enough? Would it help?

And then, on the Easter Vigil last year, the Easter Fire was lit in the families. We received so many photos of that gift. And "Alleluia" was proclaimed by the children with joy. The fragrance of the moment continues even now.

As the world begins to open once more, we do not know what the "new normal" will look like, but we do know that God with His children will continue to fill us with wonder and awe as we continue our work as "unprofitable servants." Like perfume that permeates and lingers, may the fragrance of the children's relationship with God in this past year always be remembered and may we all continue to do whatever we can to support them. May you enjoy what you find in this issue offered in memory of the woman's great love.

A woman came with an alabaster jar of perfumed oil, costly genuine spikenard. She broke the alabaster jar and poured it on his head.

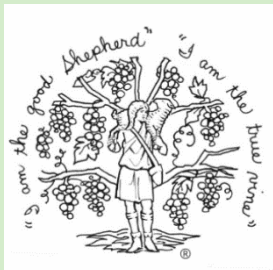
There were some who were indignant. "Why has there been this waste of perfumed oil? It could have been sold for more than three hundred days' wages and the money given to the poor." They were infuriated with her.

Jesus said, "Let her alone. Why do you make trouble for her? She has done a good thing for me. The poor you will always have with you, and whenever you wish you can do good to them, but you will not always have me. She has done what she could. She has anticipated anointing my body for burial.

Amen, I say to you, wherever the gospel is proclaimed to the whole world, what she has done will be told in memory of her.

Mark 14:3-9

Jesus is the
light of the world
that no darkness
will ever come



We believe the most valuable support we can continue to offer in this time is to help families pray with their children at home. We continue to assist children and adults to live a common religious experience in which the religious values of childhood, primarily those values of contemplation and enjoyment of God are celebrated at home, in the atrium, in the church, and in the world.

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When Jesus returned to Heaven, he told his followers to stay in Jerusalem. They were to wait for the Holy Spirit. In this Bible story from the Acts of the Apostles, nine days after Jesus' Ascension into Heaven, was the Jewish Pentecost. Jews from all over the world came to Jerusalem to celebrate this feast. Little did they know that an even bigger feast was coming for the disciples!

When you stop to think about it the disciples were going through something much like we are right now. They didn't know what was going to happen next. For nine days they waited for the Holy Spirit to come down and bless them.

The Hebrews also went through something similar. For 40 years they wandered through the Desert. Although some of the Hebrews were in doubt, there were those who did believe the Promised Land was coming. It was those people who led them to the Promised Land.

We are all waiting to see our friends and family. There are countless things that have already been canceled, but we have to keep praying because if we don't who will?

The Apostles and the Hebrews have already laid down a foundation that is an example to us, but it is up to us to follow it. Our Promised Land is coming, but we have to wait for it.

PRAYING WITH THE CHILDREN



Praying with the Children

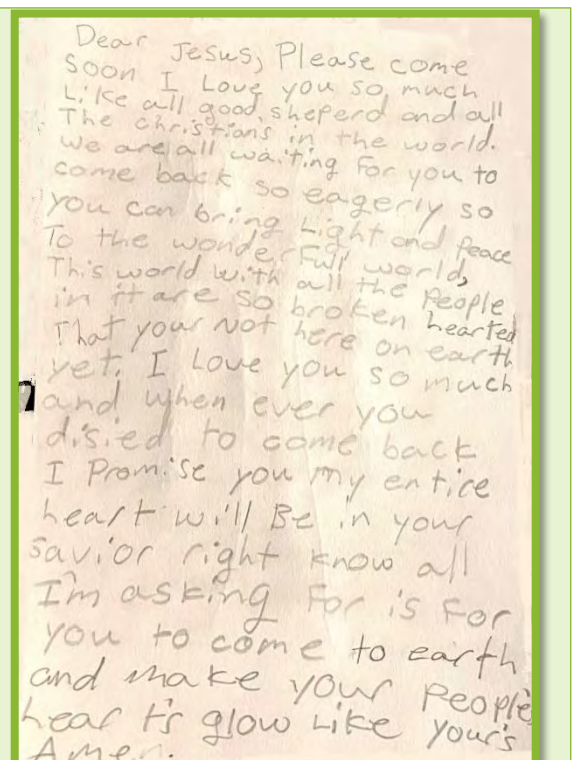
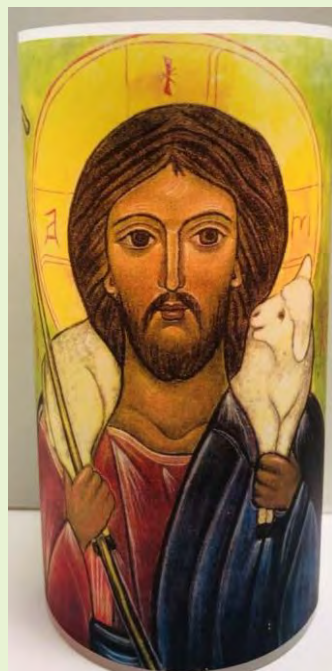
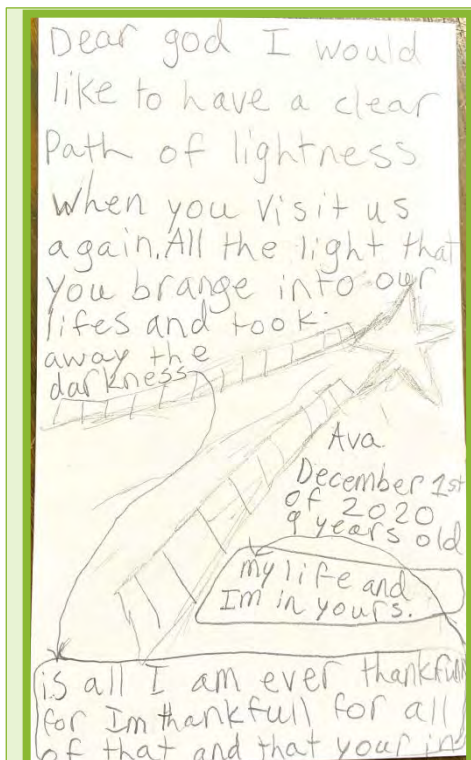
Everyone shall get light, even through darkness. We pray to the Lord.
Vincenzo age 9, Morristown NJ

Our world is holy. We all share. Amen.
Jesus is with us. Amen.
God made the earth. God is with us too.
Amen. Amen. Amen.
We love each other. Amen.

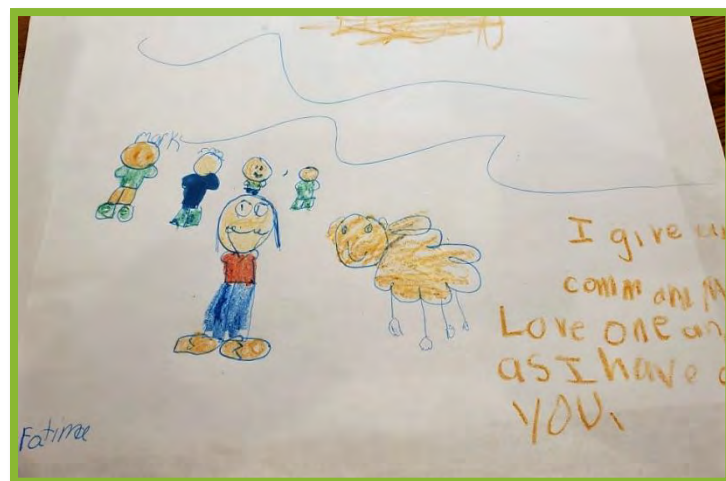
Chelsea, age 7, Atrium of the Annunciation, Durham NC

Meditating on Luke's account of Jesus' messianic entry into Jerusalem, I was struck by the Level II children's facility in using the words of sacred scripture to express themselves. As one child described Jesus' humility as a 'king' entering His city, a seven-year-old classmate turned to her and said, "He has lifted up the lowly" (citing directly from the Magnificat). In discussing the people laying their cloaks on the ground, a six-year-old remarked, "like making a way for the Lord and preparing a way in the wilderness" (cited from the Isaiah 40 prophecy). The catechist took the prophecy card for this prophecy and read the verses relating to his comments, at which point another child exclaimed, "A lamp for my feet and a light for my path" (from Psalm 119).

Dan Teller, Cincinnati OH



You Bring Us Hope



Tara Speer, the Coordinator of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd at Assumption Parish in Morristown, NJ shared an email from a mother in her community who wrote: "The kids made these today...the directions were simply... "make a prayer card to share."

How rich and beautiful is the work of our children when given the time and space to be present with God, whether that is in the atrium or at home. The children lead us in prayer and invite us to share in their religious experience of contemplation and the enjoyment of the presence of God.

Dear God,
Thanks you that you are able to bring us hope through tough times, and strengthening us for your purpose. As we miss our friends, family members, school, classmates, activities and church. We are not alone as you are with us. Though we are physically more distant we are spiritually much closer because of your presence in our hearts. We are thankful to have some at our sides and can not wait for you to bring our communities together again and bring joy to the world. We ask this through Christ our Lord.



Love,
Maria Fernanda

Easter Fire!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3GqxAsSF88>



THE QUARANTINE LETTERS

The Foglietti



Lenten Reflections in the Pandemic

March 2020

Dearest, dearest all,

I am writing this Easter Foglietto while we are still living in Lenten time: the color is purple; we are not singing "alleluia"; we are preparing for the feast. With all our third level children we will certainly be practicing using the weapons of light.

As you may know, here in Italy because of the spread of the coronavirus we had to suspend catechesis meetings with children and the training of catechists: a new type of "fasting," certainly painful but not meaningless; rather, it is up to us to discover its value.

For my part, I find this time to be difficult, especially because it is new, strange, incomprehensible in its profound meaning, and it must be understood, precisely for this reason: as a "sign of the times."

"Sign of the times" that is something that emerges in history and must be pondered in the light of God's plan. Then this time really becomes a "favorable time" to focus our attention on the "blank page."

First of all, with the certainty that we are not writing it alone. God first writes it with us, then we write it with Him. It is "our" blank page.

Then we know that this "writing" will end at the Parousia: certainly, we cannot know everything about this culmination of history that we are awaiting, but how many aspects of it we know, thanks to the word of the prophets, of the apostles, of Jesus himself!

Finally, we know that, even if we find painful events on the blank page, it will always be a "measured" time, it will last "three days," and the third day will be that of resurrection.

I know this is a slightly different sort of Foglietto that I am sending you. Allow me then to finish it by sharing a "thought" that I wrote down this morning. I opened the window and saw the full moon in the light of dawn. I immediately thought in a month it will be Easter. Here, then, is my "answer" to this sign:

Here we are, Lord, already at a full moon, beautiful and faithful

reminding us of times and stories and places: already your precious sign,

incalculable: that in a month there will be salvation.

And as always, and in your way: it will be at night, during the vigil.

It will be love. It will be as it already is: the fullness of time!

Thank you for letting me share my "thought" with you whom I feel are family!

Happy Easter soon,

Francesca

I am thinking of these days we are living and the fact that we cannot prepare for Easter together walking the path of the Armor of Light, I wanted to propose to you a path that we can walk together even from home. If it seems to us that there is a little darkness around us, we have a powerful weapon of light that is prayer. Perhaps you will remember that St. Paul announced it to us. In the letter to the Ephesians chap. 5:8 he told us:

"For once you were darkness, but now in the Lord you are light. Live as children of light."

As children of light, what can we do to keep this beautiful light alive? We can stay close to the source of light. Be with Him, listen to His word, talk to Him. There's a maxim that tells us something about that:

'Whenever you pray, go into your room and shut the door, and pray to your father who is in secret (Mt 6:6).'

There is a room to enter into and a door to close in order to be face to face with God the Father. What could this "room" and this "door" be? Of course, we need a quiet place in which to pray, but close the door to what? For what purpose? To 'pray to the Father,' ... but then perhaps we can think about how He is already there, waiting for us, waiting to be with each of us...

It may help us to listen to His word, perhaps a text that we have meditated on together in the atrium and that we particularly like; you can find a listing of some of them below. We can try putting this 'weapon' to use, even for a little while, maybe every day. Let us remain united in the Lord who is the source of true life and light.

Francesca Brolì

More Lenten Reflections in the Pandemic

March 2020

Here is Patrizia's reflection

This morning, before listening to Mass on television, I thought a little more about the Eucharist that we live in this time. We know that during the most important part of the Mass, the Eucharistic Prayer, Jesus says "Do this in memory of me...". After having given all of Himself to us, to all people of all times, it is a little as if He had made a will. I have felt invited to dig into this message: "Do this...". What is this? And then "in memory of me." How do we do this today? How do we make memory a memorial? Many of us in many countries cannot participate in the Eucharistic celebration. I thought then that today we could translate the rite into daily life. In John's Gospel the story of the Last Supper does not report Jesus' words over bread and wine, but the gesture of washing the feet is reported, certainly to help us understand that "do this" can also refer to helping others. This is something that we can be called to do in a very special way in the historical situation in which we find ourselves today. To be God's hands in history, to have God's eyes on the world and on people, to be, each one of us, Christ's bride, responsible, co-responsible with Him for others, for God's family.

To truly assume the role given us by the Holy Spirit gave in baptism: to be priests (doctors, nurses and all those who find themselves next to a dying person can give the blessing), prophets (to discover the signs of the times, to give to those in anguish, in the sadness of loneliness in the midst of this pandemic, the certain hope that God wants good and not evil), martyrs (if it is necessary, then to go and help others, even if this could cause a risk for us).

Then I thought about the phrase we say before receiving the Eucharistic Jesus: "I am not worthy...". Of course, immediately afterwards we also say, "but only say the Word..."; we proclaim that His Word is enough. But we can't take communion today. Well? As always, we find the answer in the Bible. I've been thinking about the parable of the insistent friend. Perhaps God wants the words we say, "I am not worthy" to not just be words that we repeat automatically, in some rote fashion. Perhaps we could say them more consciously throughout this time of Eucharistic fasting. In this way we might become more aware that we really do want Him to make us worthy of His Life. Even the friend of the parable must knock several times. In so doing, we might better understand that we really want that Life of His, that we desire it more than anything else, and that it is worth waiting for...

Dearest Ones,

Once again, Patrizia and I would like to share some reflections with you, grateful as we are for the fellowship we have in the Good Shepherd, thanks to Sofia and Gianna, throughout our "world of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd."

And now my reflection:

In this time of Lent, the time of conversion, I am meditating in a new way on the prophecy of Isaiah 2:4: "...they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks."

With the Level III children, when we present the prophetic texts on the Parousia (the green card material) we ask ourselves which of all these realities we are awaiting can we somehow anticipate?

Well, it seems to me that this prophecy of Isaiah precisely relates to this time we are in and that it is already, in a certain way, being fulfilled. I was very impressed to hear about very high-end fashion industries, producing luxury clothes that only a few can buy - after all, "superfluous" industries - that are converting their products and manufacturing masks and medical aids for everyone! How nice it would be if they could also convert industries that manufacture weapons into industries that produce instruments of salvation! In the meantime, the Secretary of the UN and Pope Francis have already asked for wars to stop. One must go one step further. It makes me think that, since we cannot understand it by ourselves, since we always think that war is about "others" and not "us", now it is history that forces us or will soon force us to understand it, converting not only our hearts, but also our works.

I feel strongly the need to pray that all the peoples who build weapons - and there are many of them - realize that by doing so they are not building peace for themselves, but their own suicide! We can invite our children to re-read this prophecy and meditate on it together to stir hope in us that it will come true.

We can invite our children - and if possible, we can do it with them - to bring out all the "green cards", the prophecies, asking ourselves once again, in this special, new time of waiting:

- What are we waiting for at Parousia?
- What can we already anticipate on our "blank page"?
- What is not yet there and what is already there or can be there?

I embrace you
Francesca

Pentecost Foglietto 2020

June 2020



During this vigil of Pentecost, Francesca Cocchini has published a text of Sofia Cavalletti's in "settimananews" (weekly news), a blog of the Dehoniani of Bologna, 5/27/20., that can help us in "reading the signs of the times" of our world. In the situation we are living, preparing for and awaiting the beginning of a "new" situation, what happened in the history of Israel invites us to understand that it is not a matter of substituting one thing for another thing: the Synagogue for the Temple or Lectio Divina or some other communal activity for the Eucharist. It is not a journey of choosing an alternative; "either this or that;" rather, it is a matter of "this and that." It is necessary to proceed in the direction of enriching what has already been noted with the discoveries and deeper understanding that our new situation offers us. In this way the Holy Spirit carries the history forward toward the fullness of truth.

The Temple and the Synagogue (in "Settimana News")

Francesca Cocchini, 5/27/20

A page in the book, *Ebraismo e Spiritualita Cristiana (Judaism and Christian Spirituality*, Studium, 1966) by Sofia Cavalletti (1917-2011) seems to me to be important in reflecting on what the Church is doing in the journey "between the health lockdown and the liturgical

countdown" (Marco Casadei in SettimanaNews). The history of Israel is fundamentally the history of the Church; it is exemplified in each of its stages, because in each stage God's will to live a covenant relationship with his people is revealed through what God does. A stage that is particularly noteworthy is that which is marked by the exile.

Accordingly, Sofia wrote:

It is well known that the Synagogue is an institution which dates back to the (Babylonian) exile. Being deprived of the Temple, and therefore of the possibility of offering God blood sacrifice, the Hebrew people try to make up for such a great loss through the means they had at their disposal. The Lord had linked his presence to the Temple in a special way, so that, after the destruction of the Temple by the Babylonians, the Lord himself was somewhat in exile. Yet he spoke through his Law, and the only way left for the exiled Hebrew people to remain in communication with their God was to return to meditating on the Word, which is a means of his presence among them.

But the Synagogue does not owe its origins merely to contingent historical causes. In fact, even after the return to the land of Israel and the rebuilding of the Temple, not only does the Synagogue not die, but it spreads, proving to be more alive than ever. In truth, it is rooted in a religious need which we see deepening and spreading more and more as time goes by: a deeper penetration of religion into daily life and a more active and lively participation in it also by the non-priestly classes. Whereas in the Temple the priestly privileges are reserved for a hereditary aristocracy, the pious "commoners"—which we would call "the laity"—affirm that all of Israel "is a priestly kingdom and a holy people."

The "laity" storm the Temple, occupying Mount Zion itself, where vying for the land of the Sanctuary, already a synagogue arises in the pre-Christian epoch—documented by the oldest inscription of any synagogue—that is, a place where worship of the Word of God is open to all and is not reserved for the priestly class alone, a place where every Israelite can be called on to read and explain the Scripture. Thus, the "laity" is inserted into the same liturgical life of the Temple. "Stations" are created, which are groups of Israelites who, in turn, represent the people during the offering of the sacrifice, and they are given such importance that it is stated: it is due to their merit that the heavens and earth exist. (pp. 91-92)



The “Always New Gift” That We Have Received

July 2020



This time I am sending the Foglietto in advance of the anniversary of Sofia's birth (August 21) and "Passover" (August 23). I am writing now in light of the very recent publication of an important document for the Catholic Church by the Holy See: *a Directory for Catechesis*. The preceding General Catechetical Directory was promulgated by Paul IV and then, on October 16, 1979, the Catholic Church received from John Paul II, the Apostolic Exhortation: *Catechesi Tradendae* (CT). I well remember the interest with which Sofia and Gianna studied that document. In 1979 the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd had been unfolding for twenty-five years (having begun—as you know—in 1954); it had already become ecumenical; it had already spread to different countries and cultures and had been welcomed in a wide variety of social settings. Therefore, it was a source of great joy for them to find such confirmation in that official document of the Church, intended for all Catholics in the world, including many institutions and many convictions therein that were now consolidated in this document. One has only to look at the cross references to CT in the second, expanded edition of *The Religious Potential of the Child* [of 3-6]. (The first edition was published in 1979, before CT had been published.) Here I will only cite three of these references:

+Remembering the centrality of Christ in the Catechesis [of the Good Shepherd], Sofia cites CT nos. 5-6.

+Regarding the necessity that the catechesis have a certain structure and order also when younger children (before six years of age) are involved (See the "Introduction" to *RPC I*), Sofia cites CT no. 21, which declares that catechesis: "must be systematic, not improvised but programmed to reach a precise goal; It must deal with essentials... It must nevertheless be sufficiently complete, not stopping short at the initial proclamation of the Christian mystery such as we have in the kerygma; It must be an integral Christian initiation, open to all the other factors of Christian life.

+But it is, above all, in regard to the catechist that Sofia finds affirmed in CT no. 6 what is truly precious: the catechist as "unprofitable servant." (See Chapter 2 in *RPC I*: "The Child and the Adult" and the "Conclusion" in *RPC II*.) She speaks explicitly about this affirmation at the beginning of Foglietto no. 2, shared in 2005, where she says:

The text cited establishes a principle of the utmost importance in catechesis: the need for the catechist to be rigorously objective in the transmission of the message.

In every educational process, the educator must put the one to be educated in relationship with reality so that he or she becomes capable of establishing his or her own personal relationship with it. The task of the catechist is to initiate into religious reality, that is to say, (1) to point to the reality that we are surrounded by the presence of a Person, of a Love, because from this knowledge is born (2) a personal relationship with God.

The catechist should work in a direct manner during the first moment, transmitting this "treasure" that was given to her, and helping only in an indirect fashion during the second moment.

In remembering Sofia's and Gianna's study of CT, I, too, have wanted to consider our catechesis in light of the new Directory and to share with you at least a few of my first impressions of the document. I am especially pleased to report what is written in the Preface to the Directory. It includes a long citation from the Apostolic Exhortation of Pope Francis: *Evangelii Gaudium*, which serves as a fundamental reference point for the entire Directory and will be recalled in nos. 57 and 58. It reflects our catechesis so well that I want to copy it here:

A Kerygmatic and Mystagogical Catechesis. 164. We have rediscovered the fundamental role of the first announcement or kerygma, which needs to be the center of all evangelizing activity and all efforts at Church renewal... This first proclamation is called "first" not because it exists at the beginning and can then be forgotten or replaced by other more important things. It is first in a qualitative sense because it is the principal proclamation, the one which we must hear again and again in different ways, the one which we must announce one way or another throughout the process of catechesis, at every level and moment.

165. We must not think that in catechesis the kerygma gives way to a supposedly more "solid" formation. Nothing is more solid, profound, secure, meaningful, and wisdom-filled than that initial proclamation. All Christian formation consists of entering more deeply into the kerygma, which is reflected in and constantly illumines, the work of catechesis, thereby enabling us to understand more fully the significance of every subject which the latter treats. It is the message capable of responding to the desire for the infinite which abides in every human heart.

And now for the results of my initial work of comparing our "Characteristics" and other sources in our catechesis with what is written in the new *Directory*.

1) I am thinking of the importance of the "place", the "environment" in which our catechesis takes place. We call the place dedicated to religious life "the atrium" as did Maria Montessori in recalling the space in the ancient Christian basilica which served as an anteroom to the church, both in a literal and metaphorical sense and which is nothing like a classroom. It is not a place of religious instruction but of religious life. (See RPC I, Chapter 2 on The Environment.)

Characteristics nos. 2-4, 24 regarding the atrium: "The catechist prepares an environment called the atrium. . . . The atrium is a community in which children, starting with the youngest ages, and adults live together a religious experience which facilitates participation in the wider community of the family, the Church, and in society... The atrium is a place of prayer, in which work, and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation, prayer and a joyful experience... The transmission of the Christian message in the atrium has a celebrative character . . . (It is the task of the catechist) to prepare the atrium and maintain order so that might be a place that fosters concentration, silence, and the contemplation of the children and adults."

Directory, nos. 221-222: Similarly, the Church has given special significance to her own spaces...for example, in the early Christian complexes the narthex was a space generally situated between the nave and the main façade of the church, intended to accommodate penitents and catechumens. Often decorated with biblical scenes or representations of the mysteries of faith, the narthex, through these images, also became a space of catechesis The spaces for catechesis are settings in which the community expresses its own way of evangelizing...it is appropriate to reflect on the specificity of the places of catechesis as instruments of proclamation and of education in human relationships. It is therefore necessary that such environments be welcoming and well-kept, that they convey a climate of familiarity that fosters serene involvement in community activities. The very widespread environments that are patterned after school buildings do not constitute the best practices for the unfolding of catechetical activities. It would be therefore good to proceed with an adaptation of these spaces to the actual meaning of catechesis.

2) The difference between school and catechesis, which is well evidenced in no. 222 that I have just cited, is further affirmed in the *Directory*. This is a highly innovative element, and, for this reason, it was underscored in the presentation of the document to the press. We know it is fundamental for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. How many times Sofia reiterated the necessity of avoiding any attitude or language or anything else that could cause our work to resemble a "scholastic" type of work the announcement of the [Christian] message, the communal reflection, and the personal work that follows it must all have a "celebrative character" because what is involved is the person of God and his relationship with his creatures.

Characteristic no. 4: "The catechist renounces every form of control (such as quizzes, tests, exams, etc.) in the spirit of poverty before an experience whose fruits are not his or her own."

Directory, no. 313: Its relationship between the teaching of catholic religion in schools with catechesis is one of distinction in complementarity. Where the distinction is not clear, there is danger that both may lose their identity. Catechesis "promotes personal adherence to Christ and maturing of the Christian life, [whilst] school teaching gives the students' knowledge about Christianity's identity and Christian life.

3) The *Directory* recognizes that even young children, pre-school children, must be given the opportunity to receive a catechesis that can assist them in their relationship with God. For us in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, this recognition reflects a "discovery" that forms the base of all our work. It is what, in a manner of speaking, most characterizes our work; thus, we cannot help but enjoy seeing it recognized [in the *Directory*].

What catechists from the CGSUSA webinar on 2/5/21 said about the Directory for Catechesis:

"There are numerous connections to CGS and the Joy of the Gospel. It has been very validating in continuing to pursue the work of CGS particularly with regard to the children, however, CGS work is transformative for ALL ages!"

"The affirmations of the Kerygma, the role of Scripture and Tradition, the parallels with CGS Levels & the Process of Evangelization, the dynamism & transforming power of the Holy Spirit, introduction to community life sections reminded me of greater participation in the life of the church, the importance of Scripture and Liturgy, Beauty, vocation."

"Our church community is in such sadness during this pandemic. So many have lost so much. But this directory is filled with love, beauty, joy and above all HOPE. If we trust in the love of the Good Shepherd, we can continue to grow and bring more of God's children to the sheepfold."

"A witness of faith and keeper of the memory of God."

"I came away from our time together wanting to share all the affirmations of our work with my staff. I loved the passages about inclusion of persons with disabilities and all marginal persons. I loved the sections 331 which lift up the deschooling of catechesis."

"The importance of beauty in the environment and that being a catechist is not a job or task, it is a vocation of service to the church. I found this a beautiful description."

Regarding *RPC I*, we must never forget how important the early pages of this book are for our work in which Sofia refers to particular "intuitions" that the young and youngest children have in their relationship with God, manifesting this capacity of theirs with "joy": this is why we can speak of a "religious potential" of the child!

Directory no. 236: It is from the tenderest age that the children must be helped to perceive and to develop the sense of God and the natural intuition of his existence (cf. GE 3). Anthropology and pedagogy confirm, in fact, that the child is capable of relating to God and that his questions about the meaning of life arise even where the parents are hardly attentive to religious education.

Children. . . are capable of rejoicing before the mystery of life and love.

4) Regarding the contents of catechesis, there are many considerations presented in the *Directory* which we can recognize as being in tune with what we present in our catechesis, through an on-going process of deepening (and expansion) which we refer to as "the spiral" (the "spiral method"). Again, I am just going to point to a few reference points in our catechesis.

Characteristic, no. 5: The themes presented in the atrium are those to which the children have responded with depth and joy. These themes are taken from the Bible and the liturgy (prayers and sacraments) as the fundamental sources for creating and sustaining Christian life at every developmental stage and, in particular, for illuminating and nourishing the child in his/her most vital religious needs.

Directory, no. 145: In the presentation of the message, it is in any case necessary to be attentive to how this is done so that it may be welcomed and received actively. It is therefore necessary to combine: a) the concise and kerygmatic character, in such a way that the various elements of the faith may be presented in a unified and organic vision capable of appealing to human experience; b) the narrative quality of the biblical account, which "always entails" approaching Scripture in faith and in the Church's Tradition, so that its words can be perceived as living [. . . .] and so enable every member of the faithful to realize that this history is also a part of his or her own life"; (Benedict XVI, *Verbum Domini* 74). No. 170: Catechesis and the liturgy are never limited to reading the books of the Old and New Testament separately, but in reading them together have shown how a typological interpretation of Sacred Scripture allows one fully to grasp the meaning of the events and texts that recount the one story of salvation. Such interpretation offers to catechesis a lasting means, still highly relevant today, for those growing in the faith to grasp the fact that nothing in the old covenant is lost with Christ, but all finds fulfillment in him. No. 175: Catechesis is not primarily a presentation of morality, but the proclamation of the beauty of God, which can be experienced, and which touches the heart and the mind, transforming life.

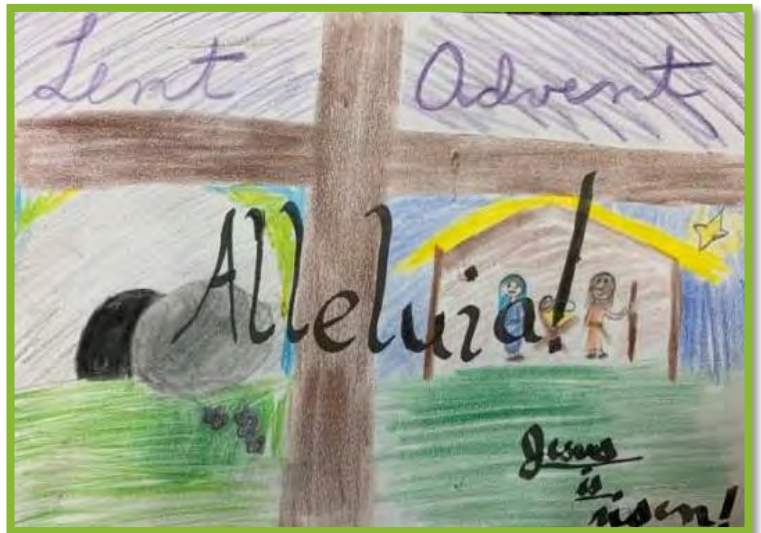
5) Finally, regarding the ecumenical dimension of our catechesis and its relationship with Judaism — elements of absolute relevance for us (one has only to remember the material on "The History of the Jewish People") - I would like to point to at least a few expressions in two numbers within the *Directory*: no. 345: catechesis is to take care of. . . . to affirm division is a grave wound that contradicts the Lord's will; no. 348: For Christians, Judaism cannot be considered as simply another religion, because Christianity has Jewish roots and the relationship between the two traditions are unique the Old Testament is an integral part of the one Christian Bible, and the Church bears witness to her faith in the one God who is author of both Testaments, thus rejecting any presumed opposition between the two.

I am going to end here. As you can see, I have only considered a few aspects of our catechesis in relation to the new *Directory*. Sofia always considered our catechesis as a "gift to the Church," so at this time when the Catholic Church has published a new directory, it seemed to me a good and right thing for us to compare the two and enjoy once again the "always new gift" that we have received and that we must faithfully guard.

With an embrace, Francesca

1 This article was published as "The Objectivity of Catechesis" in the 2006 CGSUSA *Journal* and can also be found on pages 100-102 in the 2003-2008 *Compilation of the Journals of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*.

Translated by Rebekah Rojcewicz, July 22, 2020



Christmas Foglietto 2020

December 2020

Dearest All,

We are already approaching our next Christmas, a Christmas so particular we could scarcely have imagined it.

At Easter, when we had just begun to live the mystery of the COVID virus that was invading the world, I asked myself and proposed that we ask ourselves, as the apostles asked before the Last Supper, "Lord, where do you want us to prepare the Passover banquet?" I realized that, after two thousand years, that question had acquired a new relevance; it had become our question. Now the Gospel puts before us another question, one that is also fundamental to history: "How can this be?" (Luke 1:34), and once again it is a question we can truly ask ourselves.

We know that it was Mary, the Mother of Jesus, who first asked this question after hearing the announcement Gabriel had brought to her: "You will conceive and bear a son, and you will name him Jesus." When we meditate on this event with the children, we ask ourselves: "Is this announcement given only to Mary?" If we realize that it is also given to us, then we too should pause, amazed, and ask "How will this happen? In this history of ours, shrouded with so much pain, in this people of ours—the whole of humanity!—who "walks in darkness" (Isaiah 9:1 or 2), how will it be possible for a "Great Light" to appear?"

To Mary's question, the angel responds with a simple, clear, and unequivocal announcement: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you!" The Holy Spirit does not replace her but will act in her so that the Child can be born from her, just as he does not replace us, but acts 'with' and 'in' us, transforming the weakness, incapacity, darkness, and pain of the world into "birth pangs." Yes, perhaps never before as in this time of ours, in this Christmas of ours, is "the whole of creation sighing together and suffering the pains of childbirth," and not only creation but we ourselves, "who have the first fruits of the Spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies." (Rom 8:22-23).

It is a mystery so great and so seemingly improbable that we cannot wait for it and experience it without stopping and asking ourselves, "What will this be like?" And we ask it of each other and above all we ask it of the God of history with full confidence, with joyful trepidation, because we know that "nothing will be impossible with God!" (Luke 1:37)

And so, with this confidence, I would like to share with you the invocations that for so many centuries the churches have been addressing to the Lord in the seven days leading up to Christmas. They all begin with an "O!", an expression of wonder and then they give Him a Name —He who has so many names! —and then they plead with Him, "Come!" It might be beautiful, perhaps with the children of Level III, to add to the Names found in Is 9:5 (or Is. 9:6), these others that also come from the Bible but are given to us by the Liturgy. Here they are, the famous "antiphons in 'O'":

O Wisdom, coming forth from the mouth of the Most High, reaching from one end to the other, mightily, and sweetly ordering all things: Come and teach us the way of prudence.

O Adonai, and leader of the House of Israel, who appeared to Moses in the fire of the burning bush and gave him the law on Sinai: Come and redeem us with an outstretched arm.

O Root of Jesse, standing as a sign among the peoples; before you kings will shut their mouths, to you the nations will make their prayer: Come and deliver us, and delay no longer.

O Key of David and scepter of the House of Israel; you open, and no one can shut; you shut, and no one can open: Come and lead the prisoners from the prison house, those who dwell in darkness and the shadow of death.

O Dawn of the East, Brightness of the Light Eternal and Sun of Justice, come and enlighten them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death.

O King of the nations, and their desire, the cornerstone making both one: Come and save the human race, which you fashioned from clay.

O Emmanuel, our King and Lawgiver, the Hope of the Nations, and their Savior: come to save us, O Lord our God.

Finally, I will copy for you a reflection by Sofia from 1966 that seems so timely:

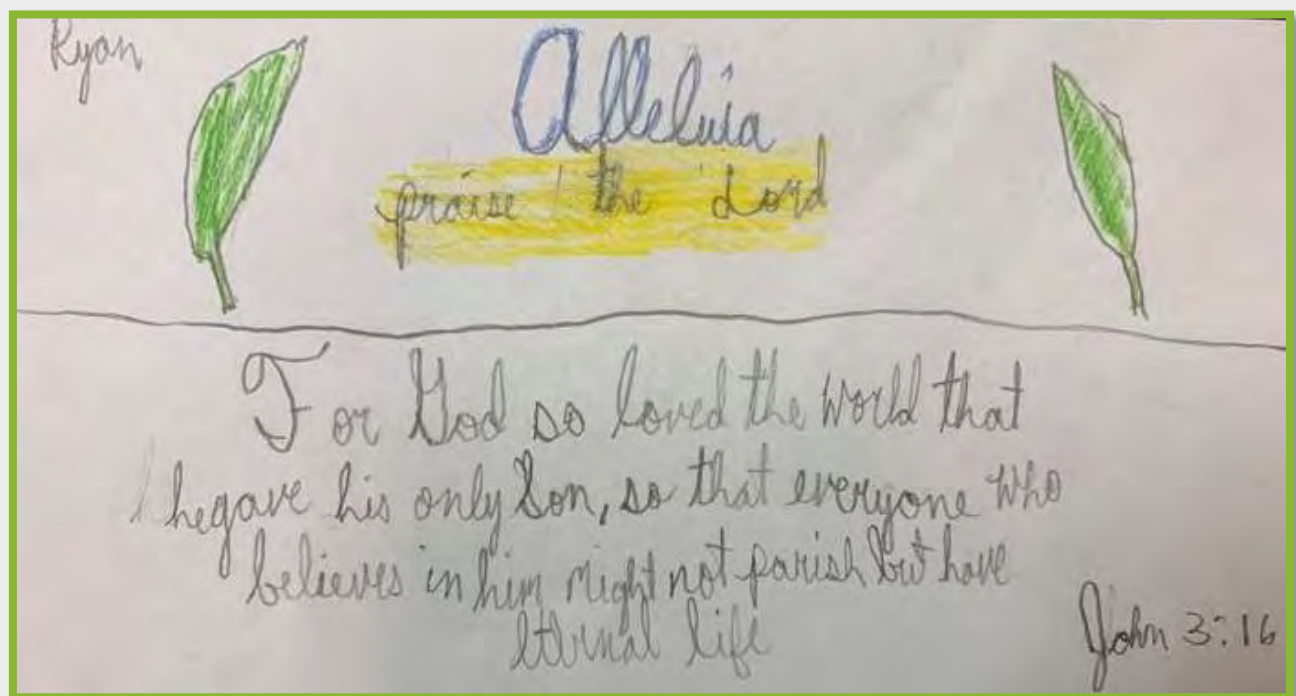
"I have not been able to convince a parish priest of the need to put Jesus at the center; for him one must begin with the Father. He said that children must first pray to God as the highest Being and then 'at a later time' comes the mediation on Christ. I am becoming convinced that the novelty of Christianity (the Incarnation, the merging of the human and the divine) is so great that we have not even begun to understand it."

With an embrace and "Buon Natale!"

Francesca

THE QUARANTINE LETTERS

For the Mission



Live as Children of Light

March 2020

Today we are writing in response to all who have called and written inquiring about how we can guide our hearts and minds as we and our world live through this new pandemic, COVID-19. We have seen communities and public health officials around the world respond to this outbreak. We have seen the closings of schools, businesses, even countries! We pray for all those affected by this coronavirus and their families; for the health workers who are courageously attempting to diagnose and treat patients, for those under quarantine awaiting results of their screening for the virus; for those groups at home and abroad who are working to provide good information, medical supplies, and assistance; for those whose daily bread is affected by these closings.

In this time of uncertainty, we take our mission very seriously, we continue to support catechists, parents, and others in the Church and beyond, as they grow in their understanding of the religious potential of children. We ask what we can do for the children of the atria, for their parents, for our catechists. Do we close our atria? Do we cancel courses? There is a great fear and anxiety in our communities, our country, and in our world. How are children absorbing this? We all ask what we can do to serve!



We stand by our purpose to assist the involvement of children and adults in a common religious experience in which the religious values of childhood, primarily those values of contemplation and enjoyment of God, are predominant. Perhaps to do so we must first live what we have learned from the children, first we

must "be", simply be. We must take a listening stance before our Good Shepherd and "be" a people of prayer. Perhaps this can be a time of deeper fasting, deeper prayer, deeper charity.

We have a wealth of resources on our website that can offer help and support in these times. Below we have listed links for families, catechists, and courses. We also offer some links on the virus. We strongly encourage you all to look for and share those resources available in your own communities and dioceses.

Our friends in Italy have been in a country-wide quarantine for some time now. As you may know, all of Italy now has the distinction of having Europe's worst cluster of infections, and the second-highest outside of China. Please hold them close in prayer. We have received a Foglietto, a "little memo" from Francesca Cocchini that is filled with wisdom and hope. May it bring you peace.

We see the schools and businesses closing and going online to keep as many people at home as possible. What shall be done when an atrium closes for this pandemic? Could this be an opportunity to live our purpose in a new way! Our purpose to assist the involvement of children and adults in a common religious experience in which the religious values of childhood, primarily those values of contemplation and enjoyment of God, are predominant. While this happens in the atrium environment, could we take some time to focus on another very important environment, the "domestic church." The term "domestic church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

A New Sunday

In this time of sheltering in place and watching the Celebration of the Eucharist on a screen, we have an opportunity with our children to look more closely at those things, we may not see as well from our seats in the pew. If we can "see" the Celebration as a whole, we will see that there are two main parts: the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist. During the Liturgy of the Word, we live what we heard in this Sunday's Gospel where Jesus walks along with the disciples and "opening the Scriptures" to them. During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the priest, representing Jesus, takes the bread, blesses it, and breaks it. Again, we live what we heard in this Sunday's Gospel; the Risen Lord is present with us although he is hidden. He gently invites us to encounter him in the mystery of his passion, death, and resurrection, just like those early disciples did, "in the breaking of the bread."

We now have an opportunity to observe more closely the gestures of the Eucharist. These gestures are among the richest liturgical signs. They speak to us through movement, telling us what is really happening in the celebration. Prayer words often accompany these gestures, but the movement itself is a powerful language. Young children are naturally very attracted to movement. They need to be given the opportunity to focus on these rich liturgical movements and learn to "read them", even before going on to meditate on the prayer words.

In this moment of sheltering in place, let us all take time to observe more deeply what we participate in the Celebration of the Mass. Sofia Cavalletti writes in *The Religious Potential of the Child* (3-6). She reminds us all that, "the child who comes to know the Good Shepherd should be initiated into the greatest action in which we meet Him: The Mass."

Within the life of the family, this "domestic church," we find the first and privileged place of evangelization. Here the first experience of the Christian community is lived. Here the parents are "the first heralds of the faith" (LG, #11). Here is the fundamental environment where a "sense of God's loving presence is awakened and faith in Jesus confessed, encouraged and lived." (GDC 177) It is important, therefore, that we help parents with their responsibility to nourish their child's faith during this time when we are facing COVID-19. How can we help parents understand and care for the spirituality of their children very seriously, recognizing that in the faith life of children, great care must be given so that they may be nurtured for a life lived in communion and solidarity with God and his people?

Let me share with you a moment of life within the domestic church of a family in my parish. Nate has just celebrated his First Reconciliation. He walks toward his mother who waits for him at the Baptismal Font where she, once again, vests him in a white garment as she did on the day of his baptism. They hug each other closely and return to their family. His mom whispers to him: "Nate what did you feel?" He answered right away with his beautiful, brown eyes wide open in amazement: "I felt the Holy Spirit!!!!" Nate kneels and continues to pray. At the end of the celebration, as the family readies to leave, Nate, still in his white garment, stands before his mother and places his hands on her knees, then on her legs and then around her body. She catches his hands and asks: "Hey, what are you doing?" He says again with his enchanting, resplendent smile and eyes wide open. "I am giving you, all around you, some of the light of Christ that I have with me. Nate knows deeply that he is a child of the Light! And he shares this with his family freely. Nate's mom sees how we can witness what she calls this "astounding encounter" between God and the child. May we not forget the meeting of these two mysteries in this moment in time, remembering that there is so much that happens in the other 9,960 minutes of the child's life outside of the atrium and within the life of the family.

As I write this holding you all in my heart, I find it fitting that we are approaching the third Sunday of Lent. The readings call to us. Let us listen closely. In the first reading, we will be reminded of the people of Israel journeying through the desert with Moses. Let's silently reflect on the place we stand, is it called "The place was called Massah and Meribah, because the Israelites quarreled there and tested the LORD, saying, 'Is the LORD in our midst or not?'" (Exodus 17:7) Truly we know that He is with us, in our midst.

The second reading will remind us that: "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith to this grace in which we stand, and we boast in hope of the glory of God. And hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us." (Romans 5:2-5) Yes!

And let us thirst for peace and healing in our world, stand together in prayer at the well with the Samaritan woman and hear our Good Shepherd call to us: "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again; but whoever drinks the water I shall give will never thirst; the water I shall give will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life." (John 4:13,14)

In His Love,

Mary Mirrione

A Different Season of Fasting

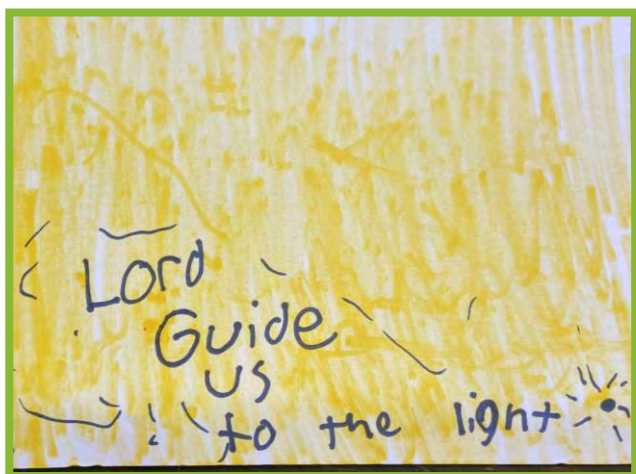
March 2020

To our dear Formation Leaders:

During this season of Lent, a time when we are invited to a depth of holiness through prayer, fasting and almsgiving, we are also experiencing an unprecedented time when a virus has gripped the world. This has become a different season of fasting causing us to continually think about what we share, what we do, and how close we can be with anyone: children, family, friends, and neighbors. In times of crisis such as 9/11 or natural disasters, we typically have found strength, solace, comfort and joy within a shared community, with human touch, shared meals, and corporate worship. It's therefore, counter intuitive to be asked to self-isolate, to socially distance ourselves.

It feels as if it is a particularly dark time and in the midst of this darkness, we are invited to remember who lights our path. This season of Lent, we are invited to draw even closer to Jesus, to remain with Him as branches on the True Vine. What prayers and scriptures can we read, proclaim, and say to strengthen, guide us, and give us hope? How can we remind ourselves that the connection we seek to have with each other is first given to us in Him? How do we help our children, families, and our catechists remember this?

What do we offer the children during this Lenten season? They hear Jesus proclaim, "I am the Good Shepherd," his voice of love calls them by name. They may also hear the words of Psalm 23, "the Lord gives me everything I need," or "your rod and staff give me courage." They may ponder the compassion of the Samaritan for the wounded man or the words of a maxim that gives them strength, "when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret." (Mt. 6:6a).



The oldest atrium children reflect on the Armor of Light as a way of considering what helps us navigate the darkness, how to live as children of light. All of these reflections (and many others) offer our children prayers to guide their way, and ours. We, too, can walk this particularly trying season as we do with the children, prayerfully holding the same scriptures savoring them, pondering them so they give us strength, guide us, offer us hope, and an "armor of light."

As a formation leader, how can you help your course participants prayerfully embrace the spirit and charism of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd so they can reflect more deeply on the gospel message of hope? In writing about the older children's experience of the Armor of Light, recall Sofia's words:

"Our consideration of the darkness which obscures the light's brilliance must always bring us back to the beauty of the gift we have received and

our desire to be more worthy recipients of that gift. Consideration of the negative must serve as a springboard to something better in the future. the morality of the gospel is a morality of "You can!"...because it is rooted in a morality of "You are." (RPC6-12, p. 109)

On a more practical level, many of us as formation leaders have catechist formation courses underway and we are faced with what to do as each session approaches. For many, the decision to cancel (or not) a catechist formation session will be greatly determined by what is happening in your area with the COVID-19. Questions have arisen about the possibility of offering online CGS formation in light of a cancelled session. Please know that CGSUSA holds to a policy of no videorecording of CGS catechist formation which includes giving presentations through any online platform or recording. This does not offer the catechist the most in-depth formation experience which is modeled on the atrium experiences with children. So during this time, if you have to cancel, you may want to consider involving participants in some exchange of discussion of readings from the core texts or have an open forum to answer questions about what they are observing of the children in the atrium.

How best to respond to course participants when a session needs to cancel? Please read below an example of a letter written by the Sheepfold Formation Team located in the Pacific Northwest region, in Washington, in response to cancelling their Saturday Level I session. If you are a formation leader wrestling with what to say or do, may these words be of help to you. It is with the permission of the Sheepfold Formation Team that I share this with you.

Holding all of you in my prayers with love,

Karen Maxwell

Fully Present in Time and Space

March 2020

Dear Participants,

Given the news this morning of the ban on large gatherings in several western Washington counties, and the recommendation to maintain social distance even in small gatherings, the Sheepfold Formation Leaders have decided to CANCEL this Saturday's Level 1 Formation Course. We are mindful of the fine line between responsible action and fearful action and believe that prayerful prudence requires us to limit exposure to the coronavirus as much as possible for our families and communities right now.

Please know that we are dedicated to helping everyone receive the formation they need. We will be exploring the possibility of rescheduling this course day within the current year, (and we are aware that ongoing urgency may impact our April course day as well) and relaxing the time limits with which to finish the course. Please know, too, that we had a conversation with Karen Maxwell at the National Association office about whether to consider offering some of the course day via video conferencing. It is the Association's policy not to offer formation in a remote/technology format. We all agreed that even in these extenuating circumstances, the essential quality of formation - much like the essential quality of the child's experience in the atrium - invites us to be fully present with one another in time and space. In this, we honor the reality of the current health crises to alter our plans, and we are reminded that God's time is not our time. CGS always asks us to enter into a long, slow work, even as our hearts are longing for a faster pace.

So, we will not offer any part of the course via video conference. However, we have just begun to consider whether we could offer study session via video this Saturday (album page questions or discussing Montessori readings) as a way to stay connected and support one another. We'll share more about that as soon as we know more.

Please let us know if you have any questions or concerns. Our prayers continue for all who are ill or caring for the sick, all who have lost loved-ones, and all who are anxious and afraid right now. As we affirm in the atrium each year during Lent:

The Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need.

In green pastures he makes me lie down; to still waters he leads me; he restores my soul.

He guides me along right paths for the sake of his name.

Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me.

You set a table before me in front of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.

Indeed, goodness and mercy will pursue me all the days of my life;

I will dwell in the house of the Lord for endless days.

Blessings,

Sheepfold Formation Leaders (Lynne Shioyama, Joann Terranova, Kim Ward, and Trinkha Hamel)

Finding a “Silver Lining” in This Cloud

March 2020

Dear Atrium Parents,

We miss being with your children in the atrium!

We hope you are all keeping well and finding a “silver lining” to this cloud of the Corona virus. Father Val’s most recent e-mail, that included the prayer Bishop Talley had shared, was a “silver lining” for me.

At least one family among you has asked about “virtual catechesis”. Our national Association for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is fielding that question from all over the country. The truth is that our catechesis is not compatible with digital transmission; by its very nature, it must be a lived experience in a prepared environment with a community of peers and their catechists, in which the children’s personal work, silence, and prayer are a far more important part than the catechist’s presentation.

The home is meant to be its own sort of “atrium”, what the Vatican II documents refer to as the “domestic Church.” How the family cares for one another, confronts challenges together (such as COVID19!), lives and prays together is a very powerful “homily” for every family member.

While we will not be streaming the atrium presentations into your homes, we can underscore the importance of family faith sharing and prayer. We can also steer you to some CGS “sources” that perhaps can help with the contents of your faith sharing in this very particular time of Lent and the Corona virus threat. During Lent, here are some of the main themes we reflect on:

Level I:

We refer to our liturgical calendar puzzle to note the 6 purple pieces signifying the 6 weeks we wait and prepare for Easter because it is the greatest feast of all when we will celebrate that Jesus, the Good Shepherd died and rose from the dead and remains with us always. A purple cloth will be put on the prayer table each week, along with a statue of the Good Shepherd and a prayer card (either just verse 1 of Psalm 23—“The Lord is my Shepherd; I have everything I need.” (the Good News Bible translation) or verses 1-3 (from any translation).

The parable of the Good Shepherd (John 10, but only verses 3b-5, 10b-11 14-16) is central to the paschal mystery because it’s all about the total giving of the Shepherd for his sheep, not just in his death; the Good Shepherd is always giving himself to his sheep, in a most particular way in the Eucharist. The parable of the “Found Sheep” (Luke 15:3-6 only) is another example of how well he knows and loves

his sheep. With young children we place no emphasis on why the sheep got lost, but only focus on the shepherd's love and action. (He's so happy that he goes out to tell his friends and neighbors!)

We look at a raised-surface model of the City of Jerusalem and offer a BRIEF narrative about the passion, death and resurrection story. We also recount the story of the Last Supper using a model of that "upper room" in the Cenacle with figures for Jesus and his Apostles. And we plant wheat seeds for a reflection on "the mystery of life and death" as Jesus expresses it in John 12:24. [Note: this would be a great activity to do together as a family with all ages of children.

Levels II and III

The Level I themes listed above are still central to the atria of the older children, although with expanded detail. For example:

In Level II we will add verses 12 and 13 to the John 10 parable of the Good Shepherd (about the hired hand and the wolf) and verse 4 will be added to Psalm 23 (about the "dark valley"); whereas Level III will reflect on the whole of Psalm 23.

When looking at the map of Jerusalem, we will go on to read and reflect on some of those episodes in the Gospel such as The Messianic Entry: Luke 19:29-38, 45a-- that we celebrate on Palm Sunday, or the Arrest: Matthew 26:57-68 (saving the Luke 22:39-46 account of Jesus' Agony in the Garden and the Crucifixion accounts for Level III)

Also in Levels II and III, we will be meditating on some of the "moral parables" and maxims of Jesus to foster our Lenten work of our personal "examination of conscience." Some Level II parables are: The Sower (Matthew 13:3b-8); The Good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37a); The Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:10-14). Level III parables also include: The Ten Bridesmaids (Matthew 25:1-12); The Debtors (Matthew 18:23-35); and The Talents (Matthew 25:14). If you read these parables with the children, keep in mind that the most important thing is that you are listening to His voice together, rather than using the moment to "instruct" your children. Invite everyone present (yourself included) to simply share what message is being heard.

Finally, you are encouraged to "reply to all" if you have a message or anecdote to share about your family's experience in this challenging time.

In the peace and love of our Lord,

Rebekah and all the catechists

Do Not Let Your Hearts Be Troubled

April 2020

Within the last week, I have heard this Gospel proclaimed four times and I smiled knowing that God was really trying to tell me something! It was the Gospel of the day three of those times, but the most challenging time was when it was proclaimed at a funeral of a beautiful, young woman. I stood outside the church in the parking lot, in the desert heat watching the live-streamed celebration while we all practiced social distancing. Our hearts were breaking. "Do not let your hearts be troubled." A very difficult thing to do.



We see signs of gradual steps being made toward normalcy and we wonder what the new normal will be. It is hard to read the "sign of the times" and our confusion can often lead to discouragement. In this time of pandemic there is so much to trouble our hearts. And yet he says to each of us: "Do not let your hearts be troubled."

And then I remember that this was first spoken at the Last Supper he shared with his friends and he reminded them: "You have faith in God; have faith in me also." Yes, Lord, I have faith in you! We can see that these words live deeply in Clare and Chelsea! Only four, after working with the altar materials Clare draws her prayer: we see the altar, the candles, the Eucharist and then she covers the page with I "heart" God, I "heart" you." How easily her heart moves from thinking about God to an encounter with him. Chelsea

is a bit older; she ponders our world and knows that Jesus and God are with us. She fills her prayer with Amen, Amen, Amen, as she, too, encounters his presence. The children always lead us into the Kingdom of God. Each day, we receive many emails and phone calls sharing how you are living in these days and those things that trouble your hearts. How will we manage our courses this summer? What will happen next fall? Will we return to the atrium, if so, how will we keep the children safe? If we cannot return, what can we do? My heart is troubled with you and I know that together, with him and in him, we will find these answers. There are those emails and phone calls that lift my spirits as you share your faith in God and our Good Shepherd. As you share what you are doing to continue to live out our 32 Characteristics

of CGS, as you send photos and artwork from families who are living CGS in their homes, and as you share your gifts and donations that are helping us keep the doors of CGSUSA open each day. My heart is filled with your friendship.

In His Love,

Mary

A Vulnerable Pause

April 2020

By Heather McColl Morgan

In April of 2020, just before Easter, Heather sent the following email to the National Office with an example of what she was sharing with her parish families at home. She said that writing came naturally from her work in the garden with her children and the life of the Atrium, which – although they were separated from it physically – still reached them in the garden and transformed the ordinary into sacred space. Heather is a work-at-home mom, online teacher, and Army veteran of nearly seven years. She said that it had been a stretch to regain a sense of calm in motherhood after deploying to Afghanistan, and she credited her CGS formation with restoring her relationship with her daughter as well as helping her to experience deep spiritual transformation, cultivate patience, and heal.



Dear All,

Since we cannot share Atrium time, and I am aware that you all are finding new rhythms of being the Church at home, I wanted to send something to support you, with children, grandchildren, neighbor children, or cousins... whomever you are with! These are also rich reflections for adult formation, too. This is the kind of thing anyone can do with children, without it feeling or sounding inauthentic: moms, dads, grands, aunts, and uncles. You are their primary catechists.

After conferring with Margie, and with her blessing, I am sharing three scriptures presented from the Atrium for use in your devotional times with children. These require very little in the way of materials, which make them ideal for home use. The children have each received these presentations before, at least the first moment, but may like to revisit the material with their families as they prepare gardens and stay home during social distancing.

The Growing Seed - Mark 4:26-28 With even the youngest children, we ponder the mystery of the Kingdom of God as the mystery of life itself: exponential growth and transformation with no visible source.

Although our participation in this mystery is crucial, we cannot grow and change merely by willing it. It is only the power of God that can bring about growth and transformation. The power of life within the seed is none other than the power of God. With this parable we ponder anew the Growing Seed, to see God's power in the smallest things, to sense our participation in the life of God, and to lift up the Kingdom as one of growth and harvest, where God is quietly at work.

The Parable of the Sower - Matthew 13:3-8 (see also Mark 4:3-8; Luke 8:5-15; John 15:16-17) With the older children we remember that through an abundance of the gifts of God and His strength of life, God initiates a covenant relationship with us. We are called to prepare and cultivate our "soil" so that God's life in us might grow and bear much fruit in the building of the kingdom of God.

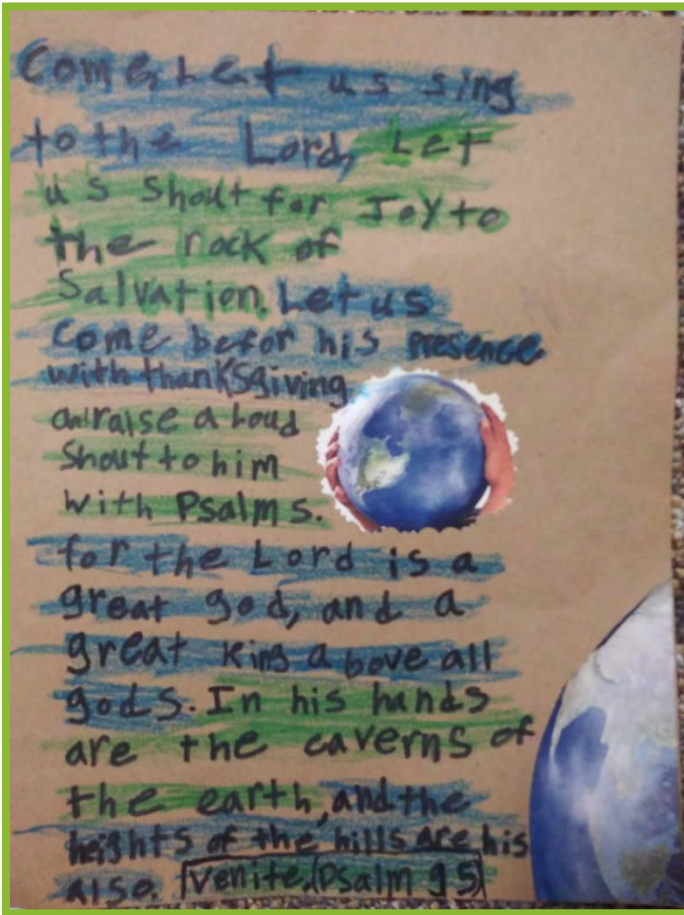
With this parable we proclaim and reflect on the abundance of life and gifts God gives and how it is important to prepare and cultivate our "soil" so that God's life might grow in us and bear much fruit in the building of the kingdom of God.



In pondering this parable with your children, just focus on what's essential:

- 1) find a place where you can first be still, invite the child, who will eventually be drawn by your stillness (reverence, awe)
- 2) possibly light a candle, always invite the Holy Spirit in prayer or song
- 3) read the Scripture passage in a solemn way once (twice if possible), and ask, "What do you notice? What do you wonder?"

And that is all. He will do the rest.



I often need to be reminded of this. The other day, in the falseness of my rushing, I was irritated with our girls as we prepared the garden space. It was not unprovoked - there was whining and sloth on both counts, even though they had completed what I'd asked. After running off to play with the boy who also lives on our farm, I overheard them arguing with one another. I was relieved to be working "unencumbered," but knew there was a missed opportunity I might circle back for: the soil I was working was as full of rocks and debris as my own heart that day. As I considered how best to invite these three into the Parable of the Sower with me, I remembered that all the preparation of the material and physical space of the Atrium is for but one purpose: that the adult would come to stillness, able to relax and relinquish control, so that the child would be invited with love and joy to come near to the Good Shepherd, on his or her own.

As I dug the one-inch holes in rows for planting peas, gathered small sticks to mark the rows and found the passage for the Parable of the Sower, I could hear "...you must become like a little child" over and over again in my head. When I called them (almost six, almost nine, and just ten) over, I was kneeling in my old combat boots and repurposed multi-cam pants, ones I'd deployed with. (Speaking with adults, I can say that the Parable of the Peaceable Kingdom continues to be realized inside of me, who was trained for war and yet am also a mother. The natures of the wolf and lamb in Isaiah's prophecy are both somehow inside of me - not yet at perfect peace with each other. I am, as you know, a human "sword" being beaten into a "plowshare!") The solemn reading began, "This parable is from the Holy Bible, recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, but today we'll hear it from the Gospel of Luke. What is a parable?" Our neighbor

recalled that they are stories that tell us how to live, and my daughters added that some parables Jesus used to tell us about himself, and his Kingdom.

This kind of dialogue--this great, vulnerable pause, these simple words--did not come naturally to me at first, but I offer them to you, as one who has been gratefully taught a new way. Ultimately, the Holy Spirit will give you the words. Less is more! Asking "What do you notice, what do you wonder?" opens things up beyond belief. By the end of this reading and reflection, the kids were wondering how God's word (the seed) can grow in our hearts and noticing what can get in the way of that. They noticed that attitudes, habits, and other people can interfere, or help it to grow. The work I invited them to do was just to hold several seeds in their hand, and we sang a Kingdom Song as we planted the rows. They did so, lingered, and eventually went their ways together to play. Their companionship was restored.

As a catechist, even though we school at home, I am always puzzling about how to find this sacred space at home for spiritual formation with our kids. I am often not as patient here as I am in the Atrium. Sharing this as encouragement, and in hopes that it will help you provide one or two meaningful encounters with our Lord's Passion and Death this week, looking forward to the celebration of his Resurrection!

Much love,

Heather

As We Now Celebrate the Memorial of Our Redemption

April 2020

As we come to this night, in this time of finding new ways of remaining in relationship as we shelter in place, I have been remembering past celebrations, times when we have been all together as we celebrated these most holy of days. Each year I remember a dear sweet child that was in my atrium for six years. He drew this empty tomb and joyfully gave it to me just after hearing the account of the Last Supper. It helps me remember.

It was twenty years ago now; my parish family had come together on this night to multilingually celebrate the memorial of our redemption. All of us. Together. Mass began. We stood. We sang. When our pastor reached the altar and turned to face us, we saw tears in his eyes. He announced to us that one of our little ones had died. He was just seven, he had a strep infection that had crossed over into his blood. This boy had handed me the drawing of the empty tomb just days before. His dad, our deacon, who was to have washed our feet this night had washed the body of his son instead.

There was one collective gasp among all of us. How could this be? How can we celebrate? It was a Triduum like no other. We found that we were profoundly united in this celebration of the Paschal Mystery. We were to remember and proclaim the mystery of our faith, which in those days was simply: "Christ has died, Christ is Risen, Christ will come again" Did we really believe this? Would we be able to proclaim Alleluia, He is Risen in just three days?

As a community we moved through these days slowly and found ourselves drawing strength from our remembering and we celebrated the memorial of our redemption in a real and true way - through, with, and in Christ. It was not until Easter morning when we lifted up our voices that we found we could sing Alleluia, for we did believe!

As we enter into the celebration of the Easter Triduum, we pray you will live these days as Sofia Cavalletti shared with us: "Christ has died, but He is risen. He has conquered death forever, and we look forward to that time when the victory of the Risen One will have reached every creature. The Christian "mystery of faith" is the hymn to that life that, in Christ, is stronger than death. The "mystery of faith" is the heart of the Christian life, and we must transmit it to every Christian child as the most precious treasure we can offer." *The Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old*, page 68

Our dear little one knew this, it was his precious treasure, which as children do, he gave to me and I offer now to you.

In His Love,

Mary



Alleluia! He Is Risen! He Is Risen, Indeed!

April 2020

We hear in the Easter Vigil Gospel, "Do not be afraid! I know that you are seeking Jesus the crucified. He is not here, for he has been raised just as he said." These words take on a deeper meaning as we shelter in place in this pandemic. Do not be afraid! We celebrate this greatest news that ever was, He is risen!



As the women go to announce this to their friends, they meet Jesus along the way. Jesus, Himself, says to them: "Do not be afraid. Go tell my brothers to go to Galilee, and there they will see me." This year, I heard something new in these words: "go to Galilee and there you will see me." Could it be He was sending them home?

Home, that place like no other, is it there we can see Him? In the faces of our children? How shall we live these words today?

Thank you for the abundant outpouring of this CGS community! We have received so many emails and phone calls from you, sharing how you are using the resources found on our website. Truly, the Domestic Church has arisen with Easter joy!

Thank you for all the photos you have sent. We have placed a video of this collection here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z3GqxAsSF88>

Together, we are living what Sofia Cavalletti wrote about in *The Religious Potential of the Child* (page 31 in the third Edition)

"The initiation of a child into Christian life is not a work that can be fulfilled by the catechist alone, nor by the parents alone. It is the whole Christian community that proclaims Christ, and the child must enter into contact with the entire Christian community." We are finding new ways of living this and once again, the children lead us.

May we continue to do this together. We will continue to add resources for children, families, and catechists on our COVID-19 page. This week we have added resources for the reflection of the liturgical season of Easter, and Baptism.

It is our joy to continue to do this precious, holy work with each and all of you!

In His Love,

Mary



Holy One, You give us the love of You.

Great and powerful One, You give us life.

We get blessed in peace, You are the breath taker.

You love us and we love You.

We eat and drink Your Body and Blood.

God, You are great, powerful and holy.

God, You are strength, love and the Vine and we are the branches.

We bear fruit with all the love we give You.

God, we have sinned, we start to break.

God we love You.

God, You are the Shepherd, and we are the sheep,

You care about us with all Your heart.

God, the great and Holy One.

We love you with all our hearts.

Amen.

Brock, age 8, St. Fidelis, Roman Catholic Church, Butler, PA

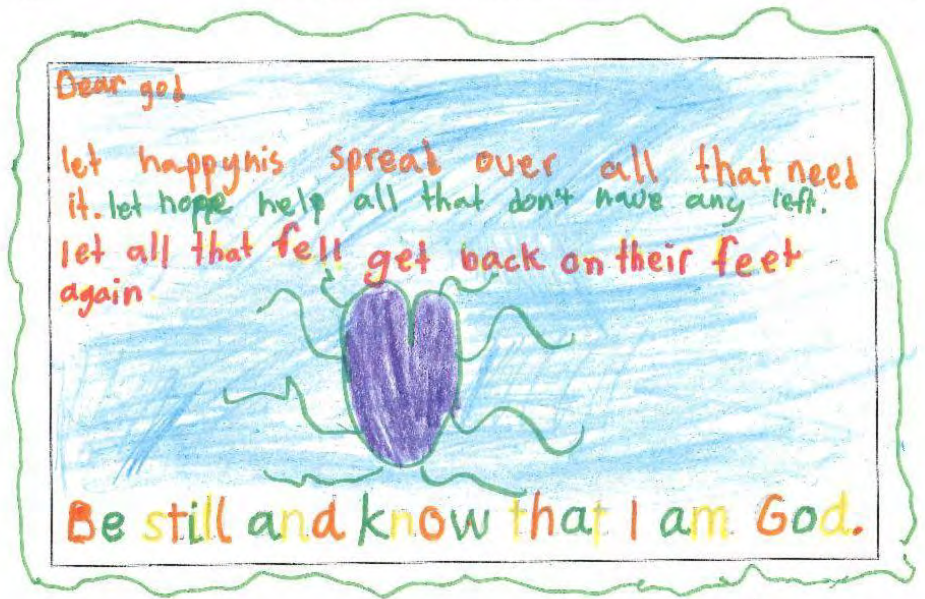
"I Pray... That They All May Be One." John 17:21

June 2020

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd especially honors the spiritual values of childhood and wishes to nurture the formation of a consciousness which is oriented to the construction of the history of salvation in justice and solidarity. #28 CGS 32 Points of Reflection

This past Sunday we celebrated the great Feast of Pentecost, a celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit, a memorial of the seven holy gifts poured out upon the apostles so they could leave the upper room, transform the world and share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Yet, since Monday, May 25, we have grieved the killing of George Floyd, and the many others who have been senselessly killed due to the heartbreaking truth that racism continues to choke the lives of our sisters and brothers of color in this country. This is, as Archbishop Gomez says, a "sin that cries out to heaven for justice."

In these days of Pentecost, we have spent time listening, learning, and praying for the wisdom and understanding that will help all of us contribute to building bridges for change and reform, even in the smallest of ways, as we recognize that peace and justice begins within each of us. The Good Samaritan parable calls us to consider our role as we cannot remove ourselves from the wrongs committed in our society. Are we like those two in the parable, who "saw the man" and then "passed by on the other side"? In these days may we be "moved with compassion at the sight" of this injustice and look to stand in solidarity with those who are vulnerable and oppressed.



In these days of Pentecost, let us ask God for the gift of Fortitude, a holy daring given by the Holy Spirit so that we have the strength and courage to face challenges with compassion. Today, this gift is an invitation to deeply love and care for everyone in our communities, to authentically live out our baptismal call to follow our Good Shepherd and respect the dignity of every human being. Biblically, this gift was lived out through prophecy – the prophet is one who has a particular capacity to listen to God. As catechists, we have learned to take a listening stance before God with the children. This is a capacity we can continue to cultivate as we listen deeply with our brothers and sisters of color in their pain, grief, anger, and hear the injustice they suffer. Only then can we truly work together to root out the systemic racism that continues to disrupt our American culture.

In her book, *The History of the Kingdom of God: From Creation to Parousia*, Sofia Cavalletti says, "If the prophet can be identified as a voice—the voice of God in the midst of the people—it is because he has first been an ear, straining to listen to what God has made known to him." She goes on to point out that God "establishes a particular relationship with the prophets; the Lord enriches them with a great gift that leads to a mission. The prophet lends his ear—and even more so his heart—to the word of God, not to keep it to himself but to share it with all people, so they might take instruction from it."

The Hebrew word for prophet is *nabi*. It is a word that literally means to "stand in the breach," to be a bridge. As Sofia indicates, it is "an action noun: that is expressed in passive form. The prophet is passive before God in receiving God's message, allowing it to penetrate and nourish him."

"Who is my neighbor?" Once the word of God has penetrated the prophet, it leads to action.

"The one who treated him with mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

In Him,

Mary

Compassionate Considerations

June 2020

There is good news from over four decades of research on resilience that shows compassionate considerations can buffer children from harm and increase the chances they adapt positively to adversities such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Families and communities can work together to promote these protective factors. We know that God and the child have a unique relationship with one another. The growth of this relationship should be assisted by the adult but is directed by the Spirit of God within the child. We know that children need their own place to foster the growth of that relationship. This spiritual growth is best served through tangible but indirect means.

The primary factor in a child's recovery from an adverse or traumatic event is the presence of a sensitive and caring adult. To support healthy child development during COVID-19, children need to maintain regular age-appropriate connections to important adults in their lives. For example, young children may need more face-to-face time for connection than older children and adolescents, who are able to connect virtually. Hopefully, we as Good Shepherd Catechists provide such caregiving by spending real quality time with children in the atrium which can strengthen children's sense of safety and security during uncertain or scary times.

Meeting the vital needs of children and families—such as food, shelter, clothing, and medical and mental health care—is essential to protecting children's well-being in stressful times. Can the parish actively mobilize tangible resources for families during the pandemic is especially important for families experiencing additional risks, such as economic instability, job loss, and health or mental health needs? We in CGS know that children also have a vital need to be in and celebrate their relationship with God. We can also remember that asking for help is a sign of strength and resourcefulness, not weakness. Perhaps the parish can identify helpful local services through a child's current service provider, school, or early care and education program, or through local agency websites and hotlines, family resource centers, or community resource specialists.

Emotional and behavioral changes in children are to be expected during a pandemic, as everyone adjusts to changes in daily routines. Some children may show signs of emotional distress (e.g., clinginess, anxiety, sadness, anger). But with strong emotional support from adults and communities, most children will return to their typical level of functioning from before the pandemic. We as catechists can remember that we can reassure children about their safety and the safety of loved ones through our presence and through the announcement of the Gospel, we can provide a place of peace and order, help the children manage difficult feelings (e.g., deep breathing, movement, quiet time). We can emphasize the positive. The announcement of the Gospel, the face of God most needed for each age and stage of development bring hope and resilience that provide an important counterbalance to negativity and fear about the pandemic.

Positive social connections are an important compassionate consideration for both children and adults during a pandemic. Although in-person contact may be limited, physical distancing should not turn into social isolation, which is a risk factor for child abuse and neglect, adult and youth substance use, and family violence. During disasters, children interact less frequently with mandated reporters and other adults who could recognize and report signs of trouble in a family. Monitoring children's safety is especially important during the pandemic. We as catechists can continue to reach out to our families with children to check on their well-being and offer support.

Mary Mirrione, Summer Seminar Reflection

What catechists said in our Summer Seminars...

"I've continued to do weekly email and gospel reflections during the pandemic. I connect to presentations from the atrium when I can and always include additional resources and family prayer opportunities. I have been very cognizant of not giving parents "one more thing" but still providing them encouragement and resources."

"My formation has served me very well in focusing on what is absolutely essential in the presentations and materials. In offering online options, I found that the simpler I kept things, the better they were received--a single picture with a voiceover scripture reading, a short prayer time with lighting the candle, etc. I also found that posting a video which could be watched anytime worked much better than zoom sessions. The videos I made that were less than five minutes received the most responses, mostly Level I children."

"Each family has a CGS Catechist guide who calls once a week, offers resources and support. The resources will include CGSUSA resources, videos and articles the parish produces, CGS material to be leant for those who have received presentations and CGS extension materials."

*My only concern is my lack of wisdom to answer the following:
A 3-year-old asks, "Why did Jesus send us a virus?"
A 6-year-old asks, "Why does God or Jesus make evil things happen?"
12-year-old asks, "If God is good and the Good Shepherd is always taking care of us, how can so many people have died with this virus? Why is God letting evil or bad things happen?"*

Living the 32 Points of Reflection

June 2020

The 32 Points of Reflection are the principal points which distinguish the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd from other methods of formation. These 32 Points are shared with catechists in formation courses and are also found in *The Religious Potential of the Child, Ages 6 to 12 Years*, *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey*, and *Life in the Vine: The Joyful Journey Continues*. As catechists, we appreciate and enjoy the 32 Characteristics, and know well that they are not a list to be read only in our formation courses but are a gift to be reread and come back to, so that we may consider not only how we are living those characteristics, but how they remind us to think more deeply about our role as a catechist, about the prepared environment, about the context of this catechesis, sacramental preparation, and most importantly, about the child.

No. 24. The tasks of the catechist include:

- going deeper into the Christian message through the knowledge of the biblical and liturgical sources and of ongoing living tradition of the church, including the theological, social, and ecumenical movements which enliven the church today;
 - preparing an environment and maintaining order in that environment (the atrium) so that it fosters concentration, silence, and contemplation in both the child and adult;
 - preparing the materials oneself as much as possible while collaborating with others in areas that are beyond one's abilities.
-

In the Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Characteristic No. 24 commits the catechist to "preparing an environment and maintaining order in that environment (the atrium) so that it fosters concentration, silence and contemplation in both the child and adult;" and goes on to invite us to dwell upon "preparing the materials oneself as much as possible while collaborating with others in areas that are beyond one's abilities." Due to the pandemic, we have faced challenges in living No. 24 this year. We are grateful for all the ways that our staff, our board, and our members have worked to examine how we could maintain our prepared environment but also how we continued to stay connected and build community with one another.

The first bullet point under No. 24 refers to the preparing of ourselves as catechists. It states that we are to go deeply into the Christian message. What does it mean to go deeply? We need to dig always more deeply into the Word of God. That is so important especially during this time of the pandemic for us as catechists as well as for the child. Digging deep into the Word of God keeps our faith a living faith – always growing. And Sofia tells us in *The Religious Potential of the Child* that the continuous

attitude of the person facing the Word of God is an attitude of openness, joy, wonder, and gratitude. Because we are always before a Gift that constantly reveals itself to be always greater. Maria Montessori wrote about the Spiritual Preparation of the Adult, and the characteristics of she spelled out, are echoed by Sofia and Gianna:

- instead of words, we must learn silence
- instead of teaching, we must observe
- instead of haughty dignity where she was wanting to appear infallible, she puts on a garment of humility.

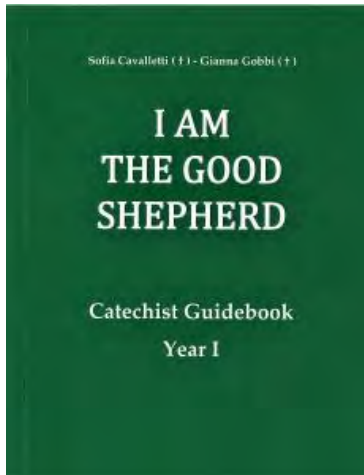
Can we ask ourselves how well we are living and practicing those today? Is silence a part of our day, or is the noise of the news, or social media not allowing us to enter into the practice of silence? Do we take the time to observe what is going on in our home, with the people that we love, or within our own heart? In coming before the Word of God, do we come and experience ourselves as truly small in relation to what is infinite, because God's Word is truly infinite. It is to this sense of humility that we will share with the child.

The next two bullet points for No. 24 are about preparing the environment and making materials. Much of our focus this year was in regard to conversations on how a catechist might prepare the environment during the pandemic, options in cleaning and sanitizing the environment and materials, and how we could meet with the children and their families via Zoom, in the Atrium, or via a retreat or hybrid model. Regardless of which model was chosen, we are called as a community of catechists to continue to look to the 32 Points of Reflection to guide our efforts. The environment and materials are truly a means of helping the child's meditation and prayer. They are a help that allows the adult to really be a "servant" that is, one who is predisposed to do what is necessary and assists the child's encounter with God, and then steps aside once it has begun. We know that preparing an environment takes time, patience, and great love. Let us remember what we have learned in our courses, from our core texts and Journals, as well as from the children. As we reflect upon the 32 Characteristics during the months and years ahead, we will continue to unpack how this year has impacted our work. Let us remember the atrium environment transforms us as well.

I Am the Good Shepherd Book Series - an online option

November 2020

Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd #17: A material is placed at the disposal of the children. The children's personal work with the material aids their meditation on and absorption of the theme presented. In settings where it is not possible to have an atrium yet, another valid instrument for announcing the Christian message consists in the workbooks and catechist's guidebooks: "I Am the Good Shepherd." The voice of the Good Shepherd can reach the child through different instruments, but regardless of the particular instrument, the voice of the Shepherd resounds in the depths of the heart.



In 2017 at the International Council (Consiglio) meeting, Francesca Cocchini shared with international representatives, a sample from Sofia's 1965 diary about how she began writing the *I Am the Good Shepherd* book series:

"January 1965, I have been asked by the Vicariate of Rome to prepare a program for the schools with a guide for teachers. This is a very great work. It is...catechesis with a baptism center... "I am so happy to give the Good Shepherd and baptism to all children of Rome."

The books were first published in 1972 and available through bookstores in Rome. They were revised and expanded in 2005 and published in early 2006. CGSUSA has been in the process of translating these 10 books from Italian. This is a five-volume book series with a catechist guide and child's workbook for each year designed for elementary-aged children from the ages of six to eleven years or first through fifth grades.

I Am the Good Shepherd Year 1 addresses key themes found in the Level I atrium but is written for the religious needs, capacities, and skills of six-to seven-year-old children who are reading and

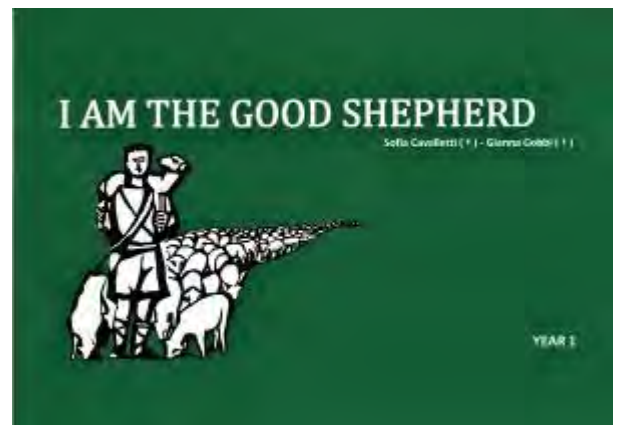
writing.

I Am the Good Shepherd Year 2 offers themes also given in the Level II atrium but is for 7-8-year-old children. The Year 3 books continue themes for the Level II aged children who are preparing for their sacraments as well as designed for 9-year-old children. *I Am The Good Shepherd* Years 4 and 5 books focus on some of the themes found in the Level III atrium. These books are designed for 10-and 11-year old children, respectively.

I AM THE GOOD SHEPHERD YEAR 1 BOOKS

CGSUSA is happy to announce that Year 1 of this book series, the Catechist Guidebook and Child's Workbook for six-to-seven-year-old children have been published and are available for sale to CGS member catechists and formation leaders. Of the book series, this is the only set that has been published in English to date. The other books are in the process of production. (Book 2 will be available Summer of 2021)

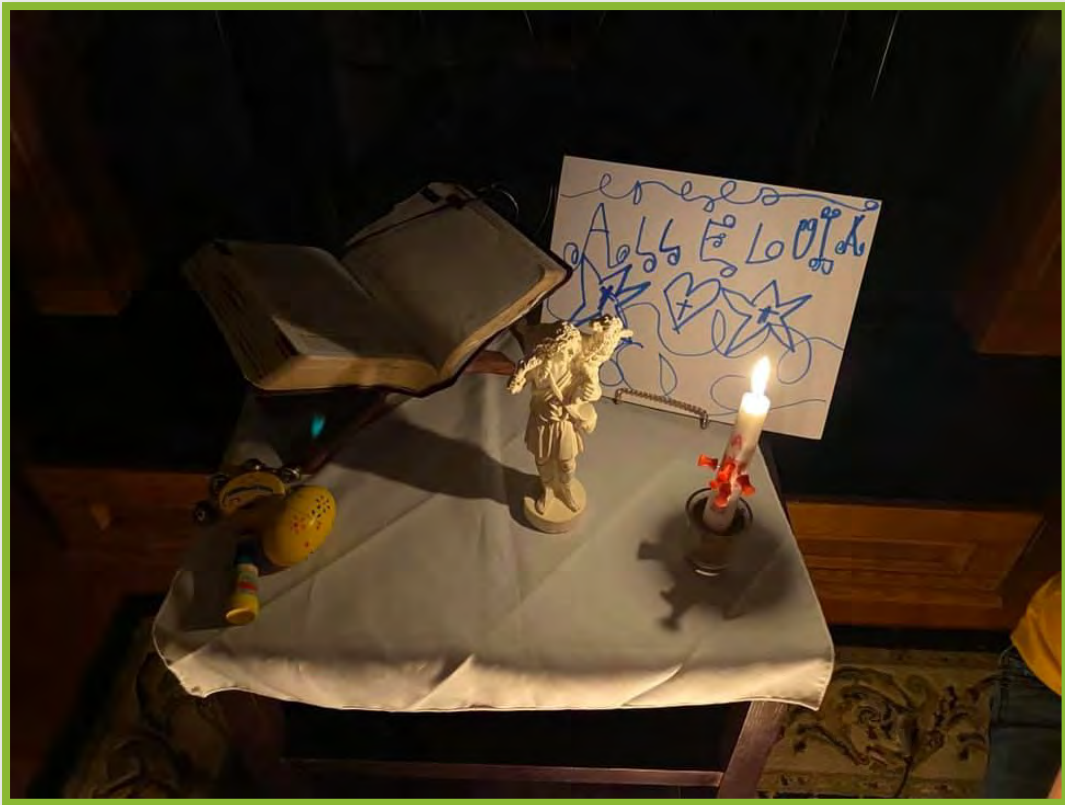
The *I Am the Good Shepherd Year 1 Catechist Guidebook* is \$19.95 and the *Child's Workbook* is \$15.95. The focus for the Year 1 books is on themes first introduced to children in the Level I atrium but are for first or second-grade children.



The books could be a resource for children who are either not in an atrium or in a school setting without an atrium. The books could be a tool for catechists serving children in an online setting if attending the atrium is not possible due to circumstances of COVID. These books are not meant to be used in the atrium nor will materials be needed.

We are in the experimental stages in using these books and therefore, are asking that those interested in using the Year 1 books have at least completed Level I catechist formation in order to have a foundational understanding of the themes that comprise the presentations to the children. We are in the process of developing some guidelines for using the books which will be available in January 2021 and we are planning to work with several groups in the U.S. who are piloting the books with children. We welcome others who wish to do the same. If you are interested in participating, please contact Karen Maxwell, karenmaxwell@cgsusa.org

REFLECTIONS ON QUARANTINE



The Little Things of Family Life *a reflection from a parent*

By LeAnne Osborn

I have so much to learn about mustard seeds. About how the small, every day, little things we do each day as parents, as the primary educators for our children, have the potential to "grow" and "become great" within the souls of our children (Mark 4: 30-32). Because for all that we try to instill in them, it is God, after all, who causes the growth (1 Cor 3:7).

We have an image of our youngest daughter, Maia, contemplating the mustard seed in the Atrium at our local Catholic school shortly before the shut-down. It has come to mind often these past several months as we have remained sheltered at home. Many of us have juggled the demands of work, household tasks, and home schooling, all without the normal support network of friends and our faith community. Multiple times, I have had to remind myself that what we are trying to do for our children, in the midst of all of this, is enough. Like Maia, I have had to center my gaze on that tiniest of seeds that has such miraculous potential to grow. And perhaps that has been one of the graces of this pandemic in our lives -- the "emptying" out of so many things, the narrowing of our world, of our gaze, within a stillness that invites us to consider what our lives are all about. While we miss our normal activities and all the richness they bring to our lives, this time, for us, has been good. It has been very good, actually. Not perfect, but overflowing with grace and unexpected gifts.

During these past several months, what we have shared with our children, in terms of faith formation, has been extremely simple. We have prayed as a family, we have read from the Bible, we have talked about different feast days and saints, and have tried to practice the virtues. We have asked each other for forgiveness when we have failed. We have played together more; we have laughed together more. We have had more snuggle time with good books. As I think about it, our identity as "the domestic Church" has grown exponentially. My understanding that what my husband and I are offering them, simple though it is, is "enough," has also deepened.



The girls recently made mini posters for the Knights of Columbus and were asked to include a "slogan" for Christmas. After I explained what a slogan was, Maia immediately said, "Christmas is Love!" and drew a pink heart in the center of her paper. She then proceeded to draw around the heart. The heart became the manger; Mary, Joseph, the Angel, the Wise Men with their gifts, all came. The heart on the blank page, as the beginning of it all -- another reminder that the littlest children understand and communicate the faith with profound depth!

LeAnne Osborn

In these days following Christmas, we have been reading from 1 John and it has reminded me of my own father. He did two things that had a big impact: he required that we attend catechism class, and we went to Mass each weekend as a family. Those were two things that were simply a given in my family; they shaped us and gave us an identity (that we sometimes complained about and our friends often marveled over -- especially when my dad would be at the door after a sleepover, ready to take me, and any friends who wanted to go with me, to Church!). Now that my dad is nearly 80, what brings him the greatest happiness is knowing that his children and grandchildren love God and love each other. (1 John).

Hopefully, please God, we will soon be moving out of this pandemic. Our lives and normal activities will resume. I am choosing not to worry about any "gaps in my children's education." I have let go of my sadness for what they have "missed out on," and am celebrating all the ways they have grown and put down deeper roots. And I am choosing to joyfully celebrate all the "little things" we do as a family and trust that they are enough. The mustard seed is small, but it is mighty!

Through Your Eyes *a reflection from Bambini a Adulti*

By Dana Mooney



The world is different right now. Things are strange, scary, and uncertain. We are living as we never have and sometimes, I wonder what life will look like next week, next month, or a year from now. How much will this virus wreak havoc on our family, our country, our world?

These days at home sometimes get the best of me trying to structure your days so you feel safe, loved and entertained. Trying to balance the odd task of performing my job at a computer desk instead of in front of a child. Going to mass on TV instead of the community I've grown up in. Visiting family through a screen rather than embracing in hugs and kisses. So much has changed in the last few weeks from the way we shop, to how we use toilet paper.

When I look at the world, I see a place looking for an answer, hoping and trusting in God that we will be strong and make it through this.



When I look at you? I see YOUR world. As it is right now. Spending our days swinging in the back yard, watching the butterflies and hummingbirds that have taken up residence in our big tree in the yard, running and playing, watching Frozen 2 for the 800th time, making recipes we never took the time to before, snuggling up for bedtime stories and saying our prayers and thanking God for this day and every day we are given. So, until this is over, I'm going to try my hardest to have faith and hope and to see the world through your eyes.



"We are in weekly phone and email contact with parents, supporting in whatever way we can. A monthly Zoom meeting to check on how they are doing. Most feel overwhelmed as our country is economically brought to its knees. The health crisis here is huge and is impacting on many levels. Support, prayer, faith-sharing groups are what we are offering, not overburdening parents with too much but meeting them where they are " -
A catechist from the Summer Seminars

Joseph's Prayer Table *a reflection from a catechist*

By Ann Eilermann

It's an early morning for a fourth grader named Joseph. The stress of the pandemic surrounds his young life. It comes from his father, a leader in education, whose role has evolved into contact tracing. It comes from his mother who also works while nurturing the needs of her family. His high school-aged siblings have experienced challenges due to hybrid learning and lack of interaction with friends. Nothing is normal. Everything seems increasingly volatile and unpredictable. These times can be overwhelming for any of us, much less a fourth grader. Joseph, however, has a place of refuge in this unique storm, the solace of his prayer table. He begins this day with prayer. He sets up his prayer table, lights two candles, kneels and silently prays.

"Be still and know that I am God." Psalm 46:11

In March of 2020, our parish and school community, much like the rest of the world, took a pause. We left our school with joy and anticipation of what we would experience over spring break. Little did we know that this break would be extended indefinitely. Upon receiving the news that we would not be returning to our school community, there was an unsettled feeling. There was angst and anticipation for the unknown - perhaps even a moment of fear of this uncertainty, this lack of control. Do we allow ourselves to remain in this fear or do we seek Him who is the only One who can pull us away from fear and into His light?

Along with many of my fellow catechists, I wondered what I could do to remain in relationship with our atrium community. How do I continue to grow in relationship with Him through those I have been blessed to serve? I cannot be with them. I cannot be with the children. There is a longing in my heart when I am separated from my faith community. That longing is even greater when I am separated from the children who lead me in prayer. They help me grow in knowledge and love of God. But, for now, I cannot be with them.

I also found myself in a state of wondering about their strength of faith. Would our children seek Him in this time of darkness? Would their parents grow even stronger and lead their Domestic Church while we were separated from Him in the Eucharist? Jesus, I trust in You. I trust in your Presence. The answer is equally simple and profound. Let us begin with Him. Let us seek Him in our "new normal." Let us make a place to draw closer to Him. Let us be still and listen for His voice.

One way I thought to serve our families was to make a simple request. We gave every family guidance, offering the essentials of making a home prayer table. It didn't need to be fancy. In fact, simplicity is preferred as a Bible and candle are enough to come close to Him in His Word. We requested photos as we longed for a glimpse into the lives of our children and their families. Considering we had been apart and were yearning to come together, as the photos poured in, our hearts were moved. There were tears of joy and sorrow - joy for what was taking place in the Domestic Church and sorrow for the longing to be with those sweet faces shining through the images. The images made it abundantly clear: He is there. He is with our children. He is working through the children. Praise God!

"Let the children come to me, and do not prevent them; for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." Matthew 19:14

Over time, as restrictions eased, family prayer tables remained. Parents communicated that making prayer cards, reading scripture or simply finding Him in the silence became a more regular practice. Children have an intentional space for being with Him. An intentional prayer space invites each of us to seek Him, to just be. We all need the peace and calm that comes with spending time with Our Lord.

Joseph's story is among many that we have faith are taking place within the Domestic Church, filling the emotional and spiritual void of these times. Perhaps we will all find inspiration for greater discipline with daily prayer that nurtures a faith life that naturally and always turns to Him. May we all make the time to be with Him in silence, seeking His peace and tranquility. The Good Shepherd calls each of us by name. He longs to hold us close to His heart and he longs for us to remain in His love.

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give it to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled or afraid." John 14:27



Finding the Good Shepherd at **Lydia's House** *a reflection from a catechist*

by Laura Menze, Lydia's House Occupational Therapist



The mission of Lydia's House is to provide safe, stable, and supportive housing for women and children in crisis. Their vision is to be a demonstration plot of God's beloved community, a home where people from all walks of life can help one another grow toward wholeness. They are a Catholic Worker house of hospitality. The shelter is a place of hope and healing as well as a springboard from which guests can seek training, new skills, and work that will provide for their needs. Families live in community, share life and meals with one another, and are encouraged in their personal spiritual journeys. Out of a sense of wanting to address the profound need for safe transitional housing options for families experiencing poverty, in 2013 the founders of Lydia's House established a small residence for homeless women and their children. In 2017 Lydia's House expanded its mission to include permanent housing. They opened the first building of affordable housing in March of 2019. (<https://stlydiashouse.org>)

A year ago, on a staff retreat, we spoke of our longing to introduce more robust spiritual practices into the life of Lydia's House. We brainstormed and let the ideas simmer in our collective consciousness. In our time of waiting and curiosity, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) rose to the surface as a good fit for our community. Mary Ellen Mitchell's children were part of this formation program and she was excited to introduce this to the children of Lydia's House.

COVID prompted closing of the Lydia's House living room and dining room, which meant that we had the space to craft a room for children to meet God. (We trust that when these rooms are reopened another plan will emerge, even if that means moving the materials each week.) It seemed turning this space into a classroom was fitting, especially since many of our children weren't getting formal schooling, and COVID spread among 3–6-year-olds is very low. Once we made this decision, Mary Ellen and I worked quickly and diligently to set up stations and shelves of different works that children can select to do independently. There are creative works in which they can respond freely to what has been experienced in Atrium. There are practical life works, such as polishing metal or washing a baby doll, that aim to increase concentration and self-mastery. There are also works that are explicitly related to the story of Jesus, such as a map of where Jesus lived and stories with peg dolls depicting the annunciation, birth of Jesus, or last supper.



In September we began offering weekly atrium times for children of Lydia's House and have welcomed an average of ten children weekly to participate in Atrium. Some children live in the Lydia's House shelter, others live at Virginia Coffey Place or participate in the Lydia's House aftercare program. Other children live in the Norwood and are connected with the Lydia's House community.

In training courses and literature, there are stories told of children's artwork being prophetic and powerful interpretations of parables and children peaceably savoring silence. We have laughed that we do not yet have any anecdotes that will make the next edition of the textbook, but we have seen very clearly the "Montessori magic" of children settling into predictable routines and meeting God. Parents report their children repeatedly asking when Atrium is and singing the songs at home. A participant child sang to her mom "Be still and know that I am God" as she sensed her mother's anxiety on the day of the election. A child with high energy arrived to Atrium, crawled into an adult's lap, and asked, "Can we read the Bible now?"

Receiving COVID-19 as a Gift *a reflection from a catechist*

By Joel David Musser

When I was introduced to CGS, it took some time for me to understand that it wasn't my job to try to improve upon the method, the materials, or the lessons. I was tempted to tinker with things, to have figures do elaborate movements during presentations, and to add details to the dioramas to make them—to my mind—more beautiful or realistic. I assume many converts to CGS struggle with the impulse to "improve" and improvise. Instead, we must receive the CGS method as a gift. When we do that, we discover that there is a tremendous joy and freedom in letting go of our individuality and accepting our role as a guide in a journey where the path has already been laid for us by the many children whose responses were carefully observed for decades.

COVID-19, however, has been an obstacle — to say the least — in that path. No longer could we do things in the way we received in our formation courses. We who learned not to change things suddenly were wondering if and how we should change things. Or should we simply wait or do something else entirely (and is that even possible or desirable)? Whatever choices we made in the beginning, now we need to decide what to do for the coming 2021-2022 year — post-COVID, we hope.

On the one hand, we may be tempted to try to return to things as they were in the "before time," doubling down on the importance of being physically together in a carefully prepared environment, the benefits of being low-tech and engaged with real things, and so forth. On the other hand, we may be tempted to wholeheartedly embrace new technologies and new ways of doing catechesis without the demands of designated spaces, long time commitments, materials that need maintaining, and so forth.

Maybe we should ask ourselves what would be best for the children. The easy answer is to say that our former way of doing things is best for them. But are there ways that things during the pandemic have been better for children? If we consider children as members of their family, certainly they have benefited from the increased emphasis on and equipping of the domestic church. Similarly, the retreat model has allowed children and their families to enjoy their spiritual life together in a new way. Hasn't this experience shown us there are new ways to meet virtually, whether for studying the Bible with Level III children or for meetings, retreats, and formation for adults? Being forced to use new technologies has not been without its benefits.

What if we learned to receive our altered way of catechesis this year as a gift, as we learned to receive CGS as a gift? What are some of the things we should or should not continue doing after the pandemic? What are some of the things we should or should not return to? Put simply: what gifts have we received in having to adapt this year, and in what ways could we retain those when we are able to reopen the atrium with all its gifts?

New Tools

According to most media ecologists, technologies are morally neutral tools. It is how we use them that can be good or bad. Therefore, it is important to understand the nature of different media so that we can use them appropriately and avoid their shortcomings.

Digital media is ubiquitous. It has the danger of being ever-present, flooding our attention. At the same time, it allows us to connect with people and ideas across time and space. It would be helpful to think through each new digital medium our communities began to use, its advantages and disadvantages. For now, let us simply note some general positives that come from greater digital communication and the use of video conferencing.

With the constant flux of the pandemic, we have gotten used to things changing week to week, sometimes day to day. The benefit is that we have learned to communicate better: streamlining websites, keeping people current through social media, and perhaps even building apps and text or email listservs. Digital registrations and reminders are both convenient and environmentally "green." How can we continue to stay more connected with families and volunteers in a healthy way?

Without discounting the serious problem of Zoom fatigue, the ability to meet anytime with people from anywhere is a powerful tool. How might we continue to use it? For one thing, we could schedule meetings with parents or volunteers after bedtime. We can also prerecord messages for people to watch on their own whenever is best for them. Giving tours of the atrium (live or prerecorded) may be a great way to get new people "in" the atrium. Would offering a digital Level III Bible study group be a way to overcome space, material, and time



constraints? Would online meditations be a way to extend atrium into breaks and holidays (and finally do all the Advent reflections, for example!)? How else might we use this tool?

Equipping the Domestic Church

One benefit of this time has been the re-emphasis on the role of the family in catechesis. Parents are the first and most important catechists of children, but the church has often been the sole locus of catechesis. The pandemic has encouraged parents to be more involved in their children's education, including their religious education, spiritual formation, and has asked catechists to depend more on parents and less on themselves.

Catechists have started to see children in terms of their families, working to give parents the tools to foster their families' religious lives instead of trying to do it all themselves. How can we keep the domestic church at the heart of catechesis? How can we continue to empower parents? We must find ways to foster a reciprocal relationship between catechesis at home and catechesis at atrium. We should continue to help parents establish a life of prayer in their homes by providing materials and parent guides. We should continue (or start) parent support groups, perhaps over Zoom, where parents can share successes and failures, provide advice and encouragement, and build community. Could we continue (or start) a retreat model for families? What other ways could we continue to build up the domestic church?

Resetting the Atrium



When the time comes to fully reopen the atrium, we should think of it as a hard reboot. Many of us dream about the ideal atrium. While there is no such thing, and some things might be too far-fetched (a new building, please!), there are probably things we could achieve when we resume regular atrium sessions. Yes, we may get pushback from some people, but I would bet that most post-pandemic people, after being shut in for so long, will be more open to new initiatives so long as they are in person. Now is the time to make changes that would have been hard to do in the regular flow of year to year.

Should we reconsider the length and format of our atrium sessions? We know according to number 8 of the 32 characteristics of CGS, "gatherings should last at least two hours" but many of us have made do with less time for one reason or another. We may not have another occasion to make

a bold move like instituting a full atrium time. Think about how great that would be! Now is the time to make it happen. What would it take to do this?

Now would also be a good time to evaluate the best days and times for atrium. Some churches have always had catechesis on Sundays or Wednesdays. Why not do an online survey and find what days and times work best for the children, parents, and volunteers? (I would never have thought of doing CGS on Friday nights until I did a survey!)

While we are at it, this would be a good time to reconsider the calendar format we use. Most of us follow a traditional school year. Perhaps consider adding a summer session, or a year-round model. What would it be like to simply have atrium instead of enrolling children each year like school? Would this allow us to better guide each individual child in his or her spiritual journey? What would that be like?

The Gifts of God

By and large, it seems we have done well in adapting out of necessity while also preserving the integrity of CGS. Some catechists have learned how to use technology in a way consistent with our principles, relying less on materials and more on meditation and prayer. Others have focused on accommodating the domestic church, providing parents with resources and support to a greater degree than ever before. Still others have adjusted the environment, materials, times, and so much more to have children in the atrium in safe and appropriate ways. On top of all that, we have learned how to use new technologies to better connect with children, families, and other catechists.

If we receive this experience of catechesis during a pandemic as a gift, a lot of good can come of it. God has given us so many gifts, as we tell the children. How may we receive and use them on our "blank page" to build the Kingdom of God?

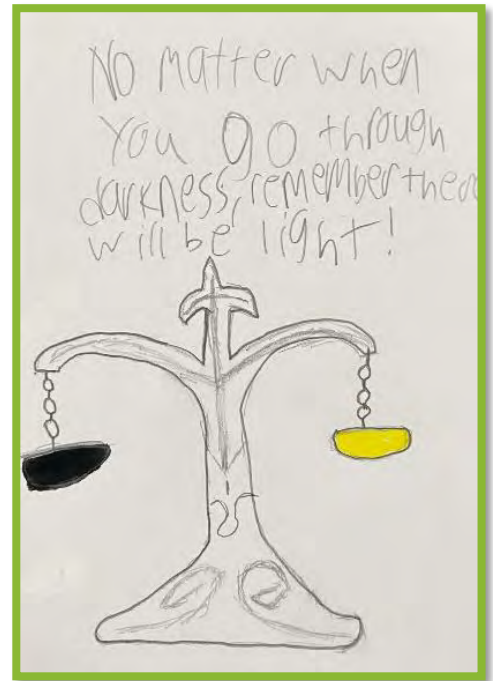
Cautious Joy and Constant Vigilance *a reflection from a catechist*

By Tara Speer

Like many atria, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) at Assumption Church was abruptly closed in March of 2020. This was a decision made for public safety and had my full support. As the summer progressed, the volunteers and I were faced with questions about the future of our Good Shepherd community. Frankly, I was unsure if we could open again. I compulsively checked the news every day for indications of COVID-19 spikes or future school closures. In phone calls and Zoom meetings, the volunteers and I would discuss worries and outlooks. But the staff was adamant: CGS brought much needed peace and fellowship to our community. If we could open safely, we should.

Using guidance from CGSUSA and the Morris School District, I created a nearly 21-page safety plan to keep our Good Shepherd community safe. We opened our Level I, II and III atria in September with cautious joy and constant vigilance. Taking temperatures, asking parents to fill out questionnaires, and staggered drop-off times for smaller sessions became our norm. But it was the reaction of the children and families that gave us the fortitude to continue to stay open. The children were so filled with joy and so grateful to be meeting again – even if sessions were often conducted outdoors, with pre-drawn 6-foot markers and masks. I firmly believe that safety comes first, but that there is intrinsic, unquestionable value to having in-person sessions for the children, especially during this time of anxiety and online school.

In-person CGS sessions allow us to support the children, many of whom are grieving, anxious, and stressed. We start our sessions with prayers and “check-ins” about how students are doing. Common feelings include loneliness, missing friends and family, and Zoom exhaustion. One Level II child expressed, “Everything is better in person.” Another Level III child commented, “We were online for longer that we would have been at school today. I’m so tired.” Seeing each other and praying together affords the children a much-needed break from screen time, but also allows them to feel that their concerns and troubles are heard by their community, peers, and the Good Shepherd.



Our sessions also allow us to support the children through loss, which is a sad reality of the current pandemic. One week before a Level II session, I received a text from a parent that two students were grieving the sudden loss of their grandmother. I am very grateful to this parent for alerting me of the children’s sadness, as the volunteers and I could sensitively prepare our session’s presentations and focus. The children began their session around the Prayer Table, remembering the great love of Jesus, the Good Shepherd and the True Vine. We proclaimed Jesus’ words to us in the Gospel of John Chapter 15. Together, we wondered upon the strength of Christ’s love – how it is stronger than death, darkness or sin. After revisiting our Paschal Candle, we took time to think about what happens to those we love when they are lifted into the arms of the Good Shepherd. We took great comfort in remembering that those who we love and who are joined to the True Vine are still connected to us through Christ.

After reflecting on the parable of the True Vine, the children shared the names of their loved ones for whom they were grieving. I was overwhelmed to learn that four of the five children had recently lost a grandparent during the pandemic. I introduced the Prayer for the Deceased to the children and invited them to insert the name of their grandparent in the prayer. The children worked outside in front of the new statue of the Good Shepherd, where they could look closely at the little lamb held with great love and think of their grandparent.

Moments of support and reflection like this occur in every session. And, while safety and public health must be prioritized, I believe that the children would not be able to have such powerful experiences of support while online. Some may argue that online catechesis is better or the way of the future, but I believe that in-person catechesis is much more valuable. If it can be done safely, meeting in person allows children to continue to grow closer to the Good Shepherd and each other, grieve together, and be strengthened; it also empowers them with the tools, faith, and hope to make sense of their new world.

Learning to Be a Domestic Church *a reflection from a catechist and a parent*

By Jana M. Bennett, with Janinne Elsinger

Just after the nation shut down in March of 2020, the United States Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd sent out a *Foglietto* ("Little Memo") from Rome from Francesca Cocchini to members about the new situation in which many atria found themselves suddenly closed. The *Foglietto* had the following statement:

...could we take some time to focus on another very important environment, the "domestic church?"

I shared that newsletter with catechists and parents at my parish; one of the catechists (who is also a parent) wrote, asking, "Where can I learn more?" We thought that this moment was a great opportunity to grow in our understanding. The term "domestic church" is mentioned as early as the fourth century, but the first modern church-wide pronouncement about the domestic church did not show up until 1965 during the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). The bishops of the Second Vatican Council wrote a brief, but tantalizing statement: "The family is, so to speak, the domestic church" (Paragraph 11, *Lumen Gentium*). The statement raises the question of what it might mean for us to be and live "domestic church," not only in this COVID era, but beyond it.

In this article, we lift up four characteristics of the domestic church that can be found in several church documents-- sharing the Gospel, liturgical life, virtue, and being a haven for society. We describe ways we have tried to live these themes in our own lives during the pandemic - and beyond.

Sharing the Gospel

Sharing the Gospel is a clear mission of the domestic church. In 1975, Saint Paul VI wrote:

The family has well deserved the beautiful name of "domestic Church." This means that there should be found in every Christian family the various aspects of the entire Church. Furthermore, the family, like the Church, ought to be a place where the Gospel is transmitted and from which the Gospel radiates. In a family which is conscious of this mission, all the members evangelize and are evangelized. The parents not only communicate the Gospel to their children, but from their children they can themselves receive the same Gospel as deeply lived by them. (Evangelii Nuntiandi Paragraph 71)

In 1981, Saint John Paul II similarly wrote about the family's strong role in evangelization, in his letter *Familiaris Consortio*, that "the Christian family, in fact, is the first community called to announce the Gospel to the human person during growth and to bring him or her, through a progressive education and catechesis, to full human and Christian maturity." Just as a crucial mission of the Church universal is to share the Gospel, so our domestic churches also share the Gospel.

As CGS catechists, we are already aware of the fact that adults and children evangelize each other. How often have I been in the atrium and heard a child's reflection on a parable, and found myself catechized? In the atrium, the catechist's attitude of listening, along with the child's freedom to choose a work that reflects the Holy Spirit's speaking to the child, provide opportunities for all of us.

Now that we are at home more frequently, let us work even more diligently to heed the Church's invitation to see each other as mutual Gospel sharers. One of the parents from our parish, Janinne, shares: "My husband frequently muses over his interactions with our children, and how they reflect situations between God and himself. It helps him understand God's perspective in instances when he is being stubborn or sinful, or not seeing the big picture. Not only does he recognize how silly and foolish he can be, but what immense love and affection God still feels for him in those moments." Janinne also notes that her son will remind her to pray for God's help in everyday situations, such as a time when the radio was not working. It had not even occurred to her to ask for God's help.

Sharing the Gospel is not done only with words but with our whole lives. The work of the atrium, as well as Jesus' call to each person, is that we offer our whole selves on behalf of proclaiming the Gospel - no matter how small the work may seem to others. As catechists, we know when we observe our youngest children how much joy there is in tracing the figures of Mary and the angel. The work of tracing becomes a child's prayer, a tangible prayer that might later show up as a beautiful picture on the prayer table. Let us find all the small but tangible ways we share the Gospel in the domestic church.

Liturgical Life

One of the main visible markers of the Church is its liturgical and sacramental life, which are also central to the way Catechesis of the Good Shepherd conveys our faith. However, during the pandemic, participation in liturgical and sacramental life has been much truncated. Many



families, including mine, have been participating in mass chiefly through live-streamed videos. As the pandemic drags on, sometimes I wonder: "Is my five-year-old getting the wonder of the Eucharist in the ways that her older sisters did?"



Yet the Church's understanding of the domestic church enables us to encounter the Eucharist and celebrate liturgically in our homes. Pope Francis says in his 2015 letter about families, *Amoris Laetitia*:

A family's living space could turn into a domestic church, a setting for the Eucharist, the presence of Christ seated at its table. We can never forget the image found in the Book of Revelation, where the Lord says: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev 3:20). Here we see a home filled with the presence of God, common prayer and every blessing (no. 15).

What an amazing image it is to see our kitchen and dining room tables as Eucharistic. Our daily blessings and prayers invite God's presence.

During the pandemic, we have invited our families to have children set up prayer tables as they would in the atrium and to have regular prayer. At our house, prayer has often been short and simple - just an Our Father or a favorite song. I have found myself blessing my children more often, just tracing a quick sign of the cross on their foreheads at the beginning or end of the day.

We have also found ways to celebrate more deeply. Janinne celebrates each child's baptismal anniversary by lighting their candles received at baptism. It is a wonderful opportunity to expand on the Catechesis presentation, since in the atrium we catechists will not have all the baptism articles that are the children's own. Just as in the baptism presentations from Catechesis, the children poured water over their fists: "In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Following the lighting of the candle, Janinne's family looks at photos of the children's baptisms and really enjoys the special attention and reflection on being adopted children of God now.

Once we got started thinking about ways to celebrate with liturgical awareness, we thought of numerous possibilities from the brief to those requiring more planning: celebrating name days, enjoying the outdoors prayerfully, growing a Mary garden, lighting a candle at special times.

Life Steeped in Virtue

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992) states that the domestic church has the task of forming each one of us to be virtuous people. "The Christian family constitutes a specific revelation and realization of ecclesial communion, and for this reason it can and should be called a domestic church. It is a community of faith, hope, and charity; it assumes singular importance in the Church, as is evident in the New Testament." (no. 2204)

The *Catechism* reminds us further that the domestic church is a space where we learn to be generous, kind, loving, and more. We read that in the domestic church we "enter upon an ecclesial experience of communion among persons, which reflects, through grace, the mystery of the Holy Trinity. 'Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous – even repeated – forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one's life'" (no. 1657).

How do we prepare our home environment to enable these virtues? We catechists know the importance of the prepared environment for children. Janinne observes: "I think that when parents recognize that these are the goals to live toward, and they make purposeful choices to do so, instead of letting life just happen, that is when very great things happen in the family."

Janinne considers, as an example, the way she prepares her home environment for prayer. She used to require everyone to pray the rosary, but then she began to wonder if that requirement was really conveying the Gospel. She describes:

Jesus says he stands at the door and knocks. He doesn't force his way in. We tried a new approach with our children lately. In the past when we would try to pray the rosary, it was a disaster – lots of interruptions and crying. Now Jeff and I pray the rosary in the mornings, and they hear us. It's like an invitation to them but not forcing them. They have told us how much they like hearing us pray. They come and join us on the couch, they might listen quietly. They're not running away. Offer opportunities where they are allowed to say no, but the gentle perseverance of us continuing to pray no matter what they choose allows them to have the option. They might be more willing to choose it because of that gentleness.

Leaven for Society

Church is not meant to be only for itself, but it extends itself, sharing the Gospel, life, liturgy, and love to the whole world. St. Pope Paul VI says, "Such a family becomes the evangelizer of many other families, and of the neighborhood of which it forms part." (no. 71) Pope Francis suggests in *Amoris Laetitia* that the domestic church even becomes "a leaven of new life for society." (no. 292)



Of course, we thought about the parable of the leaven that we hear and share in each of the atrium levels. In particular, we thought about the way that the woman mixes the leaven all through and the dough becomes alive, a growing thing. We also reflected on the fact that in ordinary times, the atrium is a gathering space for multiple families to have the opportunity to share the gospel with each other and act as leaven. Again, this connects to what Pope Francis says: "The Church is a family of families, constantly enriched by the lives of all those domestic churches." (no. 87)

What does being leaven look like at home, during a pandemic? Both Janinne and I have found this a bit more difficult to carry out. Possibilities include meal trains for people who need to stay home and new families, writing cards, inviting others by Zoom to family celebrations. As we move out from the pandemic, we might then more easily invite people in person. We might also be creative and expansive in thinking of how we interrelate. If we are meant to be mixed as leaven for all society, then welcoming as Christ even the mail carrier who shows up on our doorstep is a place to begin.

In this time of isolation, families might feel especially small and insignificant. Yet we could think of ourselves as leaven that is being mixed all through our connections with other families and whole neighborhoods. These connections might, in this time, be fewer, but perhaps it is a time to allow the leaven to work in our own family and small circle of connections in a more concentrated way, knowing that as a result, it has the potential to work powerfully through us in the future.

Cultivating a domestic church enables sharing the Gospel, the Church's liturgy, and the whole Christian way of life. As we have suggested above, being a domestic church reminds us, at many points, of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. While we wait for our parish's atria to open (perhaps in Fall 2021), we are grateful for this opportunity to reflect.

We wish to close with a prayer, the beautiful prayer that concludes Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*:

***"Holy Family of Nazareth,
grant that our families too may be places of communion and prayer,
authentic schools of the Gospel and small domestic churches."
Amen.***

Shield the Joyous *a reflection from a catechist*

By Davette Himes

"Shield the joyous" - Compline, Book of Common Prayer



How might we offer children space to encounter the holy, "shield the joyous," by keeping the flame of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd burning during the COVID-19 pandemic? The CGS atria flourished as children from five local churches who were new to CGS joined us virtually on Sundays through our newly formed Potomac Episcopal Community. We proclaim the Good News, shield the joyous, prepare space where children pray, nurture the spirit, reveal their needs and spiritual capacities. We see possibility, resilience, the ability to thrive and to undertake the cosmic task of repairing our world.

Better Together

In March 2020, Potomac Episcopal families joined a 45-minute Sunday atrium via Zoom. With a Solemn Communion class cohort and Toddler through Level III atria underway, the first confirmed case of COVID-19 in the DC metro region occurred at nearby Virginia Theological Seminary, which caused the Episcopal Diocese of Virginia to discontinue in-person worship. With the support of clergy, seminarians, and volunteers we began worship and formation online. We distributed "atrium in a bag," created a CGS family portal with on-demand resources and offline activities. Families could also log in from vacation, from around the United States, and from abroad.

Catechesis of the family. Child led.

The youngest children, with their parents, led by catechists in joyful song, observed presentations for the first time. Older children participated in bible study, prayer services, offering music or art from home. It was 75% child-led, 25% adult-led. It became virtual space for the "serene enjoyment of God" I recall Sofia and that first group of children, meeting them with only the Bible. It was enough. So powerful. Retreat. Respite. Children as their authentic selves encounter the Holy and the Word.

Future

Potomac Episcopal collaboration will continue long-term when we resume in-person worship. CGS Goals: Parent education, volunteer engagement, shared resources, ensuring CGS sustainability for years to come. Discipleship, evangelism, outreach.

Hope

Ours is an active catechesis of hope. As children pray for the end of this pandemic, for healing, for social justice, and for an end to racism, one Level III child stated "God's love is enough. There is enough for everyone." We strive to reflect the beloved community; we await the Parousia. We behold—a new thing.



Families Listening to God Together *a reflection from a catechist*

By Barbara Matera

Dorothy Day reports that after the birth of her child, “[n]o human creature could receive or contain so vast a flood of love and joy. . . . With this came the need to worship, to adore.”¹ Although Day had already begun her quest for God, her daughter’s birth accelerated her conversion and set her on the path toward her own and her daughter’s baptism.

Parents often experience a sense of wonder and awe, and a concurrent openness to the Creator, following the birth of a child. Unfortunately, many of those same parents disappear from parish life shortly after their child’s baptism, only to return when it is time for the child to “be prepared” for First Communion. The intervening years often become a missed opportunity for both the parents’ and the child’s spiritual development.

The Church has long held that parents have a vital role to play in the spiritual life of their child. In the Rite of Baptism, the celebrant addresses these words to the parents: “In asking for Baptism for your child, you are undertaking the responsibility of raising him (her) in the faith, so that, keeping God’s commandments, he (she) may love the Lord and his (her) neighbor as Christ taught us.”² This solemn responsibility has its origin in the Hebrew Scriptures. After Moses gives the command that the people of Israel shall love the Lord their God with all their heart, all their soul, and all their might, he instructs them:

Keep these words that I am commanding you today in your heart. Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise (Dt. 6:5-7 NRSV).

Hebrew wisdom literature is in accord: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray” (Prov. 22:6 NRSV).

In the Christian Scriptures, we see how Jesus interacted with the youngest of children:

Then little children were being brought to him in order that he might lay his hands on them and pray. The disciples spoke sternly to those who brought them; but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs.’ And he laid his hands on them and went on his way (Mt 19: 13-15 NRSV).

Luke’s account of the same event begins: “People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them. . . .” (Luke 18:15 NRSV).

These verses from Hebrew and Christian Scripture highlight two groups of people who need catechesis – parents and children. Parents must nurture their own love of God in addition to passing their faith on to their children. Children, as Jesus himself pointed out, need to be in relationship with Christ from an early age.

The Church Fathers were aware of the need to pass on the faith to young children. The *Didache* has this message for parents: “Never neglect your responsibilities concerning your son and daughter, but always teach them from their youth proper respect.”³ St. Clement of Rome advises: “Let your children be partakers of true Christian training.”⁴

Contemporary church documents carry forward the theme. *Lumen Gentium* recognizes that Christian training begins in the home. “The family is, so to speak, the domestic church. In it parents should, by their word and example, be the first preachers of the faith to their children. . . .” (LG 11).

Gravissimum Educationis is quite explicit about the importance of the parents’ role:



¹ Dorothy Day, *The Long Loneliness* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc., 1952), 139.

² *The Order of Baptism for Children* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2020), 77.

³ *Didache* Chapter 4:9

⁴ *First Epistle of Clement to the Philippians*.

[S]ince parents have conferred life on their children, they have a most solemn obligation to educate their offspring. . . Their role as educators is so decisive that scarcely anything can compensate for their failure in it. For it devolves on parents to create a family atmosphere . . . animated with love and reverence for God and others . . ." (GE 3).

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* views parents as the first evangelizers:

Parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children. Parents should initiate their children at an early age into the mysteries of the faith of which they are the "first heralds" for their children. They should associate them from their tenderest years with the life of the Church. A wholesome family life can foster interior dispositions that are a genuine preparation for a living faith and remain a support for it throughout one's life (CCC 2225).

In *Catechesi Tradendae*, St. John Paul II addresses the question of infant catechesis. Under the general heading "Everybody Needs to be Catechized," he writes:

One moment that is often decisive is the one at which the very young child receives the first elements of catechesis from its parents and the family surroundings. These elements will perhaps be no more than a simple revelation of a good and provident Father in heaven to whom the child learns to turn its heart. The very short prayers that the child learns to lisp will be the start of a loving dialogue with this hidden God whose word it will then begin to hear. I cannot insist too strongly on this early initiation by Christian parents in which the child's faculties are integrated into a living relationship with God. It is a work of prime importance. It demands great love and profound respect for the child who has a right to a simple and true presentation of the Christian faith (CT 36).

Maria Montessori, whose observations of children sparked a new movement in education early in the twentieth century, would agree that the family atmosphere during the first years of life has a great impact on a child's spiritual development. Her observation that children learn language and many other skills without ever having been taught, led her to conclude that during those early years, the child possesses a "strange power . . . of absorption from his surroundings." ⁵ As a result, "[a]ll that we ourselves are, has been made by the child, the child we were in the first two years of our lives. . . [The child] has to build himself up in all those complex formations that will become our intelligence, the foundation for our religious feelings" ⁶

Theologian and educator Michael Corso echoes Montessori's observation when he speaks of the "language of faith, [which,] like all language, is learned principally in the home. And language is first learned not by being formally taught but by immersion. . . No less may be true of the language of faith."⁷ He states further that he believes "the human person is born open to God, open to the divine. There is a kind of hard-wiring that makes us by nature spiritually oriented. . . [J]ust as language acquisition and development can be stunted and stymied despite an inborn predisposition, spiritual growth can be similarly hindered."⁸



In addition to providing an environment in which faith can flourish, parents also have a duty to provide their children education in the faith. According to the *Catechism*, this education "should begin in the child's earliest years . . . Family catechesis precedes, accompanies, and enriches other forms of instruction in the faith" (CCC 2226).

The *General Directory for Catechesis* views the family as "a locus for catechesis" (GDC 255). As such, it has:

an unique privilege: transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values. On this human base, Christian initiation is more profound: the awakening of the sense of God; the first steps in prayer; education of the moral conscience; formation in the Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God the Father, the Creator. It is, indeed, a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily than structured into periods (GDC 255).

Parents' duty to catechize is shared by the parish, which is "the Eucharistic community and the heart of the liturgical life of Christian families; it is a privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents" (CCC 2226). In *Catechesi Tradendae*, St. John Paul II speaks of catechesis

⁵ Maria Montessori, *The Absorbent Mind* (New York: Henry Holt and Company LLC, 1995), 7.

⁶ Ibid. 6.

⁷ Michael J. Corso, "The Parish and Family as Catechist," in *Empowering Catechetical Leaders*, ed. Thomas H. Groome & Michael J. Corso (Washington, D.C.: National Catholic Educational Association, 1999), 91.

⁸ Ibid. 91-92.

as “an inalienable right” (CT 14). He argues that “from the theological point of view, every baptized person, precisely by reason of being baptized, has the right to receive from the Church instruction and education enabling him or her to enter on a truly Christian life. . .” (CT 14).

At the same time, the parish can and should assist parents in their efforts to create a family atmosphere favorable to their child’s spiritual development. The *General Directory for Catechesis* asserts that when parents become educational ministers to their children:

the Gospel is transmitted and radiated so that family life is transformed into a journey of faith and the school of Christian life. . . . It is for this reason that the Christian community must give very special attention to parents. By means of personal contact, meetings, courses and adult catechesis directed toward parents, the Christian community must help them assume their responsibility . . . of educating their children in the faith (GDC 227).

The *Directory for Catechesis*, quoting Pope Francis in *Amoris Laetitia*, states that “[t]he Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfillment of their educational mission’ (AL 85) to become above all the first catechists of their own children.”⁹

Familiaris Consortio again underscores the role of the Church:

Therefore, it must be emphasized once more that the pastoral intervention of the Church in support of the family is a matter of urgency. Every effort should be made to strengthen and develop pastoral care for the family, which should be treated as a real matter of priority, in the certainty that future evangelization depends largely on the domestic Church. The Church’s pastoral action must be progressive, also in the sense that it must follow the family, accompanying it step by step in the different stages of its formation and development (FC 65).

Corso, reprising the theme of faith as a language, states that “catechesis should focus on families because . . . language is learned primarily in the home. Catechetical leaders should support families, giving them the resources to speak the language of faith to one another and with the larger community.”¹⁰

It is also important that parents be catechized to foster their own spiritual growth. During a typical day, adults are exposed to a multitude of ideas and values, many of which conflict with Christian values. Because parenting is a new venture, parents are tuned in to a variety of individuals they think might have helpful advice. They may consult friends, health care professionals, or extended family. They may also turn to co-workers, news and entertainment programs, or books by experts – real or imagined. Parents are often under great stress due to sleepless nights and the additional work of having a baby in the house. If parents have not had strong religious formation, they may stop attending Mass and thus sever the connection they briefly had to the Church when their child was baptized. As other concerns and values become predominant day to day, they may find that their lives revolve not around loving and serving the Creator of their little miracle, but rather signing up for baby music classes, tumbling, and toddlers’ playgroups.



Our Hearts Were Burning Within Us envisions “a laity who are living witnesses to Christ: well-formed in faith, enthusiastic, capable of leadership in the Church and in society, filled with compassion, and working for justice” (OHWB 30). They would be helped in living this life by “[t]he power of God’s word, regular prayer, a vibrant sacramental life, lay spirituality, the support of the Christian community, and the guidance of the Church’s social teaching” (CT 43). Those who are parents would “grow closer as couples, stronger as families, and better able to prepare their children morally and spiritually for life in this complex and challenging society” (OHWB 34).

Today, in parishes on every continent but Antarctica, children as young as three years old are invited to participate in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS), where their spiritual life is nurtured as envisioned in the Bible, historical writings, and Church documents. The instinct of the child is to bring home this sense of the holy and to live it there. It is a common occurrence for a Good Shepherd child to insist on setting up a prayer table at home and keeping regular prayer times. This Catechesis gives parents, too, the opportunity to grow spiritually.

⁹ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, (Vatican City State: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2020) *Directory for Catechesis*, 124

¹⁰ Corso, “The Parish and Family as Catechist,” 93.

Some parents become interested enough in what is happening with their child to volunteer to assist in the atrium or to take a formation course, which often occasions personal spiritual growth and transformation.

For many years, the founders of CGS and their collaborators have been proponents of tapping into the spiritual life of the child even before age three – including during the time spent in utero. The 1996 edition of *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey*, a book aimed at helping parents as well as catechists to understand young children's spiritual needs and capacities, includes a chapter written by Dr. Silvana Quattrocchi Montanaro about caring for children prenatally through age three. Dr. Montanaro, a medical doctor with a specialty in psychiatry, led the work of the Association Montessori Internationale on behalf of children in their earliest years of life and their families, and brought Montessori training for working with toddlers to five continents. She writes in *The Good Shepherd and the Child* that the child in the womb, who – it has been scientifically proven – moves his or her mouth when the mother is speaking, prays together with her. Dr. Montanaro also states her belief that responding immediately to an infant's needs will help the child to develop a sense of trust in God, who is always present in good times and bad.

Alessandra Bonetti, a CGS catechist in Panama who had been trained in Montessori education for children from birth to three years old, shared her experience with toddlers in a CGS environment at the CGS International Council gathering in 2002. A short time later, CGS co-founder Sofia Cavalletti expressed during a 2004 interview that the Catechesis should “go younger,” meaning that catechists should begin to work with children younger than three years old. In furtherance of her wishes, in 2014, the 60th Anniversary celebration of CGS held in Phoenix, Arizona featured a room set up as a sacred space – what CGS calls an “atrium” – for toddlers. This room stirred great interest among the catechists who attended from around the world.

During the summers of 2016 and 2017, the Board of the CGS International Council sponsored a seminal Infant-Toddler course in Wales. The United States Association has sponsored other seminal courses since that time. These courses, recognizing the important role of parents as first teachers of the faith for their children, invite parents to share in a variety of ways in the joyful journey of their child's relationship with God. Both the Infant-Toddler courses and analogous parent seminars assist parents in participating more fully in the miracle of their child's development not only in early childhood but also while the child is still in the womb.

At the very moment when parents are most open to God's working in the world – and particularly God's work in their developing child – parents can begin to process the marvelous event that is about to change their lives forever. This experience invites parents to grow in faith, while at the same time enculturating that faith into their home, where they and their child will begin a lifetime of listening together for God's voice.



God is Present with Us *reflections from catechists*

BY Catherine Maresca and Jodi-beth McCain

Catherine:

I remember in a CGS course in the early 80's hearing Sofia talk about the relationship between God and the young child. Then she paused and said, “You might wonder if such a relationship is even possible. But if you doubt the young child's ability to come near to God, do not doubt God's ability to come near to the young child.” I have relied on these words, and on my faith in God's ability to be with us, in both my life and my work since then.

In this year of moving our work with children to an online platform, combined as much as possible with some hands-on work at home or in very small groups in the atrium, we have a new, but similar question. “Is it possible for God to reach young children on virtual platforms?” And the answer is similar. Do not doubt God's ability to bridge the distance between us and the children and the materials, and to be present with each child and catechist as we continue our CGS work online.

My next realization is that the understanding of the planes of development does not change online. We must still honor the very different needs of children under six and children over six, and subtler differences of children ages 6-9 and 9-12. Mixing these groups together and hoping one size will fit all does not work any better online than in person. We need to continue to honor the specific characteristics of children in different planes of development.

Finally, we need to honor the method of the unfolding of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd: Try something specific, note the response, try again, note the response, make an adjustment, try again, note the response. . . . This was a slow process by a few women for many years.

As Sofia and Gianna did for so many years, we have begun to try. We are not seeking to sort out the essential content of CGS – that work is done for us. But we are seeking a means that preserves the best of the parable method and the Montessori method, embodied in work with the materials of CGS. We can continue this disciplined development but move it forward more quickly, by helping each other, sharing our observations of both failures and successes, and building on our communal efforts. Many of us have chosen, or been asked by our pastors and principals, to begin to work with CGS online. Some of us are in a Google group, some of us have local staff and colleagues to work with, some of us have joined online conversations, and this publication will also be a help. We are not asking for permissions or rules, but we are asking each other to share the best (and worst) of our experience so we can serve God and children effectively and faithfully.

Jodi-beth:

Classes at Christian Family Montessori School were all-virtual for three months last spring and for a month so far this school year. I have followed the lead of Virginia Viscovic, the elementary guide with whom I work, about how to approach virtual CGS and, so far, the experience is so much better than in the spring. Because I am working with fewer children this year (24 instead of more than 40), I can go more in-depth, and I am grateful! I have a presentation with each child every week and plan a 15-30-minute one-on-one meeting every other week. (This has been a time to check in about work, help them to organize materials sent home, make up presentations if they missed a session, talk about prayer and prayer places and pray together, discuss future lesson or work ideas, find prayer service leaders, etc.)

Last spring, we used Google Classroom as the platform to follow up on presentations and as a place to work. This year the school is using Seesaw; however, I am not using Seesaw for follow-up work. Instead, we made tons of paper-based materials to send home. The lesson is given with these materials, and then they can continue working with the material on their own. This feels SO much better than the spring! Children have been working on their own and have shared work with me during our one-on-one lessons.

I am using Seesaw to post songs (recordings of me or Amanda Messinger singing along with written lyrics) and also to post voice recordings of scripture booklets so that non-readers can access scripture booklets through Seesaw.

Similar to last spring, Bible Study is joyful. After work with the Books of the Bible chart and practicing helping each other to find different books in their Bibles, our virtual discussions feel as meaningful as when we are in person. Their insights about scripture and the world in which we live are truly gifts to me and to the parents and staff with whom I share them.

For Epiphany, we are focusing our singing on songs with gestures ("Bright Morning Star," "The People who Walked," "He is the King"). Amanda posted videos of students singing and signing the songs, and I have been practicing the songs with lower elementary children during our morning Zoom meeting. Interestingly, more children join in signing when we "sing" the song silently than when I sing aloud. Amanda also posted a video of children dancing to "The Virgin Mary had a Baby Boy," so we will conclude our liturgy with everyone dancing together on Zoom!

I also introduced something I am calling a "Daily Prayer Practice." While we were still in-person, I asked each child if there was something from the atrium that they missed during their at-home week or that they might like to work with frequently. Their answers were varied (the Anglican Rosary, the mandalynth, watercolor painting, journaling about creation, reading the Psalms, praying with the Paschal Candle, finger crocheting their own Fettuccia, etc). We worked together to make or gather the materials that they would need. Many children work with their choice frequently, others have already chosen to change to a different practice, others forget. In general, the practice of personal prayer work seems helpful to the children and is something that I hope to continue in the future, even when we are in person, as a way to bridge home and atrium (and ideally to give the children a practice or practices that they can continue in their post-atrium years).



Catherine

Here are a few lessons learned from my Zoom atrium of the five 6-9-year-olds I've been meeting with since late September:

- Songs where the second half of a line is repeated can be used as a kind of call and response (with all unmuted!) and sounds a lot better than those where a whole verse or chorus is sung in dubious unison. We've sung "Shout for Joy," "This Little Light of Mine," "Mary Had a Baby," and "Our Father," with the children taking turns contributing or even leading verses of the song.

Songs with clapping or other movements allow participation without all trying to sing at the same time. Several songs in *Songs of Love* and *Sing with*

Joy offer simple signs, gestures, claps, or dance that invite participation with movement. Silence opened and closed with the sound of a chime still drops over a group quite beautifully.

- We've never been able to read a Psalm together in prayer services with 6-9-year-olds. But a Psalm with divided lines typed into a document to be screen shared allows a leader/Side A to begin each line and the rest of group/Side B to respond.
- I've staged presentations as a series of photos and assembled them with the related text in PowerPoint presentations. When I screenshare I become part of the group with the attention on the Word and material. The conversation is live and the PowerPoint can be reused. I can even lay out a row of photos or objects and create a pile of matching cards or labels that can be dragged to the correct spot for all those lessons of matching cards.
- For prayer services, readings, simple songs, prayers of the faithful, and silence remain effective ways to pray together. Among my small group are three 1st graders and two older boys. I meet with the younger children first for 30 minutes. Then the boys join for our communal prayer. Finally, the 1st graders leave, and I meet with the older boys. This kind of schedule allows for full communal prayers and smaller group lessons as in the atrium.
- I write an email every week to the parents about our lessons and prayer and attach any handouts and suggestions for related work or prayer at home.

A Pastoral Perspective *a reflection from a pastor*

By: Rev. Msgr. Brendan Muldoon, Pastor Emeritus, St. Jerome Catholic Church, Largo, Florida



St. Jerome Catholic Church was one of the first parishes in the Diocese of St. Petersburg to embrace the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd approach to Faith Formation of our children. We have had terrific achievement in our atria engaging our children in their faith. This has also inspired and encouraged their parents and families. Our Sunday 9 AM Mass has been designated as the family Mass and we typically invite the children forward to sit at the altar for a homily that utilizes CGS principles and is directed toward the children and their families.

Our parish was blessed to have a Livestream system broadcasting Masses and special liturgies for the past seven years to reach out to our homebound parishioners. When the pandemic arrived in March 2020, and we went to strictly Livestreamed Masses, we were prepared to continue to serve our parish community and CGS families. I became aware that many families were watching the Mass on their computers and some of these families asked if I could acknowledge the children on Livestream. I received the list of names from the CGS Director, and each week mentioned about ten names at a time in the homily. Parents responded that when the children heard their names, they felt especially connected to the Mass. Often I continued to use the figurines of CGS, familiar to the children, which the camera zoomed in on as a reflective image. The image of the Easter Sunday Empty Tomb was deeply appreciated by adults as well, who said they now have a better

understanding of the place where Jesus was buried.

Our goal as clergy is to continue to reach out to the children and their families especially during these strange circumstances with current, new and innovative approaches using technology when in-person interaction is not available. Our CGS Director, current pastor, and all clergy at St. Jerome believe our children and families are a priority in this faith journey. We are grateful to be able to interact with them and continue to keep them connected to their faith.

Parents have the dignity of being the “original and irreplaceable” person in their child’s religious journey.

The family is the primary community in the faith journey of the child; it is the “domestic church,” because it is within the life of the family, we find the first and privileged place of the Christian community lived.

Accompanying Each Other Through Grief

a reflection from a catechist

By Susan Stuhlsatz-Reese

The past year, the Covid 19 pandemic has brought so many to experience grief. Many people were in grief as they lost close family members. Many people were out of work and many of those continue to be out of work. My mother's client load for St. Vincent de Paul increased fivefold. While my grandson managed to get his schoolwork done with me at home every day, he was sad. The school musical he was practicing for was cancelled as well as his birthday party. So too the final glorious months of fifth grade, where he was in the oldest class in the school. None of the usual traditions or "goodbyes" happened. One of my very dear friends died during a time when I was ill and could not attend to her family. She had a funeral Mass that I could only watch online. I kept looking at the place where we so often sat together in church. My doctor asked me on my telemedicine visit how I was doing. I had to admit I was depressed, grieving. While I have not reached any long-lasting acceptance of the losses brought about by the pandemic quite yet, I know I will get there based on the actions of God I have seen as I faced past losses.

I am reminded of being a brand-new catechist, in the seminal stage of my CGS formation. One of the days of our course that spring we spent exploring the gestures of the Mass. I had not yet heard of Teilhard de Chardin, or his prayer "Mass on the World," yet it occurred to me that if we were present in the chalice being offered, I could take not only joys, but sorrows to God in this way. It happened that one Sunday in Lent I was at Mass. My grandfather had a stroke, was dying. I do not think I was paying much attention to the readings, to the homily; but everything changed with the offertory. As the chalice was prepared, a few drops of water were added to the wine. I thought of these drops containing all of humanity, and in particular my own family. By the time the chalice was raised in offering, I was telling God to take all of myself. All my joys and pains, and even the life of my grandfather. I offered my trust, my faith – God knew everything about life and death. My grandfather would find a love and security in His hands. Silent tears found their way down my face throughout the rest of Mass. I was beginning to find peace.

In thinking about the community of the sheepfold, I ponder why there was no separation between the singular and the plural word for sheep. While the grief I feel may be my own, it is also shared, lightened, by the community. I consider the wisdom of Jesus in choosing a communal animal, like sheep, to refer to those who are His own. When we look at the light and life of the Risen Jesus that is shared with us at baptism, I remember how the Liturgy brings the Paschal Candle out again at a funeral as a reminder of to whom we belong. A reminder that we are all in the light, the living, and the dead, together. Jesus told us about this mystery of life and death in His very own words, "Unless a grain of wheat falls to the earth and dies, it remains a single grain; but if it dies, it produces much fruit" (John 12:24). Death is a passage to more life, to more abundant life, to more abundant love. I ponder as I read about the women at the tomb and see their grief

and sadness give way to something more – from unimaginable grief, to disbelief, to belief in the Resurrection of Jesus and fullness of joy.

We must remember that children need time to grieve, sometimes silently and at a different pace from our own. After the events of 9/11, the children in my Level II atrium wanted to sing "Bells of Norwich" over and over, every session, with the refrain that sings out "All shall be well again, I know." During the pandemic, I have often returned to those words of Julian of Norwich - Julian, who lived through a time of plague.

*He Is a Man of Hope,
We Belove him and he Beloves us
he is all around in our hearts to love
he is a man of Joy, he is a man of Hope
he is a man of love
he is a man of Hope
Luca, age 8, St. Sacred Heart of Mary,
Boulder, CO*

*(written after his father survived a heart attack.
His mother is a catechist and wrote: "Education to
Hope.")*

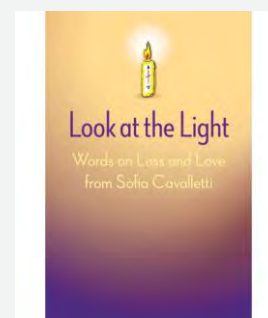
The Resurrection of Jesus is the linchpin holding everything together. It is in the Liturgy of Light, taken from the Easter Vigil, that we find the source of our hope. With great wonder, I read an article from the second Journal of our Association in 1985 regarding the Liturgy of the Light as a way to comfort us in our grief. The

Sofia on grief

Yes, writing has great limits in occasions like these, and words also have limits, and they are great as well. I think I understand a little of what you would like to say, a little of what you are experiencing, mostly because I love you, and then, too, because I can read between the lines. Just as these words resound deeply in me, so too may they console you.... The sense in which I say "console," is that I wish, hope, and pray that they give you warmth in the depth of your heart, that they may make you experience His constant presence of love, attention, protection, understanding.

Surely, we "remain" always united, but how difficult it is to accustom oneself to this new form of presence! Yes, we will speak about all this and we will help each other to look at the mystery of death, to look at it in the Light of God, who is Life—Life forever... May all this help you during this period, and transform the darkness of suffering into light.

Sofia Cavalletti,
Look at the Light



article is titled “Children in Front of the Mystery of Death,” It records the experiences of three children greatly affected by death and grieving and three catechists who accompanied them. I have my own story, too. A five-year-old girl in my atrium experienced the death of her father from cancer. She found some comfort in the routine and rhythm of the atrium, but it was neither the presentation of the Mystery of Life and Death, nor the Good Shepherd that seemed to give her comfort. On that day, she asked to see the City of Jerusalem again. As we went through the very brief narrative of Christ’s passion, we arrived at last at the tomb of the Resurrection and lit a small candle. I saw flashes of light in her eyes and a small smile. “Jesus rose from the dead,” she told me very earnestly, “so my dad could rise from the dead too.” She gave us both a gift that we carried into Easter together.

As we resume our time in the atrium following the pandemic caused by Covid 19, we can expect to find that many of our children are grieving. It is not unusual for Covid to take the life of more than one member of a family, nor unusual for pandemic precautions to interrupt the ordinary ways we cope with grief. Funerals may have been delayed or limited to only the closest mourners. Families may not have had the opportunity to gather at the bedside to comfort the dying and each other. Families may not have had the comfort of hearing the stories from friends of their loved ones, nor had the opportunity to share their own stories. How will we accompany these children and their families?



Will we offer them a chance to share their stories, their artwork, their prayers, and say the names of their loved ones now? Or will we wait until our November All Souls liturgies? How will we plan to remember such large numbers of those who have died in the past year? There is not only one way that is proper. If we follow the children and attend to their needs, they may find some peace. And we may find peace for ourselves as well.

Turning to the Journals and to excerpts from Sofia’s letters in *Look at the Light* may offer help for us. In *Look at the Light*, we can see a model of accompanying each other through grief. It is filled with scripture verses and little notes of comfort written from friend to friend. We can listen to the children and observe how they express their grief and offer them ideas about how we might honor their grief and their losses.

Being with the six- to ten-year-old children virtually this Lent, we pray together for the sick, for the dead: a dead neighbor, a dead pet hedgehog, a miscarried baby. I offer condolences, send a card, write little notes, and prepare. This is the Easter we will light candles and name those

who have died in addition to those who live during the Liturgy of the Light. We will pray together, recalling the love of the Good Shepherd and the presence of all the living and the dead who remain on the True Vine. We will accompany each other in our losses and thus know the presence of God who is always with us. We will tell each other again and again the stories of God’s love and care for us in our prayer, in our reading of the Word, and in our work. When words fail us, we will use our eyes to let each other know it is going to be okay. We will, not too easily and not too soon, one day find that peace that surpasses our understanding.

Uses of Digital Technology *a reflection from a catechist and board member*

by Barbara Matera

When I was a young girl in the 1960s, my father worked in systems and data processing. Sometimes he would bring me used punch cards that held data in patterns of small rectangular holes. He would explain to me that all data could be expressed as a 0 or a 1, indicating positive or non-positive. I never really understood but was happy to have the cards for drawing or writing.

While punch cards are no longer used, the system my dad explained to me is still the basis of digital technology, which “generates, stores, and processes data in terms of two states: positive and non-positive. Positive is expressed or represented by the number 1, and non-positive by the number 0. Thus, data transmitted or stored with digital technology is expressed as a string of 0’s and 1’s” (whatis.techtarget.com).

In looking at digital technology as we might use it for children’s catechesis, adult formation, or the work of the United States Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGSUSA), we can think in terms of positive and non-positive uses. As with all actions we might take as we write our blank page in the history of the Kingdom of God, our use of technology can help to bring about – or impede – God’s plan for cosmic communion as the culmination of the history. It is important to consider how we use it.

Digital technology for working with children

When atria shut down in March 2020, CGSUSA, responding to many queries about what should be done during lockdown with children who had been in the atrium, sent an e-blast to all members on March 23, 2020. It recognized that “none of us wants to lose contact with the children we serve in the atrium and we want to see that they continue to hear the proclamations of the kerygma we offer them through their atrium experience.”

The letter went on to state that “we also must keep in mind that the materials used for the presentations in the atrium are for the children's personal work and engagement with their inner teacher. As catechists, we are only a small part of the proclamation, a point of departure for this encounter for the child. The materials used with a presentation do not serve as an aid for the catechist to teach a lesson. This is important to remember at this time when there is so much interest in developing online information including sharing CGS presentations for children.” For those considering recording of presentations instead of live meetings with the children, the email stated that “CGS presentations must not be recorded and posted on any online platform, privately or publicly. Instead, we need to consider other ways (online or written) to help children cultivate their prayer lives with their families so that it becomes a shared religious experience, to nurture contemplation and joy, and to savor the themes they have received in the atrium.”



To help catechists and families to savor those themes, CGSUSA posted new “Parent Pages” every week, starting with one that described how parents could set up a prayer table at home. Children made prayer cards and helped choose items to set on the prayer table. For the remainder of Lent, during Holy Week, and continuing through the Easter Season, many families whose children had previously been in the atrium gathered around their home prayer table to pray together, to celebrate the Liturgy of the Light, and to remember the gifts of the Holy Spirit in a Pentecost celebration. Families shared photos and videos of their celebrations which were made into video compilations and loaded to the cgsusa.org website of home prayer tables, Liturgy of the Light celebrations, and Pentecost celebrations.

In November of 2020, CGSUSA announced a new publication, the first volume of the *I Am the Good Shepherd* Series for children in 1st -5th Grades who may not have access to the atrium. These books are a valid answer to how to be online with the children in the spirit of CGS. Starting in February 2021, CGSUSA began offering a series of orientation sessions for a small pilot group of catechists and formation leaders who expressed an interest in using the *I Am the Good Shepherd* catechist guides and workbooks developed by Sofia Cavalletti at the request of the Diocese of Rome. Mexican catechists who were already trained in using these books for in-person catechesis have been using them with children on Zoom during the past year. They shared their experiences with the pilot group for the first volume in the five-volume

series. The American participants are enthusiastic about the possibilities for using the books, which contain the essential pronouncements of CGS, when an in-person atrium setting is not yet possible. The first workbook, designed for Grade 1 children, contains scripture verses that the children can read, meditate upon, and illuminate; blank pages for written prayer or prayer art; and line drawings the children may color. The workbook becomes the child's “material” for personal work. CGSUSA is translating and self-publishing this book series; books two through five – for second through fifth grade – are in process and will be published in order over the next year or two.

Digital technology for catechist formation

In response to inquiries by formation leaders about whether and when it might be appropriate to use technology to complete an unfinished formation course or begin a new one, the Formation Office of CGSUSA, in consultation with the Formation Committee of the board and the International Consiglio, offered a thoughtful response. While a CGS course includes instruction in this method of catechesis, guidance in the theology and essential proclamations of the Christian message, and a presentation of the developmental needs and religious capacities of children, the goal of CGS formation goes far beyond the intellectual engagement of participants.

An essential aspect of preparing adults to serve children in a CGS atrium is to offer them a prayerful, retreat-like experience that fosters an encounter with God through the Word and the Liturgy. This experience should take place in a prepared atrium environment as it does for the children to help adults being formed to better understand the experience of the child, in this place, upon hearing the Good News. Adult formation is prayerful and reflective – being able to be in the presence of the kerygma, in community, listening with others; it is sensorial – being able to touch and work with the materials as the children would; and it is practical – being able to notice the details of how materials are made and arranged in the atrium environment and making some of the materials by hand or giving the presentation as it would be given to the children. All of these elements give a wholistic approach to understanding how to work with children with respect and sensitivity.

The *Directory for Catechesis*, published by the Pontifical Council for the Promotion of the New Evangelization in 2020 as a guide for the Universal Church, sheds light on the use of digital technology in the context of catechesis. The document wonders how the Church can “become an evangelizing presence on the digital continent” (DC 370). It acknowledges that “[c]atechesis, which cannot simply become digitized, certainly needs to understand the power of this medium and to use all its potentialities and positive aspects, while still realizing that catechesis cannot be carried out solely by using digital tools, but by offering spaces or experiences of faith. . . . Only a catechesis that proceeds from religious information to accompaniment and to the experience of God will be capable of offering meaning” (DC 371). The *Directory* counsels that it is “important to help people . . . to go beyond technology in order to recover a humanity renewed in the relationship with Christ” (DC 372) because “[v]irtual reality cannot . . . replace the spiritual, sacramental, and ecclesial reality experienced in direct

encounter among persons. . . . What is needed in order to bear witness to the Gospel is an authentic form of communication that is the fruit of real interaction among persons" (DC 217).

Because of restrictions brought about by the pandemic that did not allow courses to meet in person, CGSUSA authorized a limited number of formation courses that were in process to be completed using a digital platform. This exception did not extend to new courses.

Digital technology for communication and connection

There were situations during the pandemic when digital communication had a positive effect and allowed people who were isolated to stay in touch. As we passed through summer and many catechists, Directors of Religious Education, and school leaders pondered how and when it would be safe to re-open atria, CGSUSA gathered information and invited them to participate in a series of three "Summer Seminars" held on Zoom. A "Fall Forum" helped participants make the decision whether to return to the atrium in person, via Zoom, or with a hybrid model in the fall.



A Level I Formation Leaders Study Group that was to have been held in each region was scheduled instead on a series of Zoom calls. The technology allowed formation leaders from all regions – and even some from Europe, Australia, and South Africa – to have a rich conversation on the themes covered in a Level I course.

The CGSUSA Board of Trustees, which usually meets twice a year at the national office in Scottsdale, held both its May and November 2020 meetings on Zoom. This change meant substantial savings for CGSUSA at a time when it was losing multiple sources of income.

There was no opportunity for meals together or rooming with another board member, which has allowed board members to get to know each other and continue conversations from the day's work. Even so, the work that needed to be done at this critical juncture was completed during the Zoom meetings.

For the first time, CGSUSA's Annual Meeting, to which all members are invited each year, was held on Zoom. There were over 200 participants from around the United States as well as international members. The board and staff shared both the accomplishments and challenges of the July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020 fiscal year.

During Advent, CGSUSA was able to offer its annual "Servant Song" retreat on Zoom, allowing over 140 people to participate. Given the favorable response, CGSUSA offered a new retreat during Lent where close to 200 participated.

In addition to the bi-weekly "The Good Shepherd and the Child" podcasts, which began before the pandemic, CGSUSA has now begun offering webinars on such topics as the new *Directory for Catechesis* and *The St. John's Bible*.



Conclusion

Even with the difficulty and sadness of the times in which we are still living, the words of the prophet Isaiah ring true: "See, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? In the wilderness I make a way, in the wasteland, rivers" (Is 43:19). Part of that new way, necessitated by our isolation, has been the use of digital technology. Let us pray that God gives our catechists, our formation leaders, and our Association the wisdom to discern both the positive uses of digital technology – so that we can continue them, and the non-positive ones – so we can reject them.

A Dream *a reflection from a catechist*

By Connie Moretti

Have you ever had a dream? When I learned I was to become a grandmother, I had a dream that one day I would walk into atrium with my three-year old grandchild holding my hand and we would journey through Catechesis of the Good Shepherd together.

As I waited to fulfill my dream, I participated in Level I formation. I wrote album pages and read *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey* three times! As my grandchild learned to walk and talk, I learned about Maria Montessori, Gianna Gobbi and Sofia Cavalletti. As my grandchild grew in weight and height, I grew personally and spiritually. When my grandchild turned three, we started our journey in CGS together. I was living my dream!

In the year 2020, COVID-19 changed my world. COVID-19 changed everybody's world! In the blink of an eye, we had to stop atrium due to the virus. No atrium, no catechists, no children. For months we waited and when we were able to continue, it was with many barriers. Face shields, face masks, and a film of disinfectant covered everything and kept us separate. Then the virus came back even stronger. Atrium was once again discontinued until further notice.

With atrium on hold, I worked with my grandchild at home using many of the CGS parent resources. Part of our home faith formation was to watch Mass together on Sundays. Paying attention during Mass with the dog jumping on us and the baby crying was difficult. To help with focus, we would note the gestures of the Eucharist; preparation of the chalice, epiclesis, offering, and the sign of peace. This seemed to help. One Sunday, during the epiclesis, my grandchild turned to me and casually said, "Sometimes when we went to Mass in person, I thought that the priest's hands looked like His hands." Then she petted the dog and snuggled up against me.

After Mass she ran outside to play while I remained, seated on the couch. With wonder and awe, I thought about her statement. She had actually visualized during live Mass that the priest's hands looked like the hands of Jesus - God, our Lord and Savior! If we had been present at a live Mass, would she have been able to share this with me?

COVID-19 has changed people's lives and dreams. In the past year, negative thoughts and focus have often led me to despair. Remembering Romans 8:28, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose" has helped me. What good has come from COVID-19? The kindness of strangers and random stories of goodwill. Families struggling but becoming closer. Increased focus on the domestic church. Parents reaching out for help and The United States Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd responding. Streaming Mass leading many to hunger for the Eucharist. Grandparents and grandchildren sharing Mass and breathtaking revelations at home!

A small child is able to see His hands in the Mass! My dream may change or be put on hold, and our entire world will never be the same, but "He's got the whole world in His hands." Rather than despair, I will remember that God holds us all in His hands. I will continue to have a dream.



"The Light shines in the darkness and the darkness did not overcome it."

John 1:5

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Through your eyes	Dana Mooney	Southwest
Joseph's Prayer	Ann Eilermann	Northern Plains
Finding The Good Shepherd At Lydia's House	Laura Menze	Great Lakes
Receiving COVID-19 as a Gift	Joel David Musser	Southeast
Cautious Joy And Constant Vigilance	Tara Speer	Northeast
Learning to Be a Domestic Church	Jana M. Bennett, with Janinne Elsinger	Great Lakes
Shield the Joyous	Davette Himes	Southeast
The Domestic Church	Barbara Matera	Northeast
God is Present with Us	Catherine Maresca /Jodi-beth McCain	Northeast
A Pastoral Perspective	Rev. Msgr. Brendan Muldoon	Southeast
Accompanying Each Other Through Grief	Susan Stuhlsatz-Reese	Northern Plains
Positive and Negative Uses of Digital Technology	Barbara Matera	Northeast
A Dream	Connie Moretti	Pacific Coast

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Support the Mission

Donations to support the growing work of the United States Association of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd are gratefully received and are tax deductible.

The United States Association of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd welcomes members throughout the year. Its purpose is to assist the involvement of adults and children in a common religious experience in which the religious values of childhood predominate. Members receive the annual Journal, all communications, a vote for Board of Trustees elections, and access to an online membership directory. Catechists in formation or who have completed Level I, Level II, and Level III courses can also receive access to the appropriate level online Materials Manual.

For membership and other information, visit our website at www.cgsusa.org; write to The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, 7655 E. Main Street, Scottsdale, AZ 85251; or call 480-874-3759.

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