



The United States Association of

## *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*

### *What is The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?*

*We believe that God and the child have a unique relationship with one another, particularly before the age of six; that growth of this relationship should be assisted by the adult, but is directed by the Spirit of God; that children need their own place to foster the growth of that relationship; and that the child's spiritual growth is best served through tangible but indirect means. Our mission is to support catechists, parents, and others in the Church and beyond, as they grow in their understanding of the religious potential of children.*

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was born from the joy of the children in their encounter with God and lives in being nourished by this joy. It has also been observed that children of the same developmental stage even though belonging to different cultural backgrounds, respond to certain elements of the Christian message in the same way. Over time through being with children in a specially prepared environment called an atrium, observing and listening to their responses, scriptural and liturgical themes developed that most resonated with children's religious needs according to their age levels. Thus, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd divests itself of any strictly scholastic character, so as to become an experience of life, an education in faith, and a celebration of the encounter with the Father, in listening to Jesus, the one Teacher, and in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

### *The Value of Catechist Formation*

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a method of catechesis based upon the belief that in order to best serve the religious needs and capacities of children, especially the youngest children, there needs to be a prepared environment called the atrium and a prepared adult called the catechist. The environment and the materials are indirect instruments to serving children's religious life. However, as Gianna Gobbi, one of the co-founders of CGS, writes in *Listening to God with Children*, "the most carefully prepared environment will be of little use if the catechist is not also carefully prepared." It is the catechist who brings to life for the child the atrium environment and the materials, so that the child can hear and receive the Word that is being proclaimed. This catechesis is a religious experience shared by children and adults. The catechist, through formation, learns how to create the spiritual environment that is conducive for being attentive and responsive to God's presence. The prepared catechist is a gift not only for the children, but also, the faith community.

Catechist formation in The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is offered to adults in a retreat-like manner and is multi-faceted. There are three levels of adult catechist formation: Level I for serving 3-6-year-old children, Level II for serving 6-9-year-old children, and Level III for serving 9-12

year old children. Each course provides the adult a scope of understanding that includes the developmental needs and religious capacities of children and the biblical and liturgical themes that aid children's relationship with God at their different stages of development. Catechist formation courses include engaging in communal and individual prayer, experiencing all the biblical and liturgical presentations given to children at that level, reading and studying the themes that comprise the kerygma announced in the presentations, making materials, discussing and writing album pages, and knowing how to present the key announcements from scripture or the liturgy to children. All of these components serve to cultivate the spirit as well as knowledge of the catechist.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd offers children approximately 50 presentations over a three-year cycle that follow the liturgical seasons of the church and focus on the key themes of Prayer, Baptism, Eucharist, Mystery of the Incarnation, the Mystery of the Kingdom of God: Parables, Mystery of Christ as the Good Shepherd, and the Paschal Mystery.

The catechist's album is a visible sign of the personal work the adult has engaged in throughout the formation. It is a compilation of all the presentations given on the scriptural and liturgical themes. It aids the catechist's preparation in serving children in the atrium. The album is the catechist's personal work and cannot be transferred with integrity to someone who has not received CGS catechist formation. The adult who has not received CGS catechist formation will not be able to give children the presentations with the same depth of understanding.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and the catechist formation it offers echoes, too, The Apostolic Exhortation of Catechesi Tradendae of St. Pope John Paul II on Catechesis in our Time in which he writes, "the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ: only He can lead us to the love of the Father in the Spirit and make us share in the life of the Holy Trinity." (I.5) Catechesis of the Good Shepherd does this for adults and for children.

Catechists receiving formation in The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd learn how to be with children as it "nourishes the spirituality of the catechist" and "encourages the growth of this relational capacity" as cited in paragraphs 4.139 and 4.140 in the recently published *Directory For Catechesis*. In the process, catechists are better able to invite children into their own relationship with God through Jesus, and they are better able to participate in the Mass and the life of the parish.

Churches and schools who send adults to receive CGS catechist formation do so with an understanding of the benefit the community receives in having a well-formed, prepared catechist who knows how to give the thoughtful and careful attention to preparing the atrium environment for the children's relationship with God. As a result, the adult develops a greater understanding of how to meaningfully serve the church's or school's religious education offerings.

The investment of time and study the adult gives to becoming a CGS catechist, especially when a church begins the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, while comprehensive, is also well worth the investment, since it not only prepares the adult to serve children's religious needs and capacities, but it can also be very spiritually transformative for the adult, even life changing. Often CGS catechists are deeply committed to their work in serving children through this method of catechesis for many years. Should the catechist no longer be able to serve the children in the church or school, CGS is sustained best when passed along to another trained CGS catechist. The gift of this work serving children is so immensely valuable for both children and adults.

## *The Costs Associated with The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*

### **The Atrium Environment**

The first step in starting with the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is to ascertain whether there is space available for an atrium – the prepared environment. One atrium environment for children ages three to six-year old could suffice and be used for multiple sessions during a week if there are enough children to warrant it. Or some like to consider having two atria that would allow for two groups of children meeting at the same time. The typical number of children in an atrium ranges from 12-15 but this depends on the size of the space allocated for the atrium.

For a long range look at implementing multiple levels of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for children from ages 3 to 12, a parish may want to consider having three atria environments, one for each age group: Level I for three to six year old children (preschool age), Level II for six to nine year old children (first – third graders), and Level III for nine to twelve year old children (fourth-sixth graders). Another consideration would be to also include a Toddler Atrium for children 18 months through 2 years. This is an area of research and development occurring under the auspices of CGSUSA. Developing the atria for all levels will take multiple years. It may be six to nine years before a parish is ready to have all three levels of atria. This depends upon the process of training catechists since adults need to begin with Level I, gain a couple of years working with children at this level before moving on to Level II catechist formation, then gain a couple of years working with children at this level, before moving on to Level III catechist formation. If a permanent space is not possible to begin CGS, having a space that can be set up for the atrium session and then disassembled and stored after the session is also possible. This will need the help of volunteers to set up and take down with each session.

### **Catechist Formation**

To begin a Level I atrium depends upon the next step - finding adults in the parish who are interested in attending CGS catechist formation, committing to setting up the atrium, and serving the children. Sometimes, the Director of Religious Education will want to receive CGS formation along with a volunteer as it is beneficial for the one in charge of religious formation for children to have an understanding of the scope of CGS in order to best understand how to coordinate its implementation in the parish. Catechist formation is listed on the CGSUSA website ([www.cgsusa.org](http://www.cgsusa.org)) under “Learn” and “Find a Course.” This listing is updated regularly as new courses are registered with CGSUSA. It is helpful if at least two adults from the parish can go together to receive formation. Then the parish community can assist the catechists in making materials that will be used in the atrium. Another option if there are enough adults (at least 5-6) is the possibility of hiring a CGS Formation Leader to come to the parish to offer catechist formation in the parish or to host catechist formation for the parish and other interested parishes in the area. What is needed, however, is the atrium environment or to have at least an atrium in its early stages.

### **Cost of CGS Catechist Formation**

The cost of CGS catechist formation varies around the country. The average tuition for Level I catechist formation is about \$500 per person. Catechist formation is a minimum of 90 hours or about 15 days of in person training. (CGS formation is not offered online due to its multi-faceted approach.) Depending upon the format, the formation can take a year to complete. Courses can be offered monthly, over long weekends, or over two summers (7-8 days each summer). Additional costs associated with catechist formation will include purchasing the core texts needed for the formation. The three key texts total \$60.00. They are: *The Religious Potential of the Child* by Sofia Cavalletti, *Listening to God With Children*

by Gianna Gobbi, and *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey*, edited by Rebekah Rojcewicz. These texts are also available in Spanish. Another helpful book for a parish starting out is *The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in a Parish Setting* by Tina Lillig.

#### Cost of Setting up the Atrium and Materials

The cost of setting up a Level I atrium can vary. Many of the basic items like bookshelves, small tables and chairs suitable for the three to six-year-old child will need to be purchased or perhaps even donated. There are items to purchase for the materials and items that will need to be handmade out of wood, painted, or sewn. Adults in formation are encouraged to make many of the materials by hand as part of their own formation in this method, but they will also learn of sources for purchasing some of the materials. Catechist formation also includes having access to the online Level I Materials Manual. (Membership in CGSUSA is required for access as well.) Often the talents and skills from the parish community, especially from those who have woodworking skills, can make it possible for a parish to build the atrium economically.

The average cost for setting up an atrium is about \$2500. What is important to keep in mind in starting a new CGS atrium is that the cost of building the atrium can be spread out over a two to three-year period of time. Not all the materials in the atrium will need to be ready for the children on the first day of the atrium session. What will be needed the first year are the materials for presentations offered to the children in their first year of the atrium.

The estimated costs to begin a Level I Atrium are:

Catechist Formation for two adults:	\$1000.00
Level I Core Texts for two adults:	\$ 120.00
<u>Atrium setup with materials:</u>	<u>\$2500.00</u>
Total estimated cost to begin:	\$3620.00

Please note that there could be variances in these numbers due to the cost of tuition for catechist formation and how much is purchased of the furniture and materials for the atrium. Initially, there is a small investment in training catechists, setting up the atrium, and preparing the materials, but once the atrium is established, the costs to maintain the atrium and materials is minimal. There will be an ongoing need, however, to have trained catechists, especially if the long-range plan is to build atria for multiple age group levels.

**The Characteristics of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd #3 states that:** The atrium is a community in which children and adults live together a religious experience that facilitates participation in the wider community of the family, the church, and other social spheres. We see the *atrium as a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation, and prayer. The atrium is a place in which the only Teacher is Christ; both children and adults place themselves in a listening stance before his Word and seek to penetrate the mystery of the liturgical celebration.*

For more information about CGS or assistance in discussing how to begin please contact:

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