

Sustaining CGS in a Parish Setting



The United States Association of

The Catechists of the Good Shepherd



O Lord, my God,
Creator and Ruler
of the universe, it
is Your Will that
human beings
accept the gift of
work.

May the work I
do bring growth
in this life to me
and those I love
and serve.

May my work
help to cultivate
Your relationship
with Your children
and the Kingdom
of Heaven.

Give all people
work that draws
them to You and
to each other in cheerful service. I implore Your
Blessing upon all my efforts and the efforts of those
I collaborate with.

Amen.

“Hear this!

A sower went out to sow.

And as he sowed, some seed fell on the path,
and the birds came and ate it up.

Other seed fell on rocky ground where it had
little soil. It sprang up at once because the soil
was not deep. And when the sun rose, it was
scorched, and it withered for lack of roots.

Some seed fell among thorns, and the thorns
grew up and choked it and it produced no grain.

And some seed fell on rich soil and produced
fruit. It came up and grew and yielded thirty,
sixty, and a hundredfold.”

Mark 4:3-8

Sustaining CGS in a Parish Setting

Life in community can be challenging, especially for advocates of the child's religious life. How do we help sustain the atrium for the children? How do we face the new pastor who may not understand the atrium? Or manage the pain when our atrium is closed down? What will sustain and uphold our work in the atrium and in the world?

Sowing Sustainable Seeds



We call our introductory meetings about the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd “seed plantings.” Why is that? It is because we recognize the great power of transformation that exists in the tiniest of seeds. This term prompts us to an action of careful discernment

and opens our communities to a compelling conversion. The building of an atrium can cause a

capacity to endure. As advocates for the religious life of children, we must consider the value of sustainability and actively secure it in peace.

Guided by the 32 Points of Reflection on the Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, we can continue our mission to support catechists, parents, and others in the Church and beyond, as they grow in their understanding of the religious potential of children.



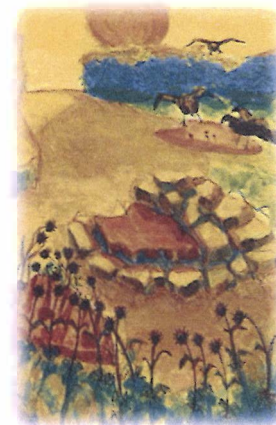
and formation leaders in this indispensable work as well.

Often change can be a time of renewal. Sometimes a positive and open approach to the change can be helpful and all that is needed for a smooth transition. Sometimes, however we have found atria sadly close only to open in another place more welcoming and with added blessings. Either way, in our work in CGS we know we are not called to be successful; we are called to be faithful. This alone can often be enough to sustain us.

Commitment

Commitment to the child and the discipline of the method of Catechesis used in CGS calls for a great commitment on the part of the community, the parents, the catechists and the parish leadership. It is very important to find ways of nourishing this commitment, times of renewal for those involved, and methods of maintenance for all the work the atrium brings that will develop and increase the ministry's

transformation of the community that will encounter many challenges of change, communication, cost, and commitment. What can we do to help ensure that the seeds sown will bear fruit? How can we cultivate the support we need from the pastor, parents and the parish at large? Especially when we find that the "Good News" we announce of the religious values of childhood can fall on deaf ears. It is good to remember the parable of the Sower and its optimistic outlook. Despite the rocks, thorns and birds, eventually the "seed" will be successful, take root and produce abundantly.

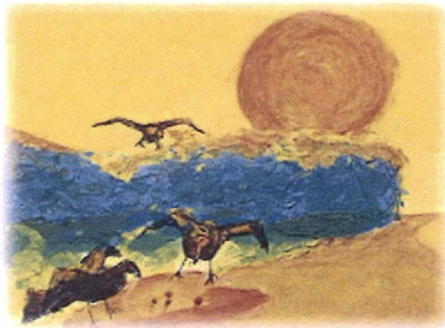


CGS has shown this ability around the world.

Let us remember that sustainability is the capacity to endure through nourishment, renewal, and maintenance, in contrast to durability, which is the capacity to endure through unchanging resistance to change. Let us find ways to sustain our work.

Communication

Communication is a vital, significant element in community relationships. We need to develop our speaking, writing and listening skills to better serve the religious life of the children. It is very important to say the right things at the right time and at the right place when dealing with pastors, parents, directors of religious formation, catechists, and other volunteers. This takes thought and planning. Any ambiguity or miscommunication can be like the chattering of the birds on the wayside, eating up your hard work and ruining your chances of sustainability in the parish. Maintaining good oral and written communication with the parish is extremely important.



the atrium can put down good solid roots and grow. Sometimes, people have great difficulty with such change. Sometimes new leadership steps in and the process of change begins all over again. needs to go through the whole process once again. In either case, “thorns” an begin to develop that can “choke” the life of the atrium and bring great pain. And only sometimes can we even be aware that it is happening and seek to “weed out” the difficulties with those involved.



What can be done? Prayerful discernment is necessary and should be maintained with a trusted Spiritual Director. The National Director and the Director of Formation are available to help and support catechists

A dedicated space can also be a great challenge when space is at a premium. Working together with those who may have need of the space is important. A clear understanding of responsibility and use from the beginning followed by ongoing conversation can be very important in this area.

Meeting the cost of time may be the biggest challenge. It is best to be clear, kind and gentle in the ongoing reminders of why this work takes such time to begin with. Matching our pace to the pace of the child is essential to our service of the child and beneficial in our own life in the Spirit. We must have patience and faith that, in time, all will come to see the wisdom of this and actually enjoy the time spent.

Change

Whenever a parish begins CGS there is change. The preparation of the space and materials, the development of an understanding of the work and the child, the effect this all has on other ministries and parishioners all is part of this change. Managed well,

Regular communication with the parish leadership is essential. This can be anything from ongoing presentations given at staff meetings, a monthly visit with the pastor or collaborating with other ministries in the parish who may either have need of our sharing the gift of CGS or being able to offer support in building furnishings, materials and funding supplies for the atrium.

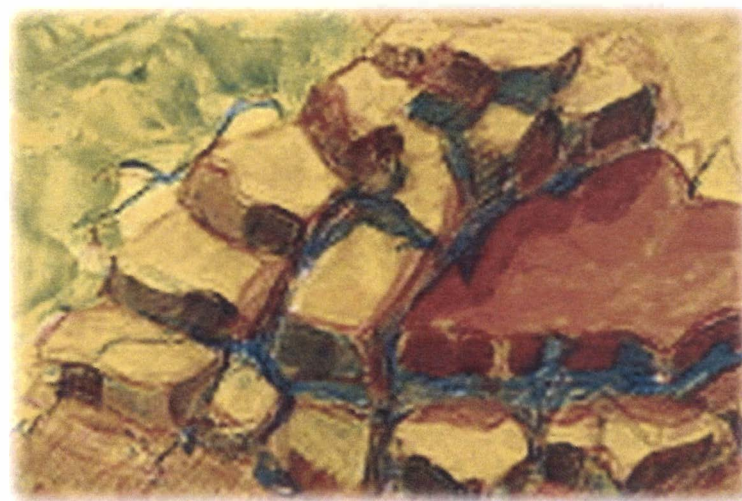
It is also very important to have ongoing ways to nourish the partnership with the parents of the children involved. This can be cared for in many ways. Monthly book studies and seasonal family prayer celebrations can entice parents to become more involved. There is a need for parent meetings, newsletters and invitations to visit the atrium to be offered on a regular basis. These must be done well to be helpful so it will be necessary to seek those in the parish who may have gifts in writing and organizing such events.

The same can be said for communication with other catechists and volunteers who work in the atrium. In

the Rome atrium, they would gather for an hour or so after the children had left for the day to discuss the session, plan for the following week and, most importantly, savor the enjoyment and contemplation they had just shared with the children.

Cost

It is possible to keep costs to a minimum with the careful stewardship of resources. Remember the “cost” of the atrium is not just in dollars but also in time and space. Financial budgets, the regular attendance of catechists and parents and a dedicated space need to be prepared and negotiated with parish leadership and the parish at large. We must be good stewards in these areas; aware that we receive God's gifts gratefully, cultivate them responsibly, share them lovingly in justice with others, and return them with a yielded thirty, sixty, and a hundredfold to the Lord. Inviting and involving others to share in our mission is necessary when we look at the cost.



The conversation might get a bit “rocky”. It is therefore important that we give due diligence in preparing regular and ongoing information in these three areas.

Today, parishes and parents are often experiencing the very “hard soil” of limited resources. Yet, there are always those patrons and donors who will delight in supporting our work with children. Fundraisers, beyond raising funds, can also build understanding and future support when it is a good match with the spirit of our work.