



Characteristics of Official Formation Courses in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

United States Association of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, USA

The following list was first developed by the Formation Committee for the United States Association of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGSUSA) in 2002, with guidance from the International Council (Consiglio) following their 2002 Consiglio Meeting. We continue to uphold these Characteristics for all official CGS courses. These Characteristics were updated in September 2012, January 2013 with clarification to #3, and then again April 2021.

The following serve as guidelines for CGS catechist formation in which United States Association of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd certificates are issued:

1. All CGS catechist formation must be registered with the Office of Formation of the United States Association of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd by completing a Formation Course Registration Form. A Registration Fee will be paid to the United States Association of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd based upon the number of participants enrolled in the course (\$35.00/participant). This fee should be incorporated into the tuition and paid by the hosting community to CGSUSA. (Mission and international courses are exempt from paying the Registration Fee.)
2. A formation course should meet for *at least* 90 hours but could be as much as 120 hours. As a general rule, each course comprises *at least* 15 days for about six hours each training day. While every group will require a slightly different schedule, it is encouraged that formation leaders use the following guidelines to determine the amount of time to give to each element of the course: Presentations and album page discussion: 50-60 hours; Adult reflections or background notes and discussion: 10 - 15 hrs, Time for working with the materials / making materials / practicing presentations: 20 hrs.; Prayer, music, sharing, course logistics: 10 hrs. (These numbers range from 90 to 105 hours. Level I courses needs to be at least 90 hours, Level II at least 96 hours and Level III 110-120 hours.
3. During a formation course, participants should plan to observe children in a Montessori environment and in an atrium environment. This could include serving as an assistant in an atrium. Participants will need to complete a written observation form which will be given to them by the formation leader and returned to the formation leader upon completion of the observation. The International Council's recommendation is for this observation and experience to be approximately 40 hours. The National Association of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (USA) is in the process of further clarifying these guidelines for observation but would like to see this become a consistent practice in courses with participants observing a minimum of three hours in each environment – a Montessori school and a CGS atrium - before the course concludes for a total of six hours of observation.
4. Each formation course should be offered as a complete (rather than only half or partial) course. It must cover all the presentations and adult reflection themes for the course level and as identified in the *Formation Leaders Handbooks*.
5. If the course is to be offered in two parts, it should be structured in such a way that Part I provides what the catechist in training needs in the first year of the atrium and Part II provides what the catechist needs in the second and third years. If the course is to be offered throughout a year, it could be structured in the same manner by offering in the first half of the course what is most needed to begin the first year of an atrium.
6. CGS courses should be hospitable and welcoming to anyone interested in knowing more about the child's spirituality and way of being in relationship with God.

7. Essentiality must characterize all Catechesis of the Good Shepherd formation courses. Characteristic #7 of the Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd reminds us that “The catechist of the Good Shepherd does not incorporate into the catechesis themes other than those which emerge from the essentiality and specificity of the vital needs of the children and our work with them. We discipline ourselves to the themes pertaining directly to the life of the atrium and the Points of the Christian Message/Direct Aims as found in the CGS core texts and *Formation Leaders Handbooks*.
8. It is important that formation courses not only reflect the discipline of being true to the essential themes of CGS, but also remain objective with both adults and children alike.
9. The rhythm of formation in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is slow, meditative, retreat like allowing sufficient time for participants to interiorize the themes and presentations as given to children. The atrium experience should be a guide in structuring adult formation.
10. In addition to providing the essentials of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, formation leaders need to incorporate additional time in courses for sharing Montessori’s principles of education and provide experience with practical life materials in order to demonstrate how these are integral to the atrium with children.
11. All formation courses should be given by a team. The formation team must consist of at least one CGSUSA recognized formation leader who is currently a practicing catechist at the atrium level of the course. Ideally, the team will also include a catechist who is in the Formation Leader Discernment Process who is assisting the lead formation leader or receiving mentoring from the formation leader. Other team members might include those from the course community such as a Montessori practitioner or catechist who also has gained experience with children at a particular level. Among the most important criteria in forming the team are to 1) find those with CGS experience that most closely matches the course participants (e.g., the ecumenical make-up of the group, whether they’re working in parishes or independent atria, etc.); 2) having a formation leader or catechist with Montessori training and experience; and 3) taking into consideration local formation leaders or catechists with gifts and talents to share for adult formation.
12. The formation course needs to include times for prayer, presentations as given to the children, adult reflections on key themes, as well as album page discussion, writing, and review.
13. In addition, all courses are expected to provide a prepared atrium environment for catechist formation which, as far as is possible, reflects the integrity and essentiality of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd as we have received it from Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi. It must also reflect an understanding of the Montessori principles that are foundational to the atrium experience. Simplicity, essentiality, beauty, natural colors are all important characteristics of an atrium. The online Materials Manuals will aid this preparation of the environment for catechist formation. In addition, it is expected that the formation leader is knowledgeable of practical life materials, their order and sequence as offered in an atrium, especially a Level I atrium. It is not required that every practical life material listed on the Album Page List be in a course. There will be some variation. This list serves as a guide. Many of the materials need to be available and shown in courses.
14. Catechist formation needs to allocate some time for participants to make materials with being initiated into the experience of making materials before being handed a list of sources for purchasing unfinished materials.
15. The heart of the reading assigned in formation courses needs to come from the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd core texts.

16. CGS catechist formation needs to help participants become aware of the national and international scope of the work of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.
17. Participants need to be invited and encouraged to become members of CGSUSA.
18. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd catechist formation respects the intellectual property rights of CGSUSA. All such rights are reserved. For example, copies of any CGSUSA publications may only be copied with written permission from CGSUSA. The course may not be video recorded, uploaded online, or through any social media platforms, recordings of presentations or any portion of catechist formation. Album Pages may not be published or posted through any online public platform. They may only be shared privately for a specific group of course participants through Google Drive, DropBox, or something similar.
19. At the end of a formation course, participants should have the opportunity to give evaluative feedback on the course so that the formation team can continue to grow in their ministry.