

# Catholic schools gain interest in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd formation program

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A reflective and experiential based program of religious formation that is being used in some parishes of the Diocese of Sioux City is gaining interest from Catholic schools.

Karmen Bower, director of faith formation for the diocese, noted that Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has been in the diocese for a number of years but as it grows there are a number of people who are intrigued by the concept.

“Regardless if it is in the parishes or schools, there is a big question about how we not only teach children about the faith but help them develop a relationship with Jesus,” she said. “Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a great option for responding to that need.”

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) utilizes a prepared learning environment, the atrium, that offers a peaceful setting where children pray, reflect on Scripture and think about God and his presence in their lives.

“Oftentimes when we look at catechetical programs – programs that teach about the faith – we commonly think of textbooks. What that does is bring information down to a child’s levels. CGS takes an alternative approach of acknowledging that Christ is already reaching out to the children to be in a relationship with him,” explained Bower. “He is already inviting them and speaking to them, so instead of having an adult have to break it down for them, we simply need to put them into an environment where they can hear the voice of Christ so they can respond to it.”

In the atrium a theme such as the annunciation is presented by a trained adult. The child then is free to choose an activity using physical objects – often handmade materials – that help them ponder the Scripture story with items such as a diorama of Mary’s house, the angel Gabriel and Mary. In addition to manipulatives that relate to Scripture, objects also pertain to liturgical items such as an altar and vessels used for Mass.

### Interest by schools

As the program has expanded in the diocese, the faith formation director has received several questions from Catholic schools who want to know what a program would look like in a school and wonder if it would be possible to incorporate it into a school setting.

Kelly Kohout, director of education services for the Catholic schools, said the diocesan schools educate the whole child – mind, body and spirit. With that in mind, she and Superintendent Patty Lansink have been meeting with a professor of religious studies at Mount Mercy University and a team of educators, priests, campus ministers and administrators to analyze religion standards to ensure they encompass the development of a lifelong relationship with Jesus.

“Catechesis of the Good Shepherd provides a wonderful opportunity for children to do just that,” said Kohout, who noted that Bower and her team “were gracious enough to introduce administrators and religion teachers from throughout our diocesan elementary schools to CGS along with the beautiful hands-on materials. Karmen explained how the atrium and the materials help students dive deeper, create connections and develop a better understanding of the Scriptures, Mass and the Gospels.”

During a recent Zoom meeting with school personnel,



Kindergarten students from Sacred Heart School in Boone talk to Jesus and reflect as they spend time working on an activity in the atrium. (Submitted photo)

Bower held a Q & A session with two catechists and the principal from St. Lambert Parish and School in Sioux Falls where CGS has been used in both the parish and school settings.

“The school had become familiar with CGS and they were able to find space in their school to offer it. They talked about the sacrifice that went into it because schools are always limited on space, but they have seen a lot of fruit by offering the program,” said Bower, who noted St. Lambert’s offers the program up through middle elementary. CGS is designed for students 3 to 12 years old – separated into three levels for age groups 3-6, 6-9 and 9-12.

Given the Sioux Falls school had real-life experience in working with the program in a school setting, they were able to answer a variety of questions that could be helpful should a diocesan school decide to move forward with CGS.

“They did a great job responding to very practical questions,” said Bower, who mentioned they addressed topics such as the CGS session is included in the school day, where the atrium is placed in their school and who is the teacher for these sessions. “They were good about being honest with the challenges they faced, but overall gave a positive outlook on how it has been very rewarding for their students and staff.”

While there is interest by the schools, the formation director noted many are evaluating if the program would work best in their school, parish religious education program or a hybrid where students from both could attend.

### School setting

One school that incorporated CGS this year is Sacred Heart School in Boone.

The program at Boone was initiated by Deb Franzenburg, marketing/development director for Ascension Parish and Sacred Heart School when she was looking for a way to ignite excitement about the faith of her kindergarten students in the parish religious education program in Boone. After visiting a CGS session at Madrid St. Malachy Church, which is part of Ascension Parish and has offered CGS for three years, the catechist was wowed by the program.

“It totally impacted me because it is so intentional,” she said. “I thought, look at this program. Why would we not do this program.”

Franzenburg signed up for the training that was offered in Madrid and a retired teacher joined her. As training was underway and the development director could see the value in CGS, she knew she had to approach the school about offering it to their kindergarten students.

“It’s such an intentional program. It is a way to bring the faith to our children in such a different way than it has ever been given to them,” she said, noting that it offers a different experience for children that helps them build a relationship with God in a way that memorized prayer and structured lessons may not do. “I thought I couldn’t provide this to the religious education students and not at least present it as an option to the school.”

The principal was on board and this year Franzenburg and a fellow parishioner facilitate CGS for the kindergarten class from the Boone religious education program during their class time and to the school students on Thursday afternoons for 90 minutes. Because space was not available in Sacred Heart School or the parish hall, the atrium at Boone is set up in the parish office building.

Now that CGS is offered at the school, Franzenburg would never want it to go away. She would love to see it expand to more grades as she truly believes it helps children create a more intimate relationship with God and connection to the faith that will have a huge impact in the future.

One kindergarten student, Sadie, recently commented to Franzenburg about her time in the atrium. She said, “I get to talk to Jesus so much and I really love him. The reason why I go to the altar every time is I want to talk to Jesus.”

Bower pointed out that in her previous position at All Saints Parish in Le Mars, they offered a hybrid program where students from both the parish and school were able to attend afterschool sessions. The program continues in Le Mars.

“Faith is at the center of all we do within our schools,” said Kohout. “In this world of chaos and anxiety, CGS offers children quiet, reflective time to get to know Jesus. We want youth to love their faith and share it with others.”

This webinar has been recorded. If interested in viewing, contact Bower for the link at [karmenb@scdiocese.org](mailto:karmenb@scdiocese.org). A Level I CGS catechist training to serve ages 3-6 will be offered this summer. For more information, contact Bower.



## Youth conference to help teens TURN to Christ

Ascension Parish of Boone County will once again offer a youth conference designed to help middle and high school students throughout the diocese turn to Christ.

According to organizers Megan Ulrich and Lizzie Kenkel, the second annual Turn Youth Conference will be hosted on March 23 at the parish’s St. John Church in Ogden for students in 7th to 12th grades.

The theme for this year’s conference is centered on identity: turning to Christ to find yourself. The event will include a keynote presentation, break-out sessions, time for small group discussion and social time at the local skating rink. The conference will conclude with Mass, eucharistic adoration and worship music.

The keynote speaker for the event is Jon Konz who will give a talk titled “What

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# ICC recaps key legislation, action needed

The following is the latest legislative alert from the Iowa Catholic Conference, the public policy voice of the Iowa Catholic Bishops.

The first legislative deadline or “funnel,” at the state capitol has passed. During the next couple of weeks, the house and senate will be focusing on debating bills passed by one of their committees.

The ICC is focusing on several bills of interest that are eligible for debate, including enforcement-only immigration bills, a bill defining an unborn child as a person for the purpose of Iowa’s criminal code (except for abortion) and religious liberty.

The ICC is opposing several bills that are pursuing state solutions to migration policy, including: HSB 703 and SF 2340 – creating a state crime of “illegal entry into the state by an alien.” HF 2112 – creating the state crime of “smuggling of persons.” HF 2320 – stopping state universities and community colleges from offering in-state tuition to residents of Iowa unless they can prove “lawful presence.” SF 108 – mandating use of the federal e-verify system by employers in the state.

The ICC encourages Catholics to contact their legislators on the immigration bills.

In other news, the House Judiciary Committee passed HSB 621. The bill protects unborn human life in the criminal code in contexts other than abortion or medical procedures.

In other words, it deems an unborn baby to be a person when offenders attack or otherwise harm a pregnant woman. This is solid legislation with a long record of effective enforce-

ment in many other states. In fact, Iowa is one of only 11 states that does not treat the killing of an unborn child (excluding abortion) as a form of homicide.

The ICC encourages Catholics to contact their member of the Iowa House in support.

In addition, a committee in each chamber has passed a state Religious Freedom Restoration Act bill supported by the ICC. Twenty-five states have a very similar law, and nine states have a similar provision due to court action.

RFRA creates a balancing test in the courts to weigh a person’s right to act consistent with their religion against the government’s desire to pursue its interests in a way that violates that right. This has proven to be a sensible test that gives religious freedom a fair hearing in court.

Other committee action last week: The House Health and Human Services Committee passed HSB 642, allowing “over the counter” contraceptives. The ICC opposes the bill.

The ICC was pleased the committee also passed HSB 643, which extends coverage to moms on Medicaid to a full year after the birth of the child. They are still working to keep the income eligibility of moms at 375% of the federal poverty level, rather than lowering it as HSB 643 does.

The restructuring of regional Area Education Agencies are still a topic of discussion. AEAs are groups which partner with schools to provide special education and other support services. The House Education Committee

passed its own version of a reorganization bill, HSB 713.

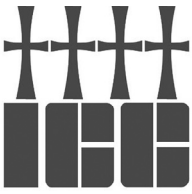
The early reaction to this bill is much better as it appears to leave the current funding structure of AEAs for special education essentially in place. It also addresses several of ICC’s concerns regarding children with special needs in Catholic schools.

Also in the education arena, the ICC has been working in support of bills to provide additional funding for children in poverty who attend the public preschool programs.

SF 2383 was passed by the Senate Education Committee; the House version didn’t make it. The House Judiciary Committee passed HF 2114, requiring that the age verification filter on a phone be turned on at the time of sale, and HF 2255, providing for parental consent for children to create social media accounts.

The ICC will be working to see if they can help get these bills to the floor for debate. Surprisingly, majority Republicans held a subcommittee hearing for a bill sponsored by Democrats – HF 488, regarding so-called “ghost guns.” The ICC supported the bill, which required firearms parts that can be assembled to have a serial number. It did not pass out of the subcommittee, but the hearing provided an opportunity for many members of the public to express their opinion.

Finally, the ICC was pleased to see a bill to bring back the death penalty, SSB 3085, failed to come up for debate in committee. The proposal to restructure or eliminate many state boards has been passed by committees in both chambers, regarding SF 2377 and HF 2550.



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