



# All About the Atrium

CGSUSA Parent Newsletter

## Art and the Child

The art shelf is a much-loved space in our Level Two atrium. In fact, this year, after a tour of the atrium, a first-grade boy, chose to draw the contents of the art shelf during his work time. Crisp, white sheets of drawing paper and a sharpened pencil were an invitation to him. At the end of our session, he showed me his drawing, and exclaimed, "We have gray colored pencils!" I am not sure what he planned on using the color gray for, but he found great delight in the array of colors that were available in the atrium.

In the atrium, after the catechist offers a presentation, the child is invited to further reflect on what he or she has heard by choosing to work with the materials of the presentation. Any of the materials in the atrium in which the child has seen a presentation is available to him whether that is a material related to scripture or liturgy, and material on practical life, or materials on the art shelf. Artwork is an important way for the child to respond to what they experience in the atrium. In the environment, we offer a few simple, quality art materials for the child to choose for such a response.

Children, whether very young or older, often do not possess the adequate vocabulary to articulate what is in their hearts or on their minds. Art expression allows children of all ages to communicate visually. We know that there are many benefits of art for our children, including the development of fine motor skills, language development, decision making skills and for visual learning. Gianna Gobbi, who

was the co-founder with Sofia Cavalletti of the Center of Catechesis in Rome, writes in *Listening to God with Children* about the aims of art and handwork in the Atrium:

- To give the child further access to and knowledge of the environment (through our demonstration of the correct use of the art and handwork materials);
- To invite controlled movement which leads to greater concentration;
- To offer the child the opportunity, through the work of their hands, to continue their meditation and reflection on the Christian Proclamation.

### PARENTS ASK THE CATECHIST

Why does my child not bring home artwork each week?

For the child, it is the process that is important, not the end product. The child is developing him or herself through the process of creating art. In the atrium, we send children's work home twice a year, in December before Christmas break, and at the end of the year before summer break. Why is this? We do not want the children to feel that they need to "produce" a piece of artwork to take home, which may curtail children's artistic response.

I observed in my child's atrium last week and was struck by how his catechist spoke to him about his drawing. Are there preferred responses that adults should consider?

There are some common phrases that the catechist may use in the atrium when speaking to the children about art, and parents may want to use them at home as well. Typically, when children share artwork with adults, we tend to praise the finished product rather than their hard work, with a comment such as “nice job” or “beautiful work.” In the atrium, the catechist might rather say something like, “**I saw you working hard,**” or “**you concentrated for a long time,**” to focus on the process, not the product.

The child may ask us, “Do you like my drawing?”, and rather than respond with “Yes, I like it,” we may want to ask him or her about their favorite part of the drawing or why they used a specific color, or even “**What do you think about your work?**” It is important for the children to make their own discovery about their artwork rather than seek the adult’s approval.

What materials are found on the art shelf in the atrium?

How can you continue to foster this art expression in your child at home? Our Parent Resource page at [www.cgsusa.org](http://www.cgsusa.org) offers parents a glimpse of this space and how to set up a similar environment in their own home.

As Dr. Maria Montessori said, we cannot teach a person to be an artist but we can help him develop *an eye that sees, a hand that obeys, and a soul that feels.*

### **tHEART OF THE CHILD**

tHeart of the Child art book contains a lovely collection of the children’s work from the National Art Exhibit “tHeART of the Child.” When given time and the space of an environment prepared for their religious life, children are quite content contemplating the mysteries of the Kingdom of God. They have a great capacity for transcendence and their natural spiritual characteristics of joy, awe, wonder, prayer, and stillness are often manifested in their artwork.

Catechists who are formed in this method of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) pay special attention to the art of children because it

articulates their relationship with God and can be quite profound. We would like to share some of these theological pearls with the world.

The HeART of the Child

Exhibition offers a glimpse into the child’s conversation with God. This art exhibit and short lecture event is being shared in regions around the country where CGS is thriving.



CGSUSA is happy to present a traveling lecture series and art exhibit that displays the artwork of the child to thematically spotlight the meeting between the mystery of God and the mystery of the child.

*“Thank you for the wonderful tHeART of the Child exhibit. It was well done. What struck me is the way that God speaks to children; and then, how through the children, He speaks to us. They awaken us to the mystery of God’s presence and love in refreshing ways. The art itself has a freshness to it; many of us who don’t work daily with children appreciate the help of you or others to help us see all that is there.”*

- Bishop Thomas J. Olmsted,  
Bishop of Phoenix, Arizona

Twenty years ago, when my youngest son started Catechesis of the Good Shepherd at our parish, I could tell that he was deeply touched by his time in the atrium and was developing a strong relationship with God. I wanted to know more! As I went on to receive training for all three levels and to become a formation leader, I realized the importance of the National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. Without our National Association, there would be no training for catechists, no training for formation leaders, no translated books by the founders to assist catechists in their preparation, no manual to describe the needed materials for the children’s work, no network of catechists and other supporters of this work. I had no awareness of all that when my son was in the atrium! I just knew that something wonderful was happening. Now that I know the vital role played by the National Association, I support it every year with my membership and as much as I can spare for the Annual Appeal. Now that you, too, know how important the National Association is, I hope you will consider a generous gift to the Annual Appeal. The children thank you!

- Barbara Matera, Board of Trustees, CGSUSA

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