

# All About the Atrium

## The Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd\*



What distinguishes The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd from other methods of faith formation? The Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (or 32 Points of Reflection) represent the principle aspects of this method of catechesis as they have emerged from the observation and work with children by Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi. Catechists from around the world from different countries, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds have contributed to these discoveries of the vital needs of children's religious life. These characteristics reflect the constants of this method. This newsletter shares with you the first characteristic:

### 1. The child, particularly the religious life of the child, is central to the interest and commitment of the catechist of the Good Shepherd.

- The catechist observes and studies the vital needs of the child and the manifestations of those vital needs according to the developmental stage of the child.

The catechists live with the child a shared religious experience according to the teachings of the gospel: "Except you become as little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 18:3)

The catechist attends to the conditions that are necessary for this life to be experienced and flourish.

### What is the "religious life" of the child?

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd gives primary focus to the relationship with God through Jesus and offers a sacred place where the child can be initiated into the religious life. God and the child have a unique relationship with one another, particularly before the age of six. Through the proclamations of the Word, this relationship is affirmed for the child and assists in helping the child to draw nearer to God. To speak about the religious life of the child is to speak about how the child dwells with the mystery of God.

### How does The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and the Atrium assist the religious life of the child?

The Atrium allows the child the space to draw closer to God. It is a place where the child can listen to the proclamations of the Good News from the Word of God; meditate on the Word of God and begin to live it according to the child's own rhythm. It is a place for the announcement of the Word of God, a place for celebration and also a place for work. It is an environment in which work becomes meditation and prayer. The child's expression of the religious life is manifested through prayer responses whether silent or aloud, in contemplation, and through artwork.

### What can parents do to help develop the religious life of the child at home?

**Religious Art** – Children are attracted to the beautiful. What beautiful and sacred artwork do you have in your home? Do you have images of Jesus, Mary or an image depicting an event from the Bible? Do you have a sacred piece of art for your child's bedroom? Gianna Gobbi writes in *Listening to God With Children* (p.7), "When the child is nursing or lying down parents can put an image of the Risen Christ on the cross or of the infant Jesus in His Mother's arms nearby. The parents should simply point out and name the image for the child."

**Sacred Scripture** – Does the child have access to a Bible? Our children love the Little Gospels. Consider giving these as individual books or a set of Scripture passages with simple, beautiful drawings. With a very readable font, the presentation of these individual Gospel stories in beautifully bound books allows the child to interact with the Word in a profound way. Each 32-page book is 4 3/4 x 6 1/2 and fits perfectly in the hands of a child.

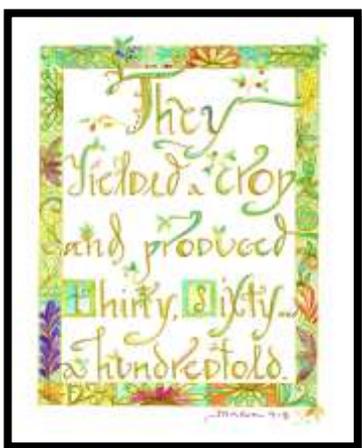
<http://www.cgsusa.org/products/little-gospels-parables/>

**Prayer and Gestures** – When making the Sign of the Cross or blessing their food or even blessing one another, parents should make those gestures slowly. With the youngest child, parents may want to make the gesture in silence, only later adding the prayer words.

### How can parents help support this mission?

Moms, Dads and Grandparents have asked how they are able to assist CGSUSA in our mission to support catechists, parents, and others in the Church and beyond, as they grow in their understanding of the religious potential of the child. Families are welcome to donate to the Annual Appeal. No gift is too small. Any amount given is appreciated!

Click on [http://www.cgsusa.org/annual\\_appeal.aspx](http://www.cgsusa.org/annual_appeal.aspx) to read about the Appeal or to make a donation. Thank you in advance for your generosity.



(\*The first draft of these points was done by the Rome Association, May, 1993. They were offered for review to the first International Symposium, October 1994, in Rome, Italy. Amendments were proposed at a meeting in Rome, March 30, 1995. The points were then revised by the International Council, October, 1996. You may read the 32 Points of Reflection at [www.cgsusa.org](http://www.cgsusa.org))