



The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Assistants in the Atrium: Practical Considerations

As an assistant in the atrium, your job is to assist the catechist in whatever way he/she needs help with the children. This may vary from time to time but in general:

1. Be observant of the children -their activities, behaviors, and responses.
2. Record your observations in a notebook whenever possible. Written observations are invaluable to our work.
3. Take attendance each atrium session.
4. Serve as greeter. Stand outside the door and greet the children as they arrive. Remind them they are entering a sacred place. Welcome them by name. If you cannot be at the door, try to be near the door. Help the child separate from the parent at the door if needed. For some children, separation becomes more difficult if the parent enters the atrium. This is especially true at the beginning of the year. Remind parents that they are welcome to observe or help during the year as long as a time is scheduled in advance. Perhaps have an observation signup sheet available for this purpose outside the atrium door. Please discourage items such as school books, toys, candy, soft drinks etc from being brought into the atrium.
5. Make sure you introduce yourself to the children, one at a time, using the name you would like to be called throughout the year.
6. Learn to scan the shelves for: low paper supplies (including tracing paper.in packets), materials that may not be put back on the shelves where they belong. spills, broken material pieces and try to help to keep tidy and in order. We want to try to clean as we go.
7. Avoid hovering over the children or interrupting the children while they work. Give help as needed, but then, allow the child space to work independently. If a child has difficulty choosing work after a fair amount of time, offer him or her two distinct choices of work: "John, would you like to arrange flowers or prepare the prayer table?" If the child answers with a third choice, that is fine as long as the work is appropriate and available.
8. If a work is already in use, you may give two choices to another child.

"Linda, that work is not available right now. You may ask John if you can work together, if not, you can watch with your eyes." Or suggest another work, "Joey that work is not available but while you are waiting you can prepare the altar."

9. Learn to be aware of who is working with what material around you. Begin to notice if the work is being put away properly or left out. Ask the child who has left work out to return and put the material away, so it will be ready for the next person.

10. Our work in the atrium is not academic, so please be careful not to quiz children regarding what they know of the materials. It may be fine to ask reflective questions and wonder with the child about a scripture passage. If you notice a child handling material roughly or disrespectfully, you need to gently intervene. A gentle but firm reminder to the child is usually all that is needed. "Jennifer, is that the way we use these materials? Please use them appropriately or you will need to put them away." After a direct correction, move away from the child. Give the child a chance to comply with dignity. Later, if you notice the child has not complied on his or her own, you can return to the child and ask him or her to please put the material away. If there is time you may show the child how the material is used appropriately as a reminder.

11. Children are expected to go to the shelves to choose their work. They may work at a table or on the floor with a mat under the materials. Some materials may not be moved from their place in the atrium. Instead the child stays with the material (topographical map of Israel and Good Shepherd materials are examples). When finished, the child is expected to clean up or straighten up the materials, if needed. Sometimes, you may need to have a reminder for the child, "Jack is that work ready for the next person?" or "Looks like you will need to clean the polish dish." For the youngest children, more follow through and perhaps assistance will be needed.

12. While the catechist gives a presentation, some children may still be working with materials on their own. Assist these children as quietly as possible but be aware of the catechist and the presentation. The 'presenting' catechist may need help with a disruptive child during the presentation by having you, the assistant, come and sit behind or beside the child.

13. Learn to look for cues. You may need to step in and calm a child or even escort the child away from the presentation. Which action that is needed is always dependent on the child, the catechist, the environment,

and the situation at the time. You will develop an inner sense for this.

14. Regarding disruptive children. Always use a quiet, gentle tone with the child. Redirect the child to another activity, if possible. Sit behind the child or place a young one in your lap, if helpful. A last resort is to lead the child out of the circle to another part of the atrium or even to take a brief walk outside the atrium to allow the child a chance to regain control.

13. We expect the children to use quiet voices, to walk carefully, and to handle the materials and their work in an orderly, respectful manner in the atrium. "Let's remember to use quiet voices in our atrium."

14. Atrium dismissal is as carefully done as at the beginning. As the assistant, you may need to stand at the door and quietly call to a child when a parent arrives (the children are sitting with the catechist in a circle) or you may want to have the door opened to signal dismissal time and stand near the door to look for parents as they arrive. This needs to be discussed with the catechist. A closing prayer and song at the prayer table can signal the end of atrium time.

15. Some cleanup/straightening needs to be done by the catechist and assistant as well as a quick discussion on how things went in the atrium that day following the children's dismissal.

16. Take a moment to record what presentations the children had that day.