



The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

- An Association of Children and Adults -
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From time to time, in the association's national office, we are asked if the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is approved by the Office for the Catechism. Sometimes the question is very simple: "Is it on the approved list?" At other times we are asked if the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd matches a particular Catholic diocese's guidelines or "scope and sequence" document.

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In 1996, the Office for the Catechism of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) began to formulate the *Protocol for Assessing the Conformity of Catechetical Materials with the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. The revised *Protocol* is a 34-page document that you can find on the USCCB website: www.usccb.org.

On this website you will also find the list of catechetical texts for use with children found to be in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC)*. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is not on that list because the list includes only published series of textbooks for children. The directions for the review process are addressed to textbook publishers. 874

Also the USCCB's website has a "new" *Handbook on the Conformity Process*. On page 13 of the handbook you will find information on those materials that do not fit the criteria for review:

"A conformity review would not be applicable for materials that fall into one of the following categories:

1. Catechetical materials that provide doctrinal content in teacher or catechist manuals rather than in student materials. The ad hoc committee will undertake a conformity review of teacher or catechist manuals only when they complement student materials that already have a declaration of conformity or are in the process of a review for conformity.

The question emerges: Is there a vehicle for the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd to be evaluated by the Office for the Catechism? According to our present understanding, there does not seem to be such a vehicle. The Summer 2004 issue of *Catechism Update*, published by the Ad Hoc Committee to Oversee the Use of the Catechism, says, "The Committee does not pass judgment on pedagogical approaches, such as the Montessori method, which do not rely on student materials, but does judge that it can only reliably evaluate materials for comprehensiveness if those catechetical instruments will be in the hands of students."

The "texts" that we use with the children are the Bible, the Order of Mass, and the rites of the sacraments. For example, we use some parables, infancy narratives, prophecies,

sayings of Jesus from Matthew 5-7, rites of baptism, confirmation, etc. None of these are children's versions, just the actual words of Scripture and the liturgy. There are some brief booklets accompanied by catechist guides authored by Dr. Sofia Cavalletti that could be optionally used to complement the children's use of various handmade biblical-liturgical materials. These volumes, as yet unpublished in the United States, are currently being translated from the Italian.

Since communion with the church has been at the heart of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd since its inception, on what, therefore, does our orthodoxy rest? On the approval of many bishops who, for many years, have received the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd in their dioceses: Toronto; New York; Cleveland, Ohio; Minneapolis-St. Paul; Las Cruces, New Mexico; Saginaw, Michigan; Phoenix; Mexico City; Guadalajara; Merida; Chihuahua; and many, many others, and above all the Diocese of Rome. At one parish in Rome, Our Lady of Lourdes, the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd atrium received a visit from Saint John Paul II.



As Catechesis of the Good Shepherd catechists, we are continually writing and refining our albums that contain descriptions of each presentation we offer to children, including its sources and doctrinal content. Each catechist's album is in continual revision and there is no complete set of album pages that is published.

Catechists using this approach have a minimum of 90 hours of formation, with many having 180 or 270 hours. The Scripture, liturgy, and history presentations are given to us, modeling the way we will hand them on to the children. Additional course work involves studying and reflecting on Bible, liturgy, theological sources and Montessori principles. A great help has come from Liturgy Training Publications (LTP), a not-for-profit agency of THE CATHOLIC BISHOP OF CHICAGO, which publishes several books on the theological and methodological underpinnings of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. In two of the books published with Imprimatur, *The Religious Potential of the Child* and *The Religious Potential of the Child 6 to 12 Years Old*, both by Sofia Cavalletti, the content of this catechesis is presented and explained.

As we carefully examine the *Protocol* and the *Doctrinal Elements* documents from the USCCB, we can see that all the doctrinal elements are present in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd with the exception of some that are beyond the limits of a normal elementary school curriculum. We are aware that the age groupings we use (3 to 6, 6 to 9, 9 to 12), based on Maria Montessori's four planes of development of the human person, are different from the traditional first to eighth grade progression. (See *Listening to God with Children*, Gianna Gobbi [Treehaus], chapters 8 and 9.)

From the beginning days of the national association, our desire has always been to share our work with bishops, diocesan catechetical offices, and others. In fact, one of our 32 Characteristics is that: ***“The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd offers its services to the diocese and therefore works in communion with the bishop.”*** The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a rich and beautiful approach to the religious formation of children, filled with the mystery of God as well as the Good Shepherd's personal love. May we continue to invite many people to “Come and see.”

Mary Mirrione
National Director