



The United States Association of

## The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

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### For Families:

We see the schools and businesses closing and going online to keep as many people at home as possible. What shall be done when an atrium closes for this pandemic? Could this be an opportunity to live our purpose in a new way! Our purpose is to assist the involvement of children and adults in a common religious experience in which the religious values of childhood, primarily those values of contemplation and enjoyment of God, are predominant. While this happens in the atrium environment, could we take some time to focus on another very important environment, the “domestic church.” The term “Domestic Church” refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to “little church.” The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

Within the life of the family, this “domestic church,” we find the first and privileged place of evangelization. Here the first experience of the Christian community is lived. Here the parents are “the first heralds of the faith” (LG, #11). Here is the fundamental environment where a “sense of God’s loving presence is awakened and faith in Jesus confessed, encouraged and lived.” (GDC 177) It is important, therefore, that we help parents with their responsibility to nourish their child’s faith during this time when we are facing COVID-19. How can we help parents understand and care for the spirituality of their children very seriously, recognizing that in the faith life of children, great care must be given so that they may be nurtured for a life lived in communion and solidarity with God and his people.

Let me share with you a moment of life within the domestic church of a family in my parish. Nate has just celebrated his First Reconciliation. He walks toward his mother who waits for him at the Baptismal Font where she, once again, vests him in a white garment as she did on the day of his baptism. They hug each other closely and return to their family. His mom whispers to him: “Nate what did you feel?” He answered right away with his beautiful, brown eyes wide open in amazement: “I felt the Holy Spirit!!!!” Nate kneels and continues to pray. At the end of the celebration, as the family readies to leave, Nate, still in his white garment, stands before his mother and places his hands on her knees, then on her legs and then around her body. She catches his hands and asks: “Hey hey, what are you doing?” He says again with his enchanting,

resplendent smile and eyes wide open. “I am giving you, all around you, some of the light of Christ that I have with me.” Nate knows deeply that he is a child of the Light! And he shares this with his family freely. Nate’s mom sees how we can witness what she calls this “astounding encounter” between God and the child. May we not forget the meeting of these two mysteries in this moment in time, remembering that there is so much that happens in the other 9,960 minutes of the child’s life outside of the atrium and within the life of the family.

In light of the present difficulty, here is an excellent link on the coronavirus and anxiety in children and the church that can be shared with the families: <https://buildfaith.org/coronavirus-anxiety-children-and-the-church/>.

If the atrium closes for a time, perhaps that time can be best spent within the family, giving each family some time that they normally don’t have to “be” with each other in prayer. We have been sending parent newsletters for a number of years now. They can be a rich source of support for families. Here is a link for cgs in the home. <https://www.cgsusa.org/discover/cgs-approach/cgs-in-the-home-parent-resources/>

While this page holds many resources, of particular interest right now can be:

- a page on praying with children written by Tina Lillig and found in Baptism as a beginning. <https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/Praying-with-young-children.pdf>
- the importance of the environment and how to set up a prayer table: <https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/HowToSetUpPrayerTable.pdf>
- a wide array of parent newsletters, including:
  - Be not Afraid: [https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All-About-the-Atrium\\_Be-Not-Afraid\\_In-The-Home.pdf](https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All-About-the-Atrium_Be-Not-Afraid_In-The-Home.pdf)
  - Purple for Preparing [https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All-About-the-Atrium-Purple-is-for-Preparation\\_In-The-Home.pdf](https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All-About-the-Atrium-Purple-is-for-Preparation_In-The-Home.pdf)
  - The Paschal Mystery: [https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All-About-the-Atrium\\_Paschal-Mystery\\_In-the-Home.pdf](https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All-About-the-Atrium_Paschal-Mystery_In-the-Home.pdf)
  - The Gift of Silence: [https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All-About-the-Atrium\\_Silence\\_In-The-Home.pdf](https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All-About-the-Atrium_Silence_In-The-Home.pdf)
  - The Last Supper: [https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All-About-the-Atrium\\_Last-Supper\\_In-The-Home.pdf](https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All-About-the-Atrium_Last-Supper_In-The-Home.pdf)
  - The City of Jerusalem [https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All\\_About\\_the\\_Atrium\\_Feb\\_2018\\_final1.pdf](https://www.cgsusa.org/wp-content/uploads/All_About_the_Atrium_Feb_2018_final1.pdf)
  - And many more.
- What about holding an online book conversation with parents on *The Good Shepherd and the Child, A Joyful Journey*. This book was written for parents!
- As with Italy and the note sent from catechist Francesca Broli, we can be sending notes to the families, perhaps even having digital conversations with the parents to support their “domestic church”?