



## Introducing: tHeART of the Child

by Patti Franz

I sat in the Franciscan Renewal Center listening to the last talk of the 2013 Servant Song Retreat. All weekend we had been treated to poster-sized reproductions of children's artwork that sat upon easels and were interspersed throughout the grounds of the center. On Sunday morning, after Mass, Karen Maxwell and Mary Mirrione unpacked the hidden theology of these masterpieces, giving us a glimpse into the secret conversations that take place between God and the child.

Like so many of us formed in this work, my thought was: If they only knew! If only others beyond the catechist -- parents, priests and religious, educators -- if they only knew what children are capable of when given time and space to explore what it means to be loved by the Good Shepherd!

The seeds for tHeart of the Child grew out of this desire. tHeart of the Child is an art and reflection series to help people deepen their understanding of the child's religious potential. CGSUSA has created a mobile, curated, powerful resource that can be shared in communities all over the country. In Scottsdale at the inaugural event, it was the centerpiece of a weekend gathering of diocesan and CGSUSA catechists, including an evening gala to introduce people who have a heart for children's spirituality and the capacity to support CGSUSA financially. In Pittsburgh, it was part of a diocesan catechetical event. In Nashville, it was part of the Formation Leader Training Conference.

In communities all over the country, we hear and speak of preparing young children for pre-school and kindergarten. Grants and funding for all sorts of efforts revolve around academic preparation. Yet studies show that to cultivate peace, we must nurture empathy. Empathy requires imagination, the ability to consider that which we cannot see. And imagination takes time, and is nurtured by cultivating awe and wonder, characteristics that come naturally to the 3-6 year-old child.

When a child is given time and sacred space to enjoy God, their joy is often captured in art. Art that shows a simple yet profound understanding of the mysteries of our faith. If you would like to share this Good News, contact CGSUSA to schedule tHeART of the Child in your community.