



In the Meadow

Where the sheep gather

A newsletter for the Organization Members of CGSUSA



Greetings!

This month we lift up words found in the third characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd:

The Atrium is a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation and prayer.

- Meditation is a quiet prayer. When we meditate, God speaks to our hearts. Beautiful things, such as small seeds, simple wooden figures and the light of a candle can remind us of God.
- Contemplation is the practice which invites us to look at, gaze upon or be aware of God.

As you conclude your Atrium sessions and reflect upon your time with the children, do you have notes and observations about these moments of meditation and contemplation? Please consider sharing the prayers of the child with CGSUSA. We invite you to use the Parent Consent Form for Child's Writing and/or Artwork or Photograph Submissions to share the children's responses with our catechist community.

For the Parish Bulletin or Parent Newsletter or Catechist Note

The Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

The 32 Points of Reflection

What are the principal points which distinguish this catechesis and because of which it is called the "Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?" The following characteristics are intended to represent the principal aspects of the catechesis as they have emerged after more than fifty years of work with children of different countries, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. These characteristics are reflective of the constants which have presented themselves in this work and are presented here with the invitation to go deeper into them for further reflection.

3. The atrium is a community in which children and adults live together a religious experience which facilitates participation in the wider community of the family, the church and other social spheres.

The atrium is a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation and prayer.

The atrium is a place in which the only Teacher is Christ; both children and adults place themselves in a listening stance before his Word and seek to penetrate the mystery of the liturgical celebration.

For the Parishioner: In the ancient basilica there was a space between the street and the Church, a space used to prepare people to enter the full life of the Church. This space was called the atrium. Our parish's atrium is a place where work becomes contemplation and prayer. Have you ever worked with your hands until you were satisfied? How has being in touch with creation put you in touch with the Creator?

For the Parent: Do you have an environment at home for prayer? Visit our parent resource page for information on how to prepare that environment for your family.

For the Catechist: What did you observe this year in the atrium? How did the overall environment aid prayer? And conversely, did you notice a time when the overall environment hindered prayer?

For Parents

This information may be included in your communication with parents.

The Feast of PENTECOST is Sunday, June 4, 2017.

In the atrium, your child has had an opportunity to reflect upon the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In preparation for the feast, as a family, you may want to reflect upon the following scripture with your children:

The young child

Acts of the Apostles 2: 1 - 4

What color do we recall when we hear about the feast of Pentecost? It is a feast of great love. In the Scripture, the apostles experienced a "great wind" that filled the place where they were sitting. They saw "tongues of fire" that came to rest on each of them, but did not harm them. At this time, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. This feast has a special color. What color reminds us of the feast of the giving of the Holy Spirit, Pentecost? It is a feast of great love. When did the Spirit come to us?

The older child

Acts of the Apostles 2: 1 - 11

The apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. What was that like?
After they were filled with the Spirit, what did they do?

Isaiah 11:1 - 3a

Are the gifts we read about used to bring about God's Kingdom?
How do we use these gifts to build the Kingdom?

For the Catechist

How lovely your dwelling,

O Lord of hosts! - Psalm 84:2

Prayer

The Atrium is a place of prayer. We know from our experience in the atrium that the prayer of the child allows him or her to enter into the relationship with God in a fuller way. The atrium is a place of silence, especially for the 3-6 year old child; and a place with moments of silence for 6-9 year old child.

As catechists, we need to remind ourselves about what Maria Montessori tells us about silence. All of Montessori pedagogy is intended to prepare within the child a fertile ground for prayer. Montessori wrote about the transformation of the child following exercises of silence in The Discovery of the Child:

"It was then that I learned that within the mind of the child dwells its own reward and its own spiritual pleasures. After such exercises it seems to me that their love was greater: they certainly became more obedient, sweeter and gentler." She goes on to say, "It is in silence and when movements are so ordered that the inner sensitivity that is called 'religious sense' or 'spiritual sense' can be developed."

What have you discovered about the child as you engage in exercises of Silence?

We look to our sources, Listening to God with Children by Gianna Gobbi, from pages 122:

"Stillness and silence foster reflection and the capacity to listen to the Other, to receive God's presence in our whole being. According to God's teachings, an emptying of self is what God desires, an emptying of self that will allow God to fill us with the gift of God's own self."

Is silence a habit in our atrium? (page 125)

Is silence a habit in your day to day living?



The 6-9 child goes from the "Lord is my shepherd, I have everything I need" to praying for everyone and their needs. The older child is able to see the needs of those in their family, community and world.

How has the atrium shaped your own prayer life?

For the Catechist and the Children

Songs for the Atrium

Those who sing, pray twice! Formation Leader and Catechist Marty O'Bryan shares a call and response song *Sheep, Sheep* - a good song for the Level One child. Thank you to Pat Sauerman, Lynda Catalano and Mindy Longwell for singing the response!



Sheep Sheep

For Reflection...for the Catechist in the Atrium

The Sources: from Sofia and Gianna

"Having a sacred space for prayer is essential for adults, and it is especially important for young children who are profoundly attracted to and affected by their environment. The prepared environment for prayer might be as simple as Abraham's rock near a spring and a tree, a family prayer table in the home, a fully equipped atrium, or anything in between, but it will always bear the characteristics of simplicity, solemnity, order, beauty, and peacefulness. In this sacred space we will move more slowly and intentionally, and we will speak with a quieter voice (except when we sing out with joy). In fact, "the atrium is a place of prayer in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation, and prayer." (The Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd").



The most basic furnishing of the prepared environment for prayer is a prayer table. It should be low to the floor (or ground, if one is outdoors and using a tree stump or rock as the prayer table) to offer a more intimate view to the children. Ideally, there will be a shelf nearby to hold the articles for the prayer table: tablecloths in the four liturgical colors, a medium-size beautifully bound Bible

(not a children's Bible) a candle, perhaps a small statue of the Good Shepherd, the Madonna and Child, and the Holy Family, and the collection of prayer cards along with the stands for placing the one chosen on the prayer table."

- Sofia Cavalletti, The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey, p 90

As a community of catechists, plan to take time this summer to gather at the prayer table in your atrium. Read together pages 117-131 of Listening to God with Children by Gianna Gobbi and page 87-92 of The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey by Sofia Cavalletti. For your reflection and discussion, we offer the following. We look forward to hearing about your conversation!

How do we as catechists make the Atrium a place of prayer?

How do we do this visually?

How do we have the room lit? Is our lighting subdued? Is there natural light?

How do we create an atmosphere of intimacy?

Have we included a few selected art pieces to be hung on the wall near the prayer table? Possibly the Madonna and the Child by Raphael? This image is found in many early Montessori schools.

How easily is the child able to access the items for the prayer table?

Are there additional items on your prayer shelf, other than those listed above, that are used by the children? Do they aid the child's prayer life or serve as a distraction?

How many items do we need to put out?

How did we observe the child at the prayer table this year?

Did the child choose the prayer table as his or her personal work?



Several of you have asked for a black and white version of some of the elements that you would like to copy and paste to your parish bulletin or catechist communication. You can find that [here](#).

We look forward to hearing from you. Please let us know what resources may be helpful to you as an Organization Member.

In the Shepherd's Care,

Mary Heinrich

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The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

cgsusa.org

