



Sample In-Service for the Board of Education, Pastoral Council or Finance Council Members

Each topic is a potential 20 to 40-minute in-service to be shared with the members of your parish board of education, pastoral council, or finance council members.

Each is a stand-alone topic, and may be presented in any order, but the first three are recommend as a foundation for the other topics.

1. What is the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?
2. Maria Montessori and her Method ***Coming Soon!***
3. The Prepared Environment and Materials ***Coming Soon!***
4. 32 Characteristics: The Adult ***Coming Soon!***
5. 32 Characteristics: The Child ***Coming Soon!***
6. 32 Characteristics: The Method ***Coming Soon!***
7. 32 Characteristics: Sacramental Preparation ***Coming Soon!***
8. Catechist Formation ***Coming Soon!***
9. What are the Level One, Level Two, and Level Three Atria? ***Coming Soon!***

1. What is the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?

Direct Aim:

- a. To offer a brief overview of the method of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.
- b. To lift up the spiritual needs of the child.
- c. To introduce the role of the prepared environment

Introduction

(3 minutes)

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is an approach to the religious formation of children ages three to twelve. It is rooted in the Bible, the liturgy of the church, and the educational principles of Maria Montessori. Children gather in an "atrium," a room prepared for them, which contains simple yet beautiful materials that they use.

The root of the word "catechesis" is the word "echo." In our work in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, we echo back to the children their natural love for and relationship with God. In the process, these reverberations provide us with spiritual nourishment as well, as we listen with the children in awe of the mystery of the greatness of God.

Children have a natural affinity with God. They need us to merely name that relationship and give them the tools to further know and love God as they grow. We put before them the Word of the Bible and the act of liturgy to allow them to come to a deeper reality of that which they already experience, the love of God.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

(10 minutes)

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd considers two mysteries, the mystery of God and the mystery of the Child. It involves both the adult and the child in a religious experience where the values of the child are predominate. What are the religious values of the child? That is one of the treasures of this work. These values are joy and contemplation.

Joy

Children are filled with joy. In the atrium, we see this in the child's singing, that everything is their size, it is an expression of art. Our invitation to prayer brings inner joy to the child. When children encounter what is beautiful, awesome, an essential, they express complete joy. Their joy manifests itself not as a giddy frenzy, but rather as a peaceful relaxation of the body, and often a contented sigh. For children, this kind of joy is the first and most important response to God's gift.

We offer a space in which the child can experience and express joy.

The themes presented in the atrium are those to which the children have responded with depth and joy. The young child has a great capacity for joy. It is seen in their prayer proclamations, their singing, and their drawing.

"The secret of the Good Shepherd parable's resonance is that it corresponds to the young child's vital needs: the need to establish a relationship and the need for protective love...It is only before the age of six that the child can be inside of this joy. It is only when we enjoy God's love,

only when we enjoy God's presence in our life, that we really have a vital faith – the birth of a religious person is born in enjoyment." – *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey* by Sofia Cavalletti, p 12-13

p. 11 : "One special feature of the religious life of children is the joy they are capable of when they are helped to draw near to God. They feel a particular kind of joy...". Sofia Cavalletti notes that just as increased height and weight are signs that the child's physical needs have been met, joy is the sign that a child's spiritual needs are being met.

Contemplation

The children have a great capacity for contemplation. The atrium is a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation, and prayer.

If we offer too many stimuli we thwart contemplation

We must be receptive of the vacant periods to allow for contemplation. As Sofia puts on p. 140 of RPOC, *"If the child does not have time to dwell on anything, then everything will come to seem the same to him (her) and he (she) will lose all interest in things."*

A Story of Contemplation

One spring day in 2009, Sofia Cavalletti received visitors to her home, three Missionaries of Charity. They had come to tell her that the previous summer at their general chapter, the religious order had decided to adopt the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd both for their catechetical work with children and in the formation of their sisters. When Cavalletti asked, "What have you found in CGS that is different from other catechesis?" their answer was "contemplation." Cavalletti could only respond with the words of the Magnificat, and in a special foglietto, she invited catechists around the world to join in her song of praise.

The Atrium

The atrium is not a classroom for instruction, but rather a special room which is set apart to help children in further developing their relationship with God through their contact with Scripture, liturgy, and the whole of sacred history. The environment of the atrium is attentive to children's capacities for concentration, love of order, desire for work and love of silence. Materials are provided in centers throughout the room to aid children's work which is directly linked to biblical and liturgical sources. The Atrium has maps of Israel and miniature environments that represent historical events or elements of parables as well as a miniature baptismal font and all articles of the Mass to encourage a greater participation in the Liturgy. The children learn how to take care of their environment through practical life activities such as cleaning, flower arranging, and precious-metal polishing. There is a prayer table, along with cloths for each liturgical season, bibles, psalm and prayer cards, and other seasonal items and statues for the children's use in preparing the table. The children are shown how to walk slowly and speak softly out of respect for one another's work so that the environment is conducive to helping the child in his/her desire to come closer to God through listening, working, praying, singing, wondering, resting, and discussing important things brought to light through his/her experiences.

DVD

(7-10 minutes)

Share the DVD "The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd presents Where A Child Can Fall in Love with God", which explains the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, is available from The United States Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Scottsdale, AZ or use the video available via CGSUSA YouTube channel, "The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd", that discusses the preparation of a sacred space, known as an atrium, for children. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfg9RfBk-fY&t=80s>)

Note: The DVD is 10 minutes in length. YouTube offers a 7-minute video.

Tour and Presentation(s)

(15 minutes)

Arrange for a tour of an Atrium or arrange to bring materials to your gathering to offer the committee/council members a presentation from the Level One Atrium.

Resources Needed:

- Screen, projector, laptop or DVD player
- DVD, The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd presents Where A Child Can Fall in Love with God",
- Atrium materials for presentation (offered by trained CGS catechist)
- Green booklet from The United States Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Scottsdale, AZ