

*The United States Association of
The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*



Catechist In-Service:
*The Role of the Adult in the
Time of the Coronavirus*

CGSUSA Catechist Summer In-Service

Catechist In-Service (approximately 1.5 – 2 hours)

A Sample Agenda:

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| Introduction | 10 minutes |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome and Introduction• Purpose of our time together | |
| Opening Prayer | 5 minutes |
| Re-Discover the Role of the Adult | approx. 30-45 minutes |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Brief Review from CGS Formation</i>• <i>32 Characteristics Relating to the Adult (handout)</i>• <i>“Unprofitable Servant” by Sofia Cavalletti (handout)</i>• <i>Our Sources: CGS Core Text and Journals</i> <i>Religious Potential of the Child</i> by Sofia Cavalletti, chapter two, page 23-25 <i>Listening to God with Children</i> by Gianna Gobbi, chapter two <i>“The New Adult”</i> by Rebekah Rojcewicz, <i>Journals of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd 2014-2018</i>, p. 93-94 (handout) | |
| Role of the Adult in the Time of the Coronavirus | approx. 30-45 minutes |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>Discussion Questions and the Four Scenarios</i>• <i>What questions do we have today about the role of the adult as it relates to the four possible scenarios?</i>• <i>What do our Sources tell us?</i> | |
| Closing and Wrap Up | 10 minutes |

Introduction

Facilitator

In our Formation Courses we have an opportunity to learn about the role of the adult in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

As we look toward returning to the Atrium in the fall, we have many unanswered questions. We may even ask about our role as catechists in this time of the pandemic. Has our role changed? What are we called to during this moment in history?

The purpose of our time together:

1. We will look to our notes from CGS Formation and our Sources to rediscover the role of the Adult in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.
2. Through our reflection and discussion, we will look to our current moment in history, and how our sources and the 32 Characteristics allow us to work with the child with humility and respect. We will make note of any new questions that arise for us.
3. We will look at each of the four scenarios and ponder the role of the adult in each. What do our Sources tell us?

We will also review the guidelines from CGSUSA concerning what can be shared online and what cannot be shared online.

In our formation, we considered, “Who is the Adult? Who is the Catechist?”

We know that the adult’s role is to prepare the environment. It is an important part of the catechist’s spirituality to make the materials, as much as possible, by hand.

The adult proclaims the Word of God in the environment. The adult is both the one who makes the proclamation and listens to the Word at the same time.

Maria Montessori’s model of the “directress” is that as “a scientist and saint.”

Sofia Cavalletti’s favorite scriptural image for the adult is that of the “unprofitable servant” from Luke 17:1-10.

Before we explore and go deeper into the role of the adult, let us take a moment for prayer.

Opening Prayer: The Unprofitable Servant

Call to Prayer

We seek the face of God,
the God of essentiality,
the God of joy,
who refreshes us and nourishes us in his Word.
Allow us to be faithful to your Word, as one
who both proclaims and listens with the child.
We ask this through Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Word of God

light candle, proclaim scripture from the Bible, Luke 17:1-10

For Your Reflection

The adult who proclaims the kerygma to the child is the “unworthy” servant of the gospel. Sofia reminds us that the catechist proclaims a Word which is not one’s own and assists the child’s potentialities, which in no way belongs to oneself. The adult cannot help but recognize how often the results surpass the promises of one’s work.

- How do we understand the term “unworthy,” “unprofitable,” or “useless” servant in relation to our role as a catechist?
- In reflecting upon our service to the child, what has the child taught us?
- Who are we before God? When our faith is weak? When we feel our attempts are clumsy and we stumble or stammer? When we feel small?

Allow participants to share a response in small groups one of the questions or what struck their heart.

Prayerful Response

For what shall we pray today?

Allow for silence and spoken prayer

Closing Prayer

Lord God, Source of All,
Let us always remember that we are unprofitable servants.
And like John the Baptist we must decrease so that Christ may increase.
Allow all our work to proclaim the love of the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit, who want to reveal their mysteries through the child.
We ask this in your most holy name. Amen.

The New Adult

In her article from the 2016 Journal of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Rebekah Rojcewicz asks if the gift, particularly the fullness of joy, is just for the children we seek to serve? She continues to describe our role:

“I believe the link between the image of the “useless servant” and the “exorbitant privilege” with which we’ve been entrusted is found in the word “humility,” a word that has tended to have a very different connotation in its more traditional religious language usage than what the children have helped us to see and understand. We genuflect before the tabernacle at Mass because we are so moved by the majesty of the One who is present there, not because we are suddenly focused on how small and unworthy we are to be in his presence. A definition of humility I found in a devotional book from the 1940s nails it for me:

Humility is not the belittling of self; rather it is the capacity to be lost in the wonder and greatness of the other.

We do not focus on the smallness of the drops of water but on the “much-ness” of the wine into which they are incorporated in the preparation of the chalice. Could it be that becoming a “new adult” simply means growing in our capacity to become “lost in the wonder and greatness of the other?””

- Rebekah Rojcewicz, “*The New Adult*”, *Journals of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* 2014-2018, p. 93-94

32 Characteristics regarding the Catechist

No. 4 The transmission of the Christian message in the atrium has a celebrative character

- The catechist is not a teacher, remembering that the only teacher is Christ himself.
- The catechist renounces every form of control (such as quizzes, tests, exams, etc.) in the spirit of poverty before an experience whose fruits are not her/his own.
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No. 6 The Word is proclaimed in the most objective manner possible, so that the words of the adult do not impede the communication between God who speaks and God's creature who listens. The only aim of the words of the adult is to discreetly serve the listening to God's Word, in accordance with Jesus' own statement in the gospel: "My teaching is not mine but his who sent me." (John 7:16)

No. 22 The catechists work together in a spirit of unity and harmony, in tune with God's plan for communion in the history of salvation and in keeping with the theme of unity so strongly expressed in the parables of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1 ff) and the True Vine (John 15:1 ff). They generously offer their talents and experience for the good of all.

No. 23 The attitude of the adult has to be marked by humility before the capacities of the child, establishing a right rapport with the child, that is to say, respecting the personality of the child, and waiting for the child to reveal himself/herself.

No. 24 The tasks of the catechist include:

- To go deeper into the Christian message through knowledge of the biblical and liturgical sources and of the ongoing living traditions of the church, including the theological, social, and ecumenical movements which enliven the church today.
- Preparing an environment and maintaining order in that environment (the atrium) so that it fosters concentration, silence and contemplation in both the child and the adult.
- Preparing materials oneself as much as possible while collaborating with others in areas beyond one's abilities.

No. 26 The primary commitment of the catechist is working with the children in the atrium; however, this commitment also leads the catechist to be open to the needs of the catechesis in general and making him/her responsive to other forms of service which can be necessary.

Dear Catechists and Friends,

Patricia asked Gianna and me: "What are the essential guidelines which could assist us as Catechists in helping children in their relationship with God?" In trying to respond to this request, I realize that it is anything but easy to highlight the principle points. Nonetheless I will try and invite you to clarify and integrate these thoughts.

The first point I would focus on is the inner disposition to change what is our common attitude, as adults, towards children. This attitude generally takes two persons into consideration: the adult and the child, attributing the active role to the adult as the one who gives, and the passive position to the child as one who receives. Yet in doing so we forget that, in the formation of the human person, there is a third person involved, the one who holds the absolutely primary position: the inner Master. And it is He alone who teaches, both the adults and the children. The Christian message will be received in our listening together -- adults and children -- to the Master, and in a constant interchange among the hearers, big and small.

We need to de-school catechesis, as we have mentioned so many times.

I think two texts from the Gospel will be able to help us in our search together.

1. "We are unprofitable servants." (Luke 17:10)
2. "Unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 18:3)

I. UNPROFITABLE SERVANTS

To be a "servant" means to be ready and willing to work in different ways. The catechesis of the Good Shepherd demands considerable effort in many areas. It calls for a personal commitment to learning, and a continual broadening of our own understanding in the fields of doctrine (bible and liturgy), psychology and pedagogy. A catechist may never consider that one's preparation in any of these fields is complete. We are called forward on a journey which leads us to go deeper and deeper in the heart of knowledge. In this way we become ever more capable of transmitting the Christian message, with fidelity to its sources and in its most essential form, so as to respond to the child's needs and touch the child's level of profundity.

As well as this, the Catechesis of the Good shepherd asks us to make a commitment to manual work. Making the materials and preparing the environment cannot and must not be viewed as a secondary activity, one that we casually delegate to others, while keeping for ourselves solely the direct contact with the children. The preparation of the material and environment is an integral and vital part of the catechist's task; in manual activity the catechist finds an instrument for indirect service to children in their relationship with God.

The environment and materials are truly a means of helping the child's meditation and prayer. They are a help that allows the adult to really be a "servant," that is, one who is predisposed to do what is necessary and assists the child's encounter with God, and then steps aside once it has begun. "Help me to come close to God by myself."

Working with our hands is a help for us as catechists as well. We will discover that manual activity is a way for the message to enter more deeply into us by absorbing it within ourselves, and on more levels than the intellectual plane alone.

"Unprofitable." When sharing religious experience with the child, we will continually see that whatever contribution we have made as catechists is exceeded by the child's response. We will come to the awareness that children, in their relationship with God, reach a depth of knowing and an intensity of feeling that surpasses by far anything we have been able to offer. So it happens that in being with children we will sense the presence of a force, mysterious and silent, which does not belong to us, and we will treasure it as an inestimable privilege to be granted at times to "see it" working within the child. As Elijah did, on Mount Horeb, when he heard the "tiny, whispering sound," at moments like this we too will want to "cover our face" in beholding the presence of God. (1 Kings 19:13)

In this way we, as catechists, learn an enriching poverty: what comes from our hands and mouth is so poor in the face of what God works in his creatures, and in his littlest creatures: young children.

II. BECOMING LIKE LITTLE CHILDREN

The other Gospel passage I would suggest for reflection is: "Unless you change and become like little children, you will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven." (Matthew 18:3).

Much superficial writing has been done on this text. But let us try to read it in light of our experience with little children. How do children appear to us in their relationship with God? The most striking qualities that emerge are essentiality and enjoyment. We have spoken together often about these two elements in the religious life of the young child.

a. Essentiality. Essentiality means the ability to go straight to the essential. In seeking to understand more about what is meant in speaking of essentiality, and where the adult and child differ in relation to this, I asked myself: Is there a connection between being essential and being simple? If so, what is it? And how do the qualities of simplicity and essentiality mutually clarify each other?

Simplicity. Something that is simple is something I can contemplate, something concentrated in the space of a single point. This focal point, however, is endowed with such essentiality that the greatest realities can be discerned in it, and from this single point I can advance towards ever expanding horizons. Would you like an example? The mustard seed. And an even more overwhelming example? The Eucharistic Bread.

Is there anything simpler than a seed -- a mustard seed, "the smallest of all seeds." Or a piece of bread -- Eucharistic Bread? And yet within these is encased the most essential secret of Life.

Can we say that the content is essential and the container is simple? I do not think it is possible to so divide the seed and the bread from the Reality they represent. Perhaps it is more precise to say that the container is simple because it is adequately suited to the essentiality of the content.

Simplicity and essentiality are, in my view, two aspects that merge in the greatest Reality.

And now let us turn to little children and the need for us to become like them.

Children accept things that are simple and essential without any difficulty. In fact, as we have so often said, it is only in these that children find true satisfaction.

When we adults are faced with such radical simplicity, we get lost. We go astray in trying to complicate and multiply things. In our meeting with what is "simple" we seem to find a denial of our own

importance as adults. In complicating things, we create a sort of smoke screen which covers our own inability or our own difficulty in being present, naked and poor, to Reality.

Let us seek to simplify ourselves, even though it is not easy. In order to accept the essential in its simplicity, we need to be really poor inside ourselves. We need to let go of our own trappings, such as, for example, our erudition or experience as adults. In saying to "let go," I mean to say that we should give to trappings like these the weight --so very light -- they actually have, when measured in terms of the grandeur of Reality.

Twice we have centered upon, from different points of view, the theme of interior poverty. Essentiality. Simplicity. Could this be the most profound lesson the child is giving us? Could this be the meaning of "becoming like little children?"

b. Enjoyment. I will not stop to dwell on the capacity of the young for enjoying the presence of God because we have done this many times together. However, I have been reflecting on the interconnection that likely exists between the child's capacity for enjoyment and the qualities of essentiality and simplicity. Perhaps it is only when we place ourselves in the presence of essential realities with a spirit of simplicity that we will find that type of enjoyment we have seen so often in the young child. And I have been reflecting on the privilege that is given to us sometimes to be able to be witnesses of such enjoyment as this.

I have also been thinking about the training school -- challenging and at times very demanding -- that catechesis with young children provides for us. If this is true, then our direct contact with children can never be abandoned. There is not a time when, having "gone beyond" the point of working with children, we apply ourselves exclusively to the formation of adults. The moment for solely "teaching teachers to teach" will never come, because if we lose our contact with children we will distance ourselves from the most significant source of our own personal formation.

There is one final reflection, which is related to the preceding one. If we are aware of how important a school the catechesis with children can be for us, then we will even be willing to share with them the low estimation that young children basically receive, in spite of all the discourses on the wealth of early childhood. There is no doubt that if we were occupied in catechesis with adolescents, we would generate much more interest, and that many draw away in disappointment when we speak about catechesis of children two and three years of age. But it is precisely in the littlest children that there is not only the greatest religious richness, which we must serve, but also the best possible school for us.

The little child is truly "one of the least" in the kingdom of God (Matthew 5:40). Let us remain close to the child in enjoying the presence of God, and also in accepting that "being one of the least" is not always valued.

For the moment, here are the reflections I am able to offer. I will leave it to you to continue the dialogue.

Enjoy your work.

With much affection,

Sofia

The Role of the Adult in the Time of the Coronavirus Discussion Questions

- What did you discover in reading from our core text, Annual Journal, 32 Characteristics or Sofia’s letter, about the role of the catechist? Was there anything that was new for you? Was there anything that struck you in light of the pandemic and this moment in history?

- Sofia wrote about the “useless servant” in an article titled, “The Objectivity of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd,”

However, how can the catechist remain in the role of “useless servant” even in the first moment of catechesis, in which she needs to be present and active in the transmission of the deposit of faith? I believe that a way she may do so is by transmitting that which she has received in the most objective manner possible, without personal additions.

In both moments of catechesis, the catechist must remember that she is “a useless servant” and thus, in performing her service, seek to occupy as small a role as possible, taking care not to interject herself into the “internal conversation” that needs to arise between the only Teacher and the disciple.

How do we occupy as small a role as possible? How do we not interject ourselves into the “internal conversation” between the Inner Teacher and the child?

- Looking at the four scenarios, and specifically about the scenario that your community is looking at for the fall, what questions do you have about your role?
 - 1) We Return to the Atrium with Modifications
 - How much time will you need to prepare and orient yourself to the modified atrium? Will you need to (temporarily) modify your album pages?
 - Will the modifications impact your ability as a catechist to proclaim the Word? To be silent? To observe? To be humble?
 - What questions do you have for returning to the Atrium?
 - 2) We Support the Domestic Church
 - The catechist observes the needs of the child. What are the needs of the child, and the family while at home?
 - How do we live the Montessori principles and the 32 Characteristics outside the Atrium environment?
 - Fr. Jose Maria Soria spoke to a group of formation leaders in Nashville, TN in 2019 and stated, “A person’s relationship with God is sacred land, each child’s heart is sacred land.” Even if the catechist and the child do not meet in a prepared environment this fall, the child’s heart is a place to encounter God’s Word. How does Fr. Jose’s words give you insight into your role?

- How can the catechist respond to the concern of screen fatigue? Both their own and the child's?
- How do we help parents understand the simple things in their daily routine as holy?
- What questions do you have for supporting the Domestic Church? What do our sources tell us?

3) We Follow a Retreat Model

- No. 26: The primary commitment of the catechist is working with the children in the atrium; however, this commitment also the catechist to be open to the needs of the catechesis in general and making him/her responsive to other forms of service which can be necessary. What do you imagine as those "other forms of service" in preparing for the retreat model?
- What preparation (possibly outside the atrium environment) does the catechist need to do to assist the child and the family for the retreat model?
- Will you send extensions home with the child? What work can the catechist do at this time to prepare for the retreat model?
- What other questions do you have for the retreat model? Can our sources offer us any insight?

4) We Plan for an Interrupted Calendar, in case there is a second shelter in place

- What work can the catechist do at this moment to prepare for an interruption to the calendar?
- How can catechist assist families to pray with one another during this time?
- What concerns do you have for a possible second sheltering in place?

- **Note: Guidelines from CGSUSA Regarding What Can and Cannot be Shared Online:** This would include recordings posted and shared via email or social media, and via Google meet, Zoom or other platforms.

Please remember that giving children presentations online is not the same as when they are offered to children in person. These are moments that we cannot in any way "realize" electronically. In the atrium, the presentation the catechist offers children is an announcement, a proclamation of the Christian message. While it is a brief moment: the rest of the atrium time allows children to absorb the message internally through the work of their hands. The material we use in a presentation is not a "didactic material" and therefore, it isn't designed for the adult as a teacher's aid. The children would see the material associated with the message but cannot immediately use it with their own hands which is key to allowing them to absorb the message it conveys. What we can do is find some time to contact them and remember with them (not remind them) that we are united in the love of the Good Shepherd. What we can do is support the Domestic Church in their shared prayer life at home which is at the heart of our mission and purpose.

- What are the other questions do you have about the role of the adult during the time of the coronavirus?