

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

~~~~~



St. Augustin Religious Education

[janis@staugustin.org](mailto:janis@staugustin.org)

Regional Association: Shepherd's Staff

[cgsiowa.org](http://cgsiowa.org)

National Association:

[www.cgsusa.org](http://www.cgsusa.org)

## WHAT IS THE CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD?

Beginning in 1954, in Rome, Italy, Sofia Cavaletti and her co-worker, Gianna Gobbi, developed an approach to the religious formation of children. It appealed to the profound religious intuition of young children, and addressed their changing developmental stages. It is rooted in the Bible, the Liturgy, and on 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. You may be wondering how these materials help the religious life of children? If an adult hears a beautiful passage from the Bible, the adult might take a Bible, find the passage, and read it slowly again and again. He or she may think deeply about the words and perhaps speak to God in a thankful or hopeful prayer. But a little child, too young to read, needs another way. In an atrium, the child can ponder a biblical passage or a prayer from the liturgy by taking the material for that text and working with it – placing wood figures of sheep in a sheepfold of the Good Shepherd, setting the apostles around a Last Supper table, or preparing a small altar with the articles of the Eucharist. Older children who do read often copy parables from the Bible, arrange prayers in order from the Rite of Baptism, or label a long timeline showing the history of the kingdom of God.

The atrium is a place where children come to fall in love with Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

"To discover the laws of the child's development would be the same thing as to discover the Spirit and Wisdom of God operating in the child. We must respect the child's objective needs as something which God Himself has commanded us to satisfy. This is the true mentality for the educator – that is, the recognition of the Divine Wisdom as a necessary element in his work as an educator."

~~ Maria Montessori ~~

"If we want to help the child draw nearer to God, we should with patience and courage seek to go always closer to the vital nucleus of things. This requires study and prayer. The child will be our teacher if we know how to observe."

~~ Sofia Cavalletti ~~

*Our primary beliefs are that God and the child have a unique relationship with one another and that the growth of this relationship should be assisted by the adult, but is directed by the Spirit of God within the child.*

### Glossary of Terms

These are some terms used regularly in CGS (Catechesis of the Good Shepherd) that may be new to you. Becoming familiar with these words will make it easier to understand the work being done in an atrium.

**Catechesis** – A word first used in the early Church to describe the instruction people received in preparation for Baptism. In our context, the Catechesis is the way children are prepared to participate fully in Christian community.

**Catechist** – The catechist is the adult who guides the children. This person is not the teacher in the traditional sense. Instead he or she prepares the space where God and the child can come together. He or she creates materials, presents them to the child, and then participates with the child in a sense of wonder about God.

**Atrium** – Another word from the early Church, it was the name of the room-sized entryway into the Church where people new to the faith were instructed for Baptism. In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, the atrium is the room that is prepared for the children. It is not a classroom. Instead it is a place of religious experience, community, and worship.

**Levels** – CGS is a multi-age approach. Level I is for 3-6 year-old children, Level II is for 6-9 year-old children, and Level III is for 9-12 year-old children.

*continued on back*

