

# Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

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St. Augustin Religious Education

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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 olds, Level II is for 6-9 year-olds, and Level III is for 9-12 year-olds. Toddler Level is for children 9 mos-3 year olds.

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## Glossary of Terms—continued

**Materials**—The materials in the atrium are carefully selected or created and are made out of wood, glass, metal, and fabric. Items are made to look real and we try to avoid plastic or the look of a toy. Children are taught to handle materials with great care.

**The most important things about the materials is that they are closely linked to the Bible and liturgy.** All materials have a specific purpose and children are invited **to work** with the materials to meditate on the liturgy or on the traditions of our faith. Examples of materials found in the Level I Atrium include small figures of Mary and the angel for the Annunciation, Jerusalem mustard seeds for the Parable of the Mustard Seed, or a small Baptismal font and Paschal candle to explore Holy Baptism. Level II materials mirror those of Level I and become more involved, a response to the growing curiosity and ability of the child. Level III materials build on the foundation of Levels I & II, but are geared toward the emerging abilities and needs of the 9-12 year-old child.

**Presentation**—Presentation could also be thought of as lessons. During a presentation, the Word of God is proclaimed through a scripture reading or a description of an aspect of the liturgy and a demonstration of how to use the associated materials.

**Work**—This is the term for the child's use of the materials. We do not use the term "play;" instead we refer to what the children do as "work." Different than play, working with the materials is the job of the child; the way that he or she delves deeply into biblical story and liturgy.

## CGS at St. Augustin Parish

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd will be offered for  
Toddlers (9 mos-3 years old),  
Level I (3-6 years old, typically preschool-kindergarten),  
Level II (6-9 years old, typically 1st-3rd grade),  
Level III (9-12 years old, typically 4-6th grade).

The cost per child will be \$75.00 for Prek-K and \$140 for 1st grade and up. Cost for toddlers will be \$40, or two toddlers for \$75. The maximum cost for a family is \$265.

Level II includes preparation for 1st Reconciliation and 1st Communion.

Our atria are in the lower level of St. Augustin Catholic Church.

### **Choose one of the following atrium session times:**

Tues. 4-5:30pm, Toddler, and Levels I-III

Wed. 9:15-11:15am, Toddler, and Levels I-III

Wed. 4-5:30pm, Toddler, and Levels I-III

Wed. 6-7:30pm, Levels I-III

Thurs. 8:45-10:45am, Toddler, and Levels I-III

**Sessions will begin Tues. Sept. 11th, 2018. Space is limited. Please register by Aug. 1, 2018.**

**We will have parent information/orientation meeting on Sunday, Sept. 19, 2018 at 11:30am.**

Individual meetings with parents are always welcomed! Please contact Janis Falk 515-255-1175, or [Janis@staugustin.org](mailto:Janis@staugustin.org) to schedule a time.

To enroll your child, please submit the registration form and fee to:

**St. Augustin Religious Education Department**  
**545 42nd St. Des Moines, IA 50312**  
(515) 255-1175 ext. 207      [janis@staugustin.org](mailto:janis@staugustin.org)

"It is a fact that children have an extraordinary capacity for prayer, as regards duration as well as spontaneity and dignity of expression.

Theirs is a prayer of praise and thanksgiving, which expresses the nearness and transcendence of God at the same time."

~~ Sofia Cavalletti ~~