

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd



Holy Spirit Parish
Office of Religious Education

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Catechesis of the Good Shepherd USA
cgsusa.org

WHAT is Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS)?

A unique process for children 3-12 years of age, founded in Sacred Scripture, Liturgy, the pedagogical principles of Maria Montessori's work with children, and the religious intuition of children themselves.

Developed in the 1950's by Sophia Cavaletti (a scripture scholar) and Gianna Gobbi (a Montessori instructor) in Rome and now found around the world.

Gobbi and Cavaletti observed children, pursuing the revelation of the young child's religious potential, and found that God and the child have a unique relationship before the age of six.

They observed that children eagerly seek religious experience and find fulfillment in it only if they are helped to live it in its deepest, most essential elements, without "childish" overtones.

When the conditions are present to foster this religious experience, young children live their relationship with God in enchanted wonder and joy which gives them peace. This peace comes from the satisfaction of the deep and vital need.

They observed that children of the same developmental stage respond to certain themes of the Christian message in the same way, even if from different cultural backgrounds. Over time a curriculum took shape which responds to the child's deep religious needs according to age.

Not primarily academic in character. Rather, it seeks to be an experience of life and an education in faith through the celebration of an encounter with the Father, in listening to Jesus the Teacher, and in obedience to the Holy Spirit.

2026-2027 CGS

3–6-year-old children* (Level I) are invited to participate on Mondays, Sept. - April, at the Holy Spirit Parish CGS Atrium, 1-2 PM.
(Acorn Pre-School students participating in Level I on Mondays will be accompanied by Acorn School staff).

Dates for Level I CGS Atrium sessions:

Sept. 14, 21, 28; Oct. 5, 19, 26; Nov. 2, 16, 23; Dec. 7, 14; Jan. 4, 11, 25; Feb. 1, 8, 22; Mar. 1, 8, 15, 22; Apr. 5, 12, 21 (Wed.), 27

LEVEL I REGISTRATION:

<https://forms.gle/sEfoE3vtd5S5y64PA>

6-9-year-old children (Level II) are invited to participate on Sundays during the regular parish religious education class time, 10:30-noon. Even if your child attends the LHCS for their religious education, they are also welcome to attend CGS.

Dates for Level II CGS/Religious Education:

Sept. 13, 27; Oct. 4, 25; Nov. 8, 22; Dec. 6, 20; Jan. 10, 24; Feb. 7, 21; Mar. 7, 21; Apr. 4, 18

LEVEL II REGISTRATION:

<https://forms.gle/JZCMjncW5uAvzp8T9>

WHY must we start with preschoolers?

The young child is the "metaphysical" child. They move easily in the world of the transcendent and delight in contact with God. Cavaletti's and Gobbi's research and observations show that the most profound mysteries should be shared with the youngest children. Research has found that the youngest children absorb their environment and learn in a way and at a speed that is more "caught" than "taught."

WHY Implement CGS?

Our faith and relationship with God are not religious subjects but a way of life (based on Scripture and Liturgy). In order to help children grow up strengthening their relationship with God and practicing the Christian way of life, they need a place of prayer and reflection. The atrium is a place to grow this way. It is a place of prayer, but it is also a place of preparation. Through the environment, they absorb the spiritual life, at their level and pace and at their size. This is preparation for the experience of Church.



Elements of the Atrium

The Catechist: The growth of the relationship between the child and God is *assisted* by the adult but is directed by the Spirit of God within the child. The catechist's role is not one of "teacher" but to prepare the environment and to give selected presentations from scripture and liturgy that "call forth" the child's response rather than "pour in" information. The catechist listens with the child and together they ask, "God, who are you? How do you love us?" The adult reflects with the child on the questions generated by the presentations with the materials offered to the child to aid the child's reflection. Both child and adult are of equal dignity and both approach God "like a child" together.

The Environment: Children need *their own place* to foster the growth of their relationship with God. This place is called the atrium. The atrium can be compared to a retreat house facilitating recollection and silence. The atrium is a place for religious life, for community and worship—not a classroom for instruction. The atrium is a place of meaningful work through which the child can have a conversation with God. The atrium was the place in the early church where the catechumens were prepared. For the child, too, the atrium is a place of preparation for involvement in the larger worship community.



The Materials: The child's spiritual growth is best served through *tangible but indirect means*. After a theme has been presented, the child is free to choose an activity that will make possible the inner dialogue with the "Interior Teacher." The Materials in the atrium are often three-dimensional wood representations of a particular scripture or are items that represent what can be found in the Sacraments. They are attractively displayed and invite the children to explore and deepen their experience of the presentation at their own rhythm. The most important characteristic of the materials is their close link to the biblical and liturgical sources. Maps of Israel and miniature environments represent the elements of the parables or the historical events from the infancy or paschal narratives that satisfy the spiritual needs of the child. The model altar and its articles convey the centrality of the Eucharist. Liturgical items initiate the child into the liturgical life of the church.



CGS at Holy Spirit Parish

Our director of religious education is certified as a CGS Catechist in Levels I and II. Level I (since 2016) and Level II (since 2018) share the same atrium and many materials.

Level I atrium sessions are being offered at no charge to **3–5/6-year-old children** on Mondays (1-2 PM). Acorn Preschool children can participate and will be accompanied by an Acorn Preschool staff member as well.

The **Level II** atrium serves the children in the parish religious education program (**ages 6-9**) as well as any children of this age group. It is offered Sundays during religious education class time (10:30-Noon).

