

Sofia Cavalletti describes *Catechesis of the Good Shepherd* as the meeting of two mysteries:

*The mystery of God & the mystery of the child.*

'Mystery' indicates our attitude of respect and wonder, our recognition that we are standing before something which is at once both knowable and beyond our complete comprehension. If we see children as mystery in somewhat the same way as we see God as mystery, then we will want to know more about them. We will want to go on learning about them, and yes, in addition to responding to Jesus' exhortation to become like them, some of us will feel called to serve them. (*Religious Potential of the Child*) It is a place of simplicity and order, prayer and work, and community.



**The Atrium**

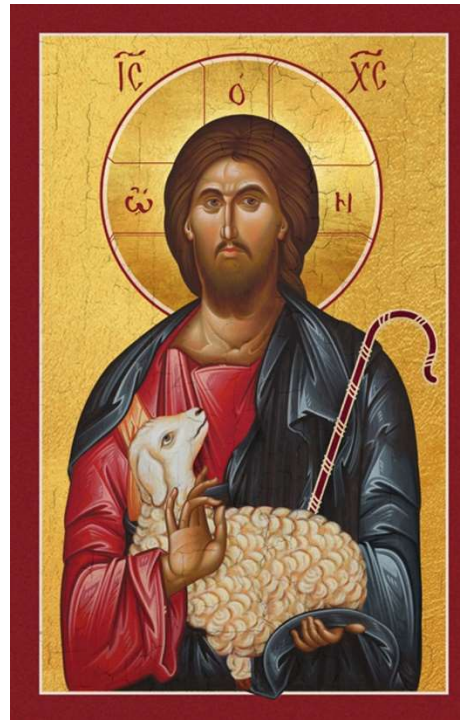
The Atrium is a place specially designed to help the relationship between God and the child to flourish.

*"How does an atrium help nourish this relationship?"*

Following the principles of Maria Montessori, the atrium is designed with young children in mind and their need to discover the Faith in a hands-on way.

- ◆ The Atrium can be compared to a retreat house facilitating recollection and silence.
- ◆ It is a place for religious life, for community and worship - not a classroom for instruction.
- ◆ It is a place of work which becomes a conversation with God. Practical Life Skills are offered as a means helping children to master them and become a means of creating peace within themselves.
- ◆ Originally, the Atrium was the place in the early church where the catechumens were prepared. For the child, too, it is a place of preparation for involvement in the larger worshipping community, it "slows down" the Liturgy.

*"Let the children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven."*



*Interested in more information?*

You can plan a "field trip" to an established atrium and receive a one-hour presentation from a certified catechist. Please contact

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*Come and see how we can help children and ourselves fall more and more in love with our Lord, Jesus Christ, the Good Shepherd!*



*This is a very powerful statement*

made by our Lord made when His disciples came to Him asking, "Who then is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

What if we told you that you can become as little children?

What if we told you that listening to God with children helps us become more humble?

What if we told you that there is a church school program that helps us to do this?

*Well, there is such a program. It is called the*

**Catechesis of the Good Shepherd**

The Atrium is a prepared environment that is attractively designed, inviting children to explore the faith at their own pace. The most important characteristic of the materials are their close link to the Bible and the Liturgy.



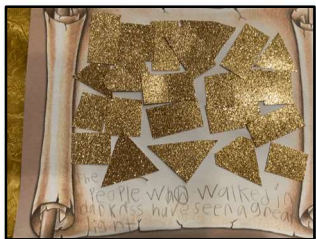
The shelves include maps of Israel and miniature figures representing the elements of the parables and historical events from Scripture that have been shown to satisfy the spiritual needs of the child.

The arrangement of the model altar and its related articles convey the centrality of the Eucharist. The Baptismal font and other liturgical items initiate the child into the Liturgical life of the Church. The Atrium allows the children to encounter materials which aid their focus to be directed toward Scripture and the Liturgy of the Church.



Every time one enters the Atrium, they enter into a personal connection with God, a moment of adoration of God's Word.

*In other words, a mini retreat!*



The children will become partners in the covenant with God by being in relationship with God. Some of the ideas shared in the CGS include:

- **The Life of Christ:** The children will hear about the historical events of the life of Jesus, including the infancy narratives, the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They will encounter presentations on the preaching of Jesus and the images of Christ as Good Shepherd, Christ the Light and the True Vine.
- **Liturgy:** The children will explore the biblical message lived in the liturgical experience of the church through prayer and celebration. Every child has a deep and joyful relationship with God which needs to be watered and fed like a tender plant.



- **Baptism:** In Baptism, we receive the gift of Jesus' Risen life. The baptismal light and white garments are signs we will discover.
- **Eucharist:** The actions and words of the Divine Liturgy help us to learn about the Good Shepherd, who gives His life for His sheep.



## The Prepared Adult

Not only do we need a prepared environment, we also need a prepared adult called a catechist, to be certified in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS). This is the equivalent of a "teacher" in the conventional Church School program.



One's formation is held at an established atrium in a retreat-like environment. We are taught to let the children know Who

Jesus is, as the One who invites us into a relationship with Him as the Good Shepherd. We do this by the *sense of wonder* which is an exceedingly important stimulus for the human spirit.

Wonder is a very serious thing that, rather than leading us away from reality, can arise only from an attentive observation of reality. An education to wonder is one that helps us go always deeper into reality. If we skim over things, we will never be surprised by them.



Wonder is a dynamic value; and can draw us to be immersed in the contemplation of something that exceeds us.