

What is Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?

The word “catechesis” means “echo”. Our aim in the atrium is to echo the words of Jesus, The Good Shepherd.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is an approach to the spiritual formation of children. It is rooted in the Bible, the liturgy of the church, and the educational principles of Maria Montessori.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is founded on these beliefs:

- That God and the child already have a unique relationship with one another, particularly before the age of six.
- That the growth of this relationship should be assisted by the adult, but is directed by the spirit of God within the child.
- That the most important message we can share with the 3-6 year old child is that Jesus loves them.
- That the 3-6 year old child prays in many different ways:
 - Through song
 - Spontaneous prayer
 - Silence

The Atrium

We call the room in which we gather, “The Atrium”. By definition, an atrium is the area just as you are about to enter the church. Our atrium is a place where we learn to prepare our bodies and hearts to enter the church.

The Atrium is a specially prepared environment. It is outfitted with child-sized furniture, materials that were handmade to tell stories from scripture, and articles to represent what is seen in the church (i.e. communion table, the paten and chalice for communion, liturgical colors, etc.).

The children are shown how to walk slowly and speak softly in the atrium. This is encouraged for many reasons: so that we can listen to what God is saying to us, to prepare us for a life-long study of God's word and prayer, and to prepare our bodies for when we are in church.

It is our prayer that the atrium is a place where your child may come to know God, His love, and enjoy His presence in their lives.

But what do the children actually do?

Generally, the children begin by gathering at the prayer table for a time of singing and prayer. We then show a short presentation to introduce a new parable, a new element of the liturgy, or to understand a special celebration such as Baptism or Pentecost. Following the presentation, the children are invited to work honoring the concept, “Let me grow closer to God by myself.” They may choose from any work they have seen presented before, or ask to learn a new work. At the end of our session, we gather back at the prayer table for a final time of prayer and singing.

It is hard to sum up what a child has “learned” in any one particular session. We allow them to ponder the words of God. We wonder with the children. And, we encourage the children to find their own answers. We believe that if they discover a truth of God on their own, it will remain with them for the rest of their lives.

The spontaneous songs and prayers the children share with us are a glimpse to us of what they are hearing from God.

Parents are welcome to observe in the atrium. They are also asked to volunteer their time as an assistant, make materials ready for the children to use, provide flowers for the children to arrange, and become a catechist if interested.

Catechists complete a formation course offered by the National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd – an experience many describe as a retreat in the way it can renew and deepen an adult's faith.

The Catechist's role is to prepare the environment and to give 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 catechist and the child live a shared religious experience according to the teaching of the gospel: “Unless you become like little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of God.” (Matthew 18:3)

Check www.cgsusa.org for a listing of formation courses.



Weekly sessions of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd are held on Sunday mornings from 9:45am-10:45am in Room 3 during the school year at:

Immanuel Presbyterian Church
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Questions?
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Catechesis
of the
Good Shepherd
at
Immanuel Presbyterian Church



Religious
Formation
for Children
ages 3-6