

## Level 1 Atrium

*Jesus said to his disciples:  
“Let the children come to me;  
do not hinder them,  
for the Kingdom of God belongs  
to such as these.”*

*Mark 10:14*

The Level I Atrium fosters the 3-6 year old child’s innate relationship with Jesus using the Parable of the Good Shepherd.

The reality of Jesus in this image affirms within the child the covenant relationship



that exists between the Good Shepherd, Jesus, and His sheep. We wonder about these sheep that Jesus calls by name, feeds and protects, searches for when lost, and rejoices when found.

*The Good Shepherd lays down  
his life for his sheep.*

The treasure hidden in the parable—of who these sheep could be—is for each child to joyfully discover on his or her own.

As the child is orientated to the Atrium, we present lessons in grace and courtesy as well as controlled movement and practical life activities, such as pouring and transferring, to assist in the development of fine and gross motor skills and in preparation for more advanced work specific to the Atrium. We also introduce nomenclature and gestures that are part of our life in the Church, such as the Sign of the Cross, Genuflection, and articles of the Mass, as well as the liturgical colors and calendar.



## Origins of CGS

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is the result of an unexpected, but joyful, journey that brought Sofia Cavalletti, a Hebrew Scripture Scholar, and Gianna Gobbi, a Montessori Educator, together in Rome. Over a long period of time, they carefully observed children and discovered that, even from the earliest age, children eagerly seek religious experience and find fulfillment in it only if they are helped to live this experience in its deepest, most essential elements. They observed that children have an innate religious potential and relationship with God that can be actualized through work in a special environment called the Atrium. Our work, as catechists, is not to “pour in” information, but instead, to facilitate the child’s relationship with God in an environment that nurtures this relationship and prepares the child for fuller participation in the liturgy, especially the Holy Mass. We provide a peaceful, reverent setting and plant seeds that are nurtured by the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. We ponder these mysteries with the children, always wondering what He wants us to know.

*"Help us, O God, to enter into the secret of childhood, so that we may know, love, and serve the child in accordance with the laws of Thy justice and following Thy holy will."*

*- Maria Montessori*

## **St. Stephen School**

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

30 minute Level I Sessions are:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, &

Thursday

For Pre-K students

**A typical Atrium session consists of:**

- ◆ *A presentation originating from the Bible or Liturgy.*
- ◆ *A period of self-directed, quiet work as an aid to contemplation and prayer.*
- ◆ *A time of worship in the prayer corner.*



*Pope John Paul II visits Sofia Cavalletti's Atrium in Rome.*

## **The Atrium and the Child's Work**

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a Montessori based approach to Catholic Religious Education where children can grow in their relationship to God through a deep engagement in Scripture and Liturgy. The beauty and mystery of God's Kingdom are revealed through Gospel Readings of the Parables, Infancy Narratives, and the Paschal Mystery Narratives. The child is prepared to enter more fully into the life of the Church and participate in the Holy Mass.

The Atrium is a specially prepared room that contains beautiful, mostly handmade, materials that the children work with as a way of meditating upon the historical events of our Catholic Faith and reflecting upon the significant aspects of our Liturgy. Especially in the younger ages, the artwork children produce often reveals their response to what they see and hear.

All materials are designed for little hands to grasp and manipulate easily.

Materials such as interactive maps of Israel and a three-dimensional model of the city of Jerusalem help situate Jesus as a real person in time.

## **Catechesis of the Good Shepherd**



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*"Help me come closer to God by myself." - Sofia Cavalletti*