



Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

FAQ for Adult Formation



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What is Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS)?

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is a method of helping children enter into a relationship with God. It was developed based on the educational principals of Maria Montessori, an expert who studied early childhood development in depth and greatly valued the dignity and immense potential of the child for learning.

Where does CGS happen?

CGS takes place in a room called the "Atrium". This is what the entrance space in Basilicas was called in ancient times. The Atrium is "more like a church than a classroom." (Religious Potential of the Child, 1992). It is a place where the children learn to contemplate God. This room is prepared by the catechists for the religious experience of the child.

How did CGS get started?

Two women, Gianna Gobbi and Sofia Caveletti, started using this method in the 1950s in Italy. Through extensive experience praying with children and observing them work in the "Atrium" they identified which scripture passages seemed to resonate the most deeply with the children. One of these passages was the parable of the Good Shepherd. They wondered why the children grasped onto this particular story so much. By listening closely, they heard the children saying they loved the story "because the Good Shepherd knows my name!" Developing this personal loving relationship with Christ is what CGS is all about.

What happens in the Atrium?

The children are presented with short scripture passages which they ponder with the trained adult Catechist. Some of the presentations have "materials" that go along with them. For example, for the story of the Annunciation, the children listen to the scripture and are then presented with figures of Mary, the angel Gabriel, and the Holy Spirit in the form of fire. After hearing the scripture, the children are invited to "work" with the materials. This leads them to internalize the scriptures and contemplate it in a personal way. Similar presentations are given with materials to teach about the Liturgy. This helps the children understand what is going on at Mass and become more engaged as they make connections between what they absorb in the Atrium and what they see in the Liturgy on Sunday.

Many presentations correspond with the Liturgical year of the church. However, the catechist also strives to observe each child and offer presentations in which the individual child shows an interest. For this reason, and because the atrium is an environment with blended ages, summaries for parents about the weekly presentations are not provided. All parents are welcome to observe (after the first 6 weeks) at any session.

Who should consider attending adult formation?

In short, any adult (ages 16 and older) should consider attending a formation course!

Regardless of whether you are currently available to work with children of the age which you train, formation provides an opportunity for growth for every individual. Level 1 provides the foundation for all the levels – meaning that though you may work with children older than age 6, the training is still relevant and rewarding. The formation never “expires” - it provides lifelong insight into fostering a relationship with Christ for both yourself and those you form in the faith – no matter if this in the everyday interactions of a parent/child, teacher/student, or a catechist with children in the atrium.

From CGSUSA.org: In Catechesis of the Good Shepherd adults are given the opportunity to embrace a method of catechesis (or religious education) that will deepen one’s relationship with God. Catechist formation in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is both instructive as well as experiential. It captivates both the head as well as the heart. It has a holistic approach for the adult, enriching the adult in a **background of scripture and liturgy, theology and prayer, as well as the pedagogy of the young child, helping the adult to see what face of God the young child most needs in order to enter into a relationship with God.** Therefore, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd requires the adult to receive training in the method in a way that is “retreat-like,” giving time and space to absorb the richness of what it means to live one’s baptismal covenant and grow in the love and knowledge of God. (from CGSUSA.org)

What are the different Levels of training? (CGSUSA.org)

- **Level I** catechist formation is for adults seeking to serve children who are three to six years old. This training is at least 90 hours. This is the foundational training for all succeeding levels of catechist formation. All the key themes and presentations that are essential to this method of catechesis are introduced at this level so it is important for an adult to begin at this level. It is also valuable for the adult in understanding the child’s developmental needs and religious capacities at this level.
- **Level II** catechist formation is for adults seeking to serve children who are six to nine years old (or first through third grade). This training is at least 96 hours and continues the themes first introduced in Level I catechist formation. It expands upon those themes according to the developmental needs and capacities of this age child. New themes are also introduced at this level especially around the History of the Kingdom of God, Moral Parables, and the sacrament of Holy Eucharist. Sacramental preparation is also a key component of this catechist formation.

- **Level III** catechist formation is for those seeking to serve children who are nine to twelve years old (or fourth through sixth grades). This training is about 110-120 hours and builds upon the previous two levels of training. It continues to broaden the scope of scriptural and liturgical themes according to the child's ability and developmental needs. In-depth Old Testament scripture studies are introduced at this level along with a broader look at God's Plan in the History of the Kingdom of God and the Judeo-Christian roots of Christianity.

Are there many opportunities for trainings for adult formation?

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is growing throughout the country. A list of available formations can be found at <https://www.cgsusa.org/learn/find-a-course/>. Practically, this program is very new to Nebraska and formation course opportunities locally have been limited. As the programs are new, many of the local atrium would love to have more trained support! To build this support, two formation courses are planned for Level 1, beginning in 2023 and concluding in 2024. One will be at St. Teresa in Lincoln, and one will be split between St. Stephen, Omaha, NE and St. Teresa, Lincoln, NE. One formation course is planned for Level 2 for 2023-2024 at St. Elizabeth Ann in Omaha (catechist need to have completed Level 1). If finances are a barrier to attendance, please contact the formation host to see if scholarships are available.

What am I committing to by signing up for adult formation?

Very simply, you are committing to attending the 90+ hours of formation to complete the course and payment of tuition in full. During the course, you will receive presentations and information and, with your formation class, compile an "album". This formation and the album will provide the information you need to lead or assist with children during sessions of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. In general, completion of Part 1 (the first half) of formation will equip you with the knowledge to lead children in the first year of their participation of CGS. Completion of Part 2 (the second half) will complete your knowledge for the second and third year with the children. Please note that CGS is not a check-box curriculum and the individual child may be drawn to (and shown by the catechist) works in his or her first year that are recommend for second or third year children. This is especially true for children who start in the atrium at an older age (4 or 5). It is important for the adult to commit to the entirety of formation for this reason.

Occasionally, someone is not able to attend part of the formation. 80% attendance is required to receive a completion certificate. If a greater absence occurs, no tuition is able to be refunded. However, a stipend may be available should you audit a future course and complete formation.

What am I not committing to by signing up for adult formation?

You are not committing to beginning, joining, or long-term volunteering at an established atrium just by signing up for formation. Your desire to volunteer at an established atrium or to start an atrium is a separate commitment. Many people desire and do make these commitments when they register for formation, but it is not a requirement. Still others hope to work with children as a catechist in the atrium in the future, but are not able to commitment to this work immediately at the end of Part 1 of formation; they are welcome too! Many people also attend for their own personal growth or to aid in their work with children outside of the atrium – this is good and wonderful!

What are my childcare options during formation?

As a mother of little ones, I understand the commitment to attend formation requires a disruption in routine and the possibility of additional childcare expenses for those who attend. No childcare is available on site and reimbursement of expenses is not available. Nursing babies who stay with mom are welcome at formation courses (as are pack-and-plays, floor mats, toys, etc.). Older children who work well individually and quietly with limited direction are welcome in the training space. Questions about specific child's needs/appropriateness of attendance can be asked of the formation host or the formation leader.

SPECIFIC TO ST. TERESA PARISH AND SCHOOL

St. Teresa CGS is in great need of more trained catechists to continue to offer sessions to the whole community. Everyone working with the program is a volunteer. The children who attend our atrium come from 10 different parishes and include those who attend traditional school or are home-schooled. Our catechists also are registered at many different parishes throughout the diocese.

Those willing to commit to weekly volunteering in the atrium for the 2023-2024 year will have tuition fee waived. Additionally, catechists do not pay for their own children to attend CGS at St. Teresa (normal fee \$100/child annually). The sessions typically have 12 children and 2-3 catechists. A brand-new catechist would never be asked to lead a session his or her first year – at least one year assisting is so important for catechists in CGS. Please let me know (contact info on Page 1) of other questions pertaining to volunteering at St. Teresa.