

# Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Interpersonal relationships are always a mystery, especially when that relationship is between God and a child. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a program of Christian formation based upon the premise that there is a deep bond between God and the child. The parish's responsibility is to assist the child to discover and articulate that bond.



The CGS classroom, called an *atrium*, is a spiritual environment more like a place of worship or a retreat center than a traditional classroom. The atrium's conditions of silence and reverence help the child focus on God. Over time, children experience a series of spiritual lessons, and are provided hand-made materials to reflect on them, in a custom-structured environment which fosters their reflection.

CGS teachers are called "catechists." The catechist, in conjunction with the parish and parents, carefully prepares the atrium environment. During each session, catechists do not "pour in" intellectual information, but make presentations that evoke a reflective response from the child. Presentations are carefully chosen material in the form of Bible stories, information about the Eucharist, and the like, selected for their developmental appropriateness.



Children are then gently guided to respond in their own way to the material presented. They are given full access to the presentation materials, such as three-dimensional maps, miniature houses and figures, art supplies, and simple household supplies for practical activities like pouring and sorting. These materials assist them to experience the lesson in the way children learn best: by interacting with it. The child is free to choose an activity that will make possible an inner dialogue with God. The entire process trusts God to develop a relationship with the child.



CGS was developed in Italy by Sofia Cavaletti and Gianna Gobbi, a Hebrew scholar who spent thirty years researching the religious development of children, and an educator who had worked closely with Maria Montessori. Today CGS exists in churches of many denominations around the world, and is widely used in the Episcopal Church. CGS has the reputation of spiritually transforming whole parishes. As the adult community works to prepare and present the program, they necessarily reflect on the spiritual material, and often experience a deep spiritual renewal. Thus, beginning a Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program may have far more to do with the Kingdom of God and the growth of a church than anything else a parish community does.