

CERTIFICATION FOR CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

As with all faith formation, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd catechists are expected to be well-prepared for their ministry. Certification courses are offered regularly to train catechists in this approach around the country and in our very own diocese. (Check www.cgsusa.org for a list of the dates and locations of training courses.) There are three levels of certification courses which correspond to the three age levels of children; that is, Level I for catechists ministering with children 3-6 years old, Level II for catechists ministering with children 6-9 years old and Level III for catechists ministering with children 9-12 years old.

All catechists are encouraged to begin with Level I training since it provides the foundational principles which under gird the catechesis of all levels. The training of catechists is extensive. Each level requires at least 90 hours of training. Catechists learn about the developmental needs and abilities of the children in various age groups and how these shape the curriculum. With such training catechists are better able to discern what is truly helpful and contributes to the child's religious formation. Catechists can become more purposeful and aware of the way they facilitate what takes place in the atrium.

Certification courses are conducted by nationally trained facilitators with years of experience in ministering with children in this approach. Formation is largely passed on orally and by first-hand experience of presentations given in an atrium. By design, catechists are not just given a manual to read, although reading assignments are integral to the process. Additionally, catechists are expected to develop their own "album pages" (which serve as lesson plans) based on their observations of presentations given in their training and actual time spent in the atrium while children are present. Album pages are scrutinized by course facilitators for approval. Catechists are also encouraged to be involved as much as possible in creating materials used in the atrium as a way of internalizing the curriculum that is presented.

Cultivating the proper attitude of catechists toward the children and delineating their role as catechists is intrinsic to their formation. To use Cavalletti's own words:

The adult who is to proclaim the most essential points of the Christian message, to listen to it with the children, and to serve the children in order to know their needs should remind himself that he is the "unworthy servant" of the Gospel. The adult's function as a mediator is necessary in evangelization; nonetheless it should not be overvalued. The catechist proclaims a Word that is not one's own and assists the child's potentialities, which in no way belong to oneself... There is a deep bond uniting God to the child, the Creator to His creature; it is a deep bond that cannot be explained as the result of any human work, a bond with which no person should dare to interfere.

The catechist's task is to create specific conditions so that this relationship may be established, but to withdraw as soon as contact occurs. We should take the greatest care not to interfere between God and the child with our encumbering person, with our insistent words. The adult's mediation is a service that is offered to the Word of God and to the child, and it has all the limitations of a service. The catechist who does not know when to stop, who does not know when to keep silent, is one who is not conscious of one's limits and, after all, is lacking in faith, because, on the practical level at least, one is not convinced that is God and His creative Word that are active in the religious event. The help the adult can give the child is only preliminary and peripheral, and one that

halts—that must halt—on the threshold of the “place” where God speaks with His creature. (Sofia Cavalletti, *Religious Potential of the Child*, p. 52)



Clearly, the disposition of the catechist in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is one of humility and service. In the traditional model of religious education, the teacher “knows” and the students do not so the teacher proceeds to pour information into the child’s empty head as if that is what is most important. By contrast, in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd BOTH child and catechist stand in face of the mystery of God’s self-revelation as equals. Catechists embrace the spiritual poverty that shuns the need for control and forfeits being able to measure the results of their efforts in favor of trusting the present and power of the Spirit who wills relationship with young and old alike. It may be said that Catechesis of the Good Shepherd takes very seriously Jesus’ maxim: “Unless you become like little children, you cannot enter the Kingdom of heaven.” (Mt. 18:3)

The National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd provides a certificate upon completion of each level of training.

The Diocese of Columbus confers advanced certification on those who successfully complete 90 hours of Level I training.