



# The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

## at St. Agnes'

### Atrium of the Lamb

St. Agnes offers a model of faith formation for young children called the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS). CGS was developed over 60 years ago by Sofia Cavalletti, a Hebrew and biblical scholar from Rome. Together with Dr. Gianna Gobbi, she developed a program for 3 to 12 year olds on Church doctrine, the Bible and the Holy Mass with a hands-on approach based on a method developed by Dr. Gobbi's friend, Maria Montessori. Children are grouped based on age, with three different levels. At St. Agnes we currently offer Level 1, which is for children ages 3 through 5.

#### Why have a program for three-through-five year-olds?

At this age, children are developmentally ready and excited to form a deeper relationship with Jesus, the Good Shepherd, who calls them by name. Children of this age are deeply connected to God; they can easily fall in love with Jesus and begin a lifelong relationship with our Good Shepherd. Waiting until the child is six or seven would mean passing this sensitive period for the personal relationship with Jesus and jumping into the moral reasoning stage. With a foundation of love, the law of God is not just an obligation, but a freely given response to God's great gift of love.

#### What is an Atrium? Why isn't it called a classroom?

The Good Shepherd environment is called an atrium. It is a specially prepared room with beautiful, hand-made, child-size materials. The name comes from Maria Montessori's vision of a place dedicated for children's religious education, and refers to the space in an ancient basilica which lay between the street and the inner sanctum. There the faithful prepared themselves, both physically and spiritually, to enter the church and participate in the liturgy. Our "Atrium of the Lamb" at St. Agnes is on the bottom floor of Thomas Patrick Hall.

#### What do children do in the Atrium?

In the atrium, children fall in love with Jesus, the Good Shepherd. The atrium experience is the foundation for a life-long relationship with God which is then lived out in the Church community. Children live the central mysteries of our faith by working with and reflecting upon materials that revolve around the life of Christ, liturgical colors, geography, the altar and the Eucharist, the Gospels of the birth, passion and resurrection of Jesus, Advent prophecies, the parable of the Good Shepherd, the Kingdom parables, and Baptism. The core essentials of the faith are presented the first year, which are then built upon in following years. Time spent working with materials allows the child to meditate and pray on the concept that has been presented.

The Level 1 atrium follows a cycle over the course of three years. Each year builds upon what was presented the previous year, taking into account each child's development and changing needs.

#### When is CGS offered for children at our parish?

In 2019-2020 we offer the Level 1 atrium on **Wednesdays from 5:30 to 6:45 pm** (the same time as PREP), and on **Thursday mornings**. We also offer it to St. Agnes School pre-K3 and Pre-K4 students during the school week.

#### Who teaches the children?

In the atrium, Christ is the teacher. St. Paul said "It is Christ who teaches, not I." The catechist, who gives presentations to small groups of children or individually, is seen as a guide and not the teacher. Afterwards, the child is able to work with the materials in the atrium. The child is given this personal work time so that the Holy Spirit can be the inner teacher: "I will send you an advocate... the Spirit of truth, he will guide you to all truth."

#### What else do I need to know as a parent?

One of the hallmarks of CGS is the intense focus and concentration the children can experience during a presentation by the catechist or while working with the materials. To maintain this atmosphere, we ask that the children be dropped off on time. Parents are welcome to observe the atrium. Observers are invited to sit outside the room or along the edge of the room so as not to distract the children. Hopefully, the stillness will allow the observer to enter into the spirit of meditation along with us!

#### How can I register my child?

You may contact the Religious Ed office at (610) 436-4640 or [dre@saintagnesparish.org](mailto:dre@saintagnesparish.org) for more information or to register your child.