



**St. Maria Goretti Parish  
Catechesis of the Good Shepherd  
Spiritual Formation  
For Children**

**PARENT HANDBOOK**

If anyone wishes to rank first, they must be servant to all. Then He took a little child and putting His arm around him said, “Whoever welcomes a child such as this for My sake welcomes Me!”

Mark 9:35-37



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

# **Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Information for Parents**

## **Just what is the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS)?**

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is an approach to the religious formation of children 3 -12 years of age. It originated in 1954 with the founding of the children's center or "atrium" in Rome, Italy. Inspired by Montessori Principles of Education, it now extends to many countries all over the world. Atriums can be found in home, parish and school settings. The Catechesis is based on the conviction that God and the child are already in relationship. The child has a deep need to experience and a special capacity to enjoy the presence of God. The task of the adult is to help the child live fully the encounter with God. When helped to do so, this experience becomes formative in the child's whole person and generates great joy.

## **...Then what is the "Atrium"?**

The atrium is one of the elements that help the relationship between God and the child to flourish. The atrium is the environment where this formation takes place. The atrium can be compared to a retreat house facilitating recollection and silence. In the early church the atrium was the place where the catechumens were prepared. For the child, too, the atrium is a place of preparation for involvement in the larger worshiping community.

## **Attendance**

It is our goal to provide the best possible religious formation for our children here at St. Maria Goretti. If your child cannot attend a session, please call the office (480-948-8380 ext. 15) If the office is not called the absence is unexcused. Please have the consideration to notify us before class begins. It is difficult for your child to make up the sessions missed. Please make every effort to have him here. If your child has 3 unexcused absences we will need to meet with you and assess how to proceed and what is best for your child.

For sacrament preparation, all workshops and retreats must be attended by parent and child. Communication is key!

## **Before the Session, PLEASE...**

Let your child know you think their work is wonderfully important. Avoid sugary snacks and drinks before coming... And please make sure your child goes to the bathroom before entering the atrium.

## **Curriculum & Themes**

After years of working with this age group, it was found that whatever their culture, children responded in the same way to certain elements of the Christian message. Because of this fact, a core curriculum took shape. The curriculum is constructed so that it accommodates and nurtures faith, moral and psychological states of the child's growth. The themes are offered in such a way as to develop the precious religious potential present in every child: the capacity to love and be loved. For a detailed description, please ask in Goretti Center office for the "beige booklet".

## **Discipline**

There is an atmosphere of peace in the Atrium that develops from the start. The children learn how to move and be in a way that does not distract others. We take time in the beginning of the session to settle. From time to time a child may have difficulty settling. We have various peaceful ways of helping the child with this. We may ask you for your help by coming into the session. We are here to support your child, please keep an open communication with your child's catechist to help us in this work.

## **Lost & Found**

If a child is missing anything, please inquire at Goretti Center.

## **Our Forms of Communication**

The main forms of communication consist of a general meeting before classes start, an additional meeting for sacrament parents, the parish bulletin, and email. We ask parents to communicate by phone, email, and direct contact with catechists. Forms will be on the parish website is [www.smgaz.org](http://www.smgaz.org), Click on Faith Formation, then Elementary.

When in doubt call GORETTI CENTER (480)948-8380 ext 15 or 25.

## **Materials**

The materials in the atrium are attractively displayed inviting the children to explore and deepen experiences at their own rhythm. The most important characteristic of the materials is their close link to biblical and liturgical sources. The shelves include maps of Israel and miniature environments representing the elements of the parables and historical events from Scripture that have been shown to satisfy the spiritual needs of the child. The altar, baptismal font and other liturgical items initiate the child into the liturgical life of the church. Much of the child's time in the Atrium is spent working with these materials. For this reason please do not expect to see work sheets coming home from these sessions.

## **Observing in the Atrium**

We are happy to have you observe this sacred space prepared for your child's work to become prayer anytime you like, in fact we encourage it! To preserve the natural rhythm of the Atrium we ask that you pick up a copy of guidelines for observing from the Goretti Center Office and please let your child's catechist know when you would like to come for a visit so a place can be prepared for you.

## **Session Times**

Sessions start promptly at 4PM . They run for one and one half-hours. The last 10 to 15 minutes are spent in prayer and from time to time the children may desire to remain longer in prayer.

The Pre-k/K classes held on Sunday begin at 8:45am and ends when the 9am Mass ends or at 10:45am-12:00pm or after the 11am Mass.

## **Sick Children**

Only well children are permitted in the atrium.

If your child is experiencing profusely runny nose, fever or has vomited or has abnormally loose stools in the past 24 hours he or she must be free of illness for 24 hours before returning.

## **Snacks**

The Atrium is a place of prayer and therefore a sacred space.

Food and drink are not permitted in the Atrium rooms.

## **Catechesis of the Good Shepherd for your child**

**Level I** is for preschoolers and Kindergarteners. These children attend weekly sessions in the Lamb Atrium on Sunday mornings.

## **Level II and Sacrament Preparation**

We follow the policies of the Diocese of Phoenix. These policies may be found on the diocesan website, [www.diocesephoenix.org](http://www.diocesephoenix.org).

Children begin their preparation for all three sacraments when they begin Level II of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd which is a three year process. First graders are in the first year of this process. Their sessions are held in the Lamb Atrium.

The second year of Level II is held in the Found Sheep Atrium where the children prepare for and receive the sacrament of Reconciliation provided they are ready. The sacrament is conferred in February. Parents attend a meeting in the fall. Parents and children attend a workshop together just prior to the evening of First Reconciliation.

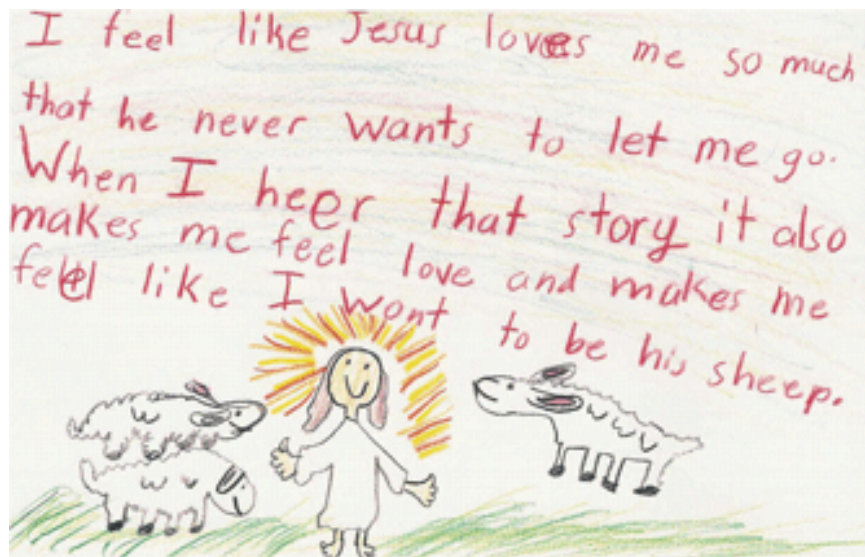
Children in their third year of Level II prepare for the sacraments of Confirmation and First Eucharist (Communion) in the True Vine Atrium. These children are normally in third grade in school. Parents play a vital role in this preparation. They attend a meeting and are given some materials to work with their children at home. There are necessary requirements for these sacraments that will be given at the parent meeting. A 2 day retreat is given the weekend before the sacraments are conferred. Parents come to a portion. These sacraments are conferred at the same Mass either the end of April or first part of May.

### **Level III**

Children in 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades attend weekly sessions in the Holyland Atrium. The goal here is mystagogia, moral formation, the plan of God in salvation history and “my place in it,” as well as connecting the New Testament to the Old. Now the children respond to the love of God which has been nurtured by asking, “What is my role as a confirmed Catholic?”

### **Commissioning our Catechist**

Our program begins with the commissioning of our catechists and assistants at the 11am Mass on the 3rd Sunday in September. Sessions begin that week and continue until the middle of May.



**St. Maria Goretti Parish  
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