

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Good Shepherd Atrium

Sts. Anne and Joachim Catholic Church



Parent Handbook

2024-25

Welcome to the atrium and the joyful journey with the Good Shepherd through the work of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS). We are so grateful to offer your child this method of faith formation.

We know that even the youngest children, in their deepest being, are in an intimate, loving relationship with God. The atrium environment helps them give expression to that relationship. The environment is carefully and lovingly prepared to give children the independence and silence they need to meet the Good Shepherd and delight in his presence.

How is this accomplished? First and foremost, it is a gift from God, the Father, accomplished through Our Lord Jesus Christ in the Good Shepherd, by the power of the Holy Spirit. In a prepared environment (the atrium) with trained catechists whose primary sources are Sacred Scripture and Liturgy, the children come to live the joyful life of a child of God. Through Scripture, the Father who is in heaven comes lovingly to meet His children and talks to them. In Liturgy, the children respond in faith and love to the great gift of God's blessings.

With Scripture and Liturgy as the pillars, the children will be soundly supported in learning about the Kingdom of God, the Life of Jesus, the Mass, the Sacraments, and Prayer. They will also develop practical life skills like pouring, polishing, and folding: all of which are skills necessary to learn the cycle of work in the atrium, build a foundation of independent work, assist the child in developing focus and concentration, which leads to prayer and contemplation. Some of the skills your child will learn this year will help prepare them to enter more fully into the Liturgy they celebrate with their family each week. Most of all, they will learn how much the Good Shepherd loves them and calls them each by name.

What to Expect

CGS Level 1 is a three-year program for 3-6 year olds, with each year building upon the previous year. Children do not need to have the full three years to benefit from the beauty of this faith formation approach.

The Good Shepherd Atrium is located upstairs next to the bathrooms, the first door on the right as you walk down the hallway towards the St. Joseph Room.

Our atrium currently has four sessions each week for Level 1 (ages 3-6).

Wednesday 9:00-10:30 AM Catechist: Molly Rodenbiker

Wednesday 3:30-5:00 PM Catechist: Brienna Dusek

Thursday 9:00-10:30 AM Catechist: Mariko Dahl

Sunday 3:30-5:00 PM Catechist: Sarah Hoepfner

Because of the uniqueness of this approach, sessions at the beginning of the year will be shorter (approximately 40-45 minutes in length) and begin with only half of the children at a time. Your child's catechist will notify you which time block your child will participate in during the first few weeks. As the children acclimate to the setting, your child's catechist will determine when to combine the two groups and extend the session length. The first few weeks will be spent helping the children learn about life in the atrium and serve as an orientation to the space. Through preliminary works, which are activities the child is already familiar with (puzzles, lacing, stringing beads, opening/closing containers), the children learn how to work in the space. Exercises of Practical Life (dry pouring, pouring water with and without a funnel, polishing, folding) allow the children to assimilate to the environment of the atrium and work on concentration, controlled movement, and hand strength. These skills are all necessary as the children move into other areas of work in the atrium.

Throughout the year, materials that coincide with the liturgical year will be presented by the catechist either 1:1 or in a small group setting. Children may work with any materials they have been presented as many times as they would like. There are, however, materials that are reserved for presentation at a certain age or liturgical season. For example, the infancy narratives are presented during Advent and Christmas, but once presented to a child may be worked with at any other time of the year. During the first year, a child will hear about the Annunciation, but the Presentation in the Temple is reserved for a later year.

There is a separate hand-out that explains the various areas of work in the atrium. Additionally, there will also be parent hand-outs from time to time explaining various components of the Montessori and CGS methods. Parents may also learn more by visiting the CGS USA website at www.cgsusa.org or our parish's CGS page at <https://stsaaj.org/catechesis-of-the-good-shepherd>.

Arrival and Dismissal

There is no food during atrium sessions, so please ensure your child has been given a snack or is well fed prior to the session. You will need to accompany your child all the way to the atrium door. Please plan on arriving approximately 10 minutes early to help your child prepare before the session by:

- Hanging up coats/sweatshirts either in the coat room on the main level or on the rack directly outside of the atrium.
- Using the restroom and washing hands.
- Getting a drink.

- Making a name tag (as needed)
- Removing shoes and placing on the rug outside the atrium. Shoes are not worn in the atrium, so children should wear or bring socks or non-distracting slippers.
- Waiting with your child until he or she is invited in to the atrium. The catechist and assistants use the time leading up to the atrium session for preparation of the space and prayer. Once the atrium door is open, the catechist will meet outside the atrium with the children before welcoming them inside to work.

Your child will be dismissed promptly at the end of the session time. The catechist and assistants will watch to see that each child is picked up by an adult directly outside of the atrium.

Attendance and Illness

Please be committed to your session. We understand that, at times, illness and other circumstances may prevent your child from coming. If something changes and your child will no longer be attending for the remainder of the year, please let us know so we may invite a child from the waiting list to join.

Please keep your child home if he or she is showing any signs of illness. The works in the atrium are communal and used by many hands. There will be hand sanitizer in the room for children and adults to use, as needed. If your child will not be attending a session, please notify your child's catechist by phone or text.

Bathroom Procedures

Children must be independent with bathroom needs to participate in CGS (no diapers or pull-ups). Please dress your child in clothing he or she can manage independently, being mindful of snaps, zippers, buttons on pants, etc. If your child needs to use the restroom during a session, an assistant will monitor his or her walking to and from the bathroom. However, our CGS catechists and assistants will not enter the restroom with your child. Again, we appreciate your help in making sure your child has attempted to use the restroom prior to the session.

Session Cancellations

In the event of inclement weather on the day of a session or any other cancellation, your child's catechist will notify you via e-mail and/or text message.

Observation

We welcome adults observing in the atrium later in the year, once the children have had an opportunity to adjust to the environment. Please contact the catechist for your session

via email if you or someone you know may be interested in observing. Guidelines for observation will be provided the day of the scheduled observation.

Allergy Information

There is a work in the atrium that involves handling flour, and occasionally during the year, we may have celebrations that involve a small snack at the end of the session in an adjacent room to the atrium. If your child has a gluten intolerance or any other allergy the catechist should know of, please communicate that to your child's catechist.

Children's Work and Art

Children will have a work folder, kept in the atrium, where they will collect work and artwork they have completed during their atrium session. The work will come home twice a year— in January and May.

Please feel free to e-mail or visit with your child's catechist or Olivia Salonek, the Director of Religious Education, if you have any questions. The space and time outside of the atrium session is for this. We welcome your interest and look forward to opportunities to share the work of CGS.

Director of Religious Education:

Olivia Salonek osalonek@stsaaj.org 701-235-5757

Catechists:

Molly Rodenbiker molly_jane1@yahoo.com

Mariko Dahl marikonakasone@gmail.com

Brienna Dusek brienna.cgs@gmail.com

Sarah Hoepfner sarah_jo_06@hotmail.com