

Saint Mary Catholic Community Parent Handbook for Level 1 Catechesis of the Good Shepherd



Program Director

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Level 1 Catechists

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What is Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS)?

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a Montessori-based religious education program for children aged 3 to 6 years. It is rooted in Scripture and the liturgy of the Church, offering children a hands-on approach to learning about their faith. The program is designed to nurture the child's relationship with God through engaging activities, prayer, and reflection, fostering a deep and lasting connection with their faith.

The Atrium

The atrium is a specially prepared environment where children engage with materials that help them explore and deepen their understanding of their faith. It is a sacred space designed to encourage prayer, contemplation, and learning. In the atrium, children interact with materials related to biblical stories, liturgical items, and the sacraments, allowing them to discover and experience the richness of the Catholic faith.

Generally a day in the Atrium will include:

- A presentation of a part of the Bible or Liturgy given to the children by the Catechist
- A significant period of time for children to work with materials of their own choice on their own
- A gathering time of worship at the prayer table

Practical Life

Practical life activities are an essential component of the CGS program. These activities help children develop concentration, coordination, and independence. Tasks such as pouring, polishing, and plant care are included to enhance fine motor skills and instill a sense of responsibility and care for the environment.

Is Your Child Ready for CGS?

To ensure your child has a positive and enriching experience in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program, consider the following readiness indicators:

- **Age:** Children should be between 3 to 6 years old.
- **Independence:** Can your child manage basic self-care tasks like using the restroom and washing hands?
- **Attention Span:** Is your child able to focus on a task or listen to a story for short periods?
- **Social Skills:** Does your child show interest in interacting with peers and adults?

If you have any concerns about your child's readiness, please speak with Dawn.

Paperwork Expectations

Each child will have a folder in which to keep their work. At various times of the year, we will send the work home. We ask parents not to expect paperwork after each session, since one of the key Montessori principles is that young children work for the process, not the end product.

Illness Policy

To maintain a healthy environment for all children and staff, please adhere to the following illness policy:

- Keep your child at home if they exhibit any of the following symptoms: fever, vomiting, diarrhea, rash, persistent cough, or any other signs of contagious illness.
 - Your child should be symptom-free for at least 24 hours without medication before returning to class.
 - Notify the program director if your child contracts a contagious illness so appropriate measures can be taken.
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Arrival and Dismissal Procedures

Arrival:

- Please arrive 5-10 minutes before the start of the session.
- Eat a healthy snack, drink some water and use the bathroom
- Accompany your child to the designated drop-off area and sign them in.

Dismissal:

- Arrive promptly at the end of the session.
- Sign your child out and wait for the catechist to bring them to you.
- Notify the program director in advance if someone other than a parent or guardian will be picking up your child.

Absences

- If your child will be absent, please inform the program director as soon as possible.
 - Consistent attendance at this age will allow your child to enjoy their time in the atrium significantly more than inconsistent attendance.
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Candles and Safety

Safety is our priority. When using candles in the atrium, children are closely supervised, and safety procedures are followed. The use of candles provides a tangible connection to the light of Christ and the reverence of the liturgical space. Candles are lit in the Atrium when Scripture is read and during sacred moments. *Please ensure that long hair is tied back during atrium.*

Atrium aides or parent hall monitors will ensure that children get safely to and from the restroom and that there is only one person at a time in the restroom when the door is closed (the bathroom sink is also used to wash certain atrium materials).

Catechists cannot assist with toileting, if an accident occurs or your child needs assistance, you will be called.

Themes of Level 1

Level 1 of the CGS program focuses on themes such as:

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| †Orientation to the Life of the Church | †Mystery of the Incarnation |
| †Mystery of Christ the Good Shepherd | †Mystery of the Kingdom of God |
| †Eucharist | †Paschal Mystery |
| †Baptism | |

These themes help children develop a foundational understanding of their faith and the liturgical year.

Rol of the Parent

Parents play a crucial role in supporting their child's faith journey. You can enhance your child's experience by:

- Attending Mass regularly as a family
 - Discussing what your child has learned in CGS
 - † What did you hear in the Atrium today?
 - † What material did you work with today?
 - † Did you enjoy your time with God today?
 - Encouraging prayer and reflection at home
 - Volunteering to assist with the program if possible
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Behavior Expectations and Policy

Our goal is to create a peaceful, respectful, and nurturing environment where every child can thrive. To achieve this, we have established the following behavior expectations:

- **Respect:** Children should show respect for themselves, their peers, and the catechists.
- **Responsibility:** Children are encouraged to take responsibility for their actions and belongings.
- **Safety:** Children should follow instructions to ensure their safety and the safety of others.

If behavior issues arise, the catechist will address them calmly and respectfully. Persistent or serious behavior concerns will be discussed with parents to develop a plan for improvement.

IMPORTANT: If you have any concerns, or if your child appears to be struggling or unhappy about attending atrium, please contact the coordinator immediately so that we can attempt to identify and collaboratively problem-solve any issues.

We look forward to partnering with you in your child's faith journey through the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program. If you have any questions or need further information, please contact Dawn.