Catechesis
of the Good Shepherd
at
Trinity-by-the-Cove Episcopal Church

Children age 3 through Grade 5

“Grounded in scripture and liturgy”
For the Care of Children

Almighty God, heavenly Father, you have blessed us with the joy and care of children: Give us calm strength and patient wisdom to bring them up, that we may teach them to love whatever is just and true and good, following the example of our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ. Amen.
As Christians, we remember that Jesus taught us whoever receives a little child in the name of Christ receives Christ himself. At Trinity-by-the-Cove, we give thanks for the blessing of children in our midst and seek to confirm a lively sense of joy in God’s presence with them. To nourish children and support their parents, Trinity-by-the-Cove offers the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a unique and exciting Christian formation program for children, ages 3 through Grade 5. The curriculum combines the spiritual vision, imagination and creativity of our children with the foundation of Holy Scripture and the liturgy of our church worship. The program incorporates the Montessori method, in which children are guided with presentations and provided hands-on materials to fully explore and investigate Christian tradition and themes.

This guide offers a glimpse of Catechesis and a place to begin in asking how you can support and nourish your child’s faith. Please feel comfortable asking Linda Gemmer, the Director of Catechesis, any questions. The clergy are also available to assist you in any way.

*This booklet is intended as an overview.*
*For more information, please contact:*

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History

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was founded in Rome, Italy, in 1954 through the collaborative efforts of Dr. Sofia Cavalletti and Professor Gianna Gobbi. These women observed that all children, regardless of cultural background, responded to certain elements of the Christian message in a similar manner. Dr. Cavalletti and Professor Gobbi based the curriculum of the program on these core elements. The program is incorporated in more than fifteen countries by a variety of Christian denominations, including Episcopal, Catholic, Lutheran and others who honor similar Biblical and liturgical traditions.

Trinity-by-the-Cove established its first Good Shepherd Atrium in the fall of 2000, with a group of 14 children, ages 3-6. The True Vine Atrium opened in the spring of 2001 and the Living Bread Atrium followed in the fall of 2004. Currently, atria for all three levels are housed in the dedicated building completed in 2005, located on the west side of the parish hall.
Overview

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a program for children, ages 3–grade 5. The mission of the program is to support and nurture our children as they begin their Christian journey, to assist them in their exploration of God and to celebrate with them their individual relationship with God as each child develops and matures. A great deal of freedom is given to the children to explore their own reflections and reactions to the presentations.

The program is organized and divided into 3 levels which correspond to the developmental stages of the children: Level I for 3-6 year olds (preschoolers and kindergartners), Level II for grades 1-3 and Level III for grades 4-5. Each level has its own room, called an atrium, which is specifically designed to consider the age and developmental stage of the children. Level I gathers in “The Atrium of the Good Shepherd”, Level II meets in “The True Vine Atrium”, and Level III is held in “The Living Bread Atrium”. Each atrium is staffed with trained catechists, who are thoroughly familiar with the materials. The catechists present the materials to small groups of one to three children. Each presentation is designed to guide the spiritual development of each child at his or her own pace. The atria are much more than classrooms for religious education; rather, they are sacred spaces for our children to share, explore, investigate, learn and worship. It is a place for them to walk a little closer with and listen to God.
Level I
The Good Shepherd Atrium
preschoolers and kindergarteners, ages 3-5

The central and foundational theme for all atria is the relationship with The Good Shepherd (Jesus). All children have an inborn relationship with God. The love expressed in the parable of the Good Shepherd is our entry point in assisting in the development of that relationship. Particular aspects of the parable of the Good Shepherd are stressed for the Level I age child, including knowing the sheep, calling them by name, searching for the lost sheep and the unconditional love of the Good Shepherd for his sheep.

The basic elements of the atrium include practical life materials, such as tools for cleaning, plant care, flower arranging, and brass and silver polishing. Each child is given an opportunity to practice activities utilizing these materials in order to take care of this sacred space. The practical life materials also help the child develop his or her concentration for future lessons. Materials and presentations designed to facilitate the child’s spiritual development, such as maps of Israel, parables of Jesus, historical events from Scripture, liturgical colors, Eucharist and Rite of Baptism, are introduced throughout specific time periods during the liturgical calendar year.

Geography lessons in Level I seek to establish Jesus as a real person living in a real time and place.
Infancy narratives, such as The Annunciation of Gabriel to Mary, The Birth of Jesus and The Adoration of the Shepherds, the Visit of the Magi, as well as Paschal narratives such as The Last Supper, and the Women at the Tomb are introduced with words from scripture and figures representing the people.

Parables that reflect on the Kingdom of God are presented to nurture the child’s natural sense of wonder. Parables of the Mustard Seed, the Pearl of Great Price, the Leaven, the Grain and the Hidden Treasure are vehicles for pondering the beauty of the kingdom—how small it begins, how it grows, how magnificent it becomes and how valuable it is.

Work with the Model Altar makes familiar the names of the articles of the Eucharist for fuller participation in the liturgy. Related, but separate, presentations introduce the gestures (hand motions of the priest) such as Preparation of the Chalice, Epiclesis, the Offering and Exchange of God’s Peace. The colors of the church year and names of the seasons on the church calendar are introduced using miniature chasubles and other colored-coded materials.

Baptism is introduced the first year using the powerful image of light to symbolize the gift of Christ’s risen life. The image of light is also used to celebrate the special Liturgy of the Light just after Easter.
Level II  
The True Vine Atrium  
grades 1-2

Just as the Good Shepherd parable is foundational for the Level I atrium, in Level II, the foundational parable is the True Vine. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing.” (John 15:5). This proclamation addresses the need to explore not only the individual relationship with God, but also relationships with family, friends and both local and global communities.

Moral parables of God’s justice and mercy, such as The Good Samaritan, The Found Coin, The Ten Bridesmaids, The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, are among those presented to the children who are seeking guidelines and models for their own behavior. Maxims, such as “Love one another as I have loved you”, are also introduced.

Prayer services are planned and led by the children. The Books of the Bible are presented using tangible, color-coded materials; formal Bible study is also introduced.
Synthesis of, or bringing together, the parts of the Eucharist begins at this level, enabling the child to consider the Eucharist as a unified celebration—the Liturgy of the Word, the Preparation of the Gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer and the Liturgy of Communion are explored as the child prepares a personal Book of Common Prayer with illustrations and prayers that are individual to their own love and understanding of the Holy Eucharist. The Mystery of Faith and the Lord’s Prayer are also highlighted.

In the True Vine, timelines that focus on the high points in the History of the Plan of God start to connect the three great moments of Creation, Redemption and Parousia (the time when God will be all in all), because they are now able to comprehend time as past, present and future. The many gifts received from God—including rocks, minerals, plants, animals, family, friends, God’s gift of Jesus—is another focus of timelines.

Additional historical narratives, geography lessons and baptismal lessons are explored in more detail, building upon the lessons from the Level I Atrium.
Level III
Living Bread Atrium
grades 3-6

By age 9, a child has an extraordinary hunger for knowledge. The primary underlying question becomes “What is the kingdom of God and what is my place in it?” The Living Bread Atrium is designed to furnish all the materials necessary to feed that hunger and offer resources to help make the connections necessary to start formulating answers to these questions.

The unity of God’s plan, illustrated by a huge timeline, presents the history of God’s plan for salvation and is the main springboard for all work in the Living Bread atrium. Both Old and New Testament stories are explored as the child unfolds the generosity of God and the responsibilities of receiving and responding to God’s great gifts. The lessons revolve around the child’s understanding of and participation in the community of God’s people- past, present and future.
Historical accounts, both secular and sacred, such as the Old Testament accounts of Creation, the Fall, the Flood, Abraham and the Exodus are explored using typology studies, a form of Bible study where scripture is read and certain persons, events and places are identified, then compared and contrasted with person, events and places in the New Testament. The Prophets, their call to service, struggles and messages, both moral and Messianic, are examined and discussed. The history of Israel and its people is looked at in great detail.

Sacramental Life, including the Rites of Baptism, Confirmation and Holy Eucharist are examined more deeply.

Moral formation presentations include virtues, maxims and more complex moral parables, such as the Workers in the Vineyard, the Talents and the Debtors.

Prayer life is expanded to be more communal rather than individual.
Questions and Answers

What is the difference between Catechism and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?

The Episcopal Book of Common Prayer contains “An Outline of the Faith, commonly called the Catechism.” It is a series of questions and answers that may be used to orally instruct people about the Christian doctrines; that is, what we believe as Christians and how we live out those beliefs. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a specifically designed educational process, or catechism, geared for children ages 3 through 5th grade to help each child “fall in love with God,” or more specifically, Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

What is an atrium?

In the early church, an atrium was a place where catechumens, or those to receive instruction, were prepared for baptism and learned about the doctrines of the Christian community. It is the term used for the classrooms where the children gather.

Who or what is a catechist?

The catechist is the name given to the teacher who has received training in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd method. Catechists prepare the environment in each room, present the lessons and demonstrate the materials with which the children will work. While the children work, they should be meditating on particular biblical passages, prayers or other significant aspects from liturgy.
What materials do the children work with?
Concrete materials which reflect the biblical and liturgical sources of the lessons of the Catechesis program are offered as alternative resources, particularly for little children who are too young to read, for children to work with as they meditate on their relationship with God.

What if my child has not previously been in attendance at a church where the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was the primary religious formation program?
Children may enter the program at any level, as each is designed to be consistent with the developmental stage of the individual child. Children explore the meaning of all liturgical and biblical materials and lessons at their own pace with the guidance and assistance of the trained catechist.

When do the children go to the atrium?
All children are welcome and encouraged to attend worship with their families at 9:00 a.m. (in season). Atria time is from 10:00 to 11:15 a.m. every Sunday from mid-September through late May. However, there is a nursery/toddler room for children age five and younger if your young child is not comfortable in worship.

What is offered for parents while their children attend catechesis?
Trinity offers a wide range of Christian formation opportunities for adults on Sunday mornings during the same time period that children are in the atria.

What about my child(ren) older than 5th grade?
Trinity has a program called Journey to Adulthood for these children and we are happy to provide you with more detailed information.
Catechesis of the Good Shepherd transforms the lives of children and I have seen it in my daughters. “One Sunday after returning from the grocery store in a rain storm, I came home to a panicked 90 pound dog. I was trying to put away groceries and my poor dog kept circling me and sitting ON my feet. I asked the girls to get the dog out of the kitchen. They sat on the kitchen floor hugging her and started singing church songs. It occurred to me that their first action to comfort the dog was to sing praises to God!!

You know that something is right when each Sunday three to five year olds, who have just squirmed in church, enter a room and work with a content and subconscious focus, pondering and using the works, and absorbing the unconditional love of our Good Shepherd. It is a privilege to observe their hearts and minds absorbing the beauty of Atrium and the individual relationships forming with the Lord."
Volunteering in the Atrium with those beautiful, sweet, innocent, CURIOUS children has so enhanced my spiritual growth and life I can not begin to put into words how very appreciative I am of my time with them each week. They ‘get it’, ‘feel it’ and I continue to appreciate witnessing it. ‘IT’ being, the Holy Spirit moving through them as they water God’s plants, create beautiful artwork for Jesus, or as they sit around the prayer table with the Light of our Lord shining bright while they share what they were most thankful for that very week.

While training to be a catechist, I fell in love all over again with our Good Shepherd. Formation is more than knowing about God, it is knowing God. Each Sunday I delight in observing the children see the faces of God through materials and special works presented to them. I too crave this personal time with God. Seeing children find God is amazing and is happening each week!
Catechesis of the Good Shepherd turns Sunday School and Bible studies on their heads. As a child, studying the Bible had never been the focus of my Sunday school class. I never considered opening the Bible simply to read it, and it certainly never would have crossed my mind to stage a Bible story with clay figures and a diorama.

Having grown up in another denomination, I was not aware of the history of the traditional liturgy of the Episcopal church. Catechesis assists children in their understanding of how our church celebrates God's love through our common words, gestures, celebrations, and signs. The richness of our church experience is explored at a level that is developmentally appropriate for each child. Catechesis respects children's innate curiosity and encourages them to ask questions on their personal faith journey.
HOW TO GET YOUR CHILDREN INVOLVED

To involve your children in Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, parents should contact Linda Gemmer, Director of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

Once you contact Linda, she will speak with you about Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and perhaps ask you to spend some time observing in an atrium.

Then, you simply bring your child to church on Sundays and drop them off at the atrium courtyard during the Formation Hour.

HOW YOU CAN TO GET INVOLVED

If you would like to become more involved in the Catechesis program, contact Linda Gemmer.

Attend the Parents’ Meetings scheduled throughout the year, all special events in the atria, and the Catechesis Open Houses.
August 22, 2010  Family Day; Miracles Baseball
August 23-24, 2010  School Begins
August 29, 2010  Acolyte Training (all ages)
September 10-11, 2010  Disney Trip (grades 6-10) *Night of Joy*
September 12, 2010  Rally Day
September 19, 2010  Children & Youth Formation begins
September 26, 2010  First Youth Spiritual Forum
October 10, 2010  Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Parent Meeting
October 16, 2010  Please & Thank You Dinner Party
October 24, 2010  Second Youth Spiritual Forum
November 13, 2010  Service Day at St. Matthew’s House
November 14, 2010  Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Parent Meeting
November 25, 2010  Thanksgiving Day
December 1, 2010  Evening Prayer at the Beach
December 5, 2010  Third Youth Spiritual Forum
December 11, 2010  Youth Golf Tournament benefitting 2012 Pilgrimage
December 12, 2010  Christmas Cookie Decorating Sunday
December 17, 2010  Last Day of School before Christmas Break
December 24, 2010  Christmas Eve & Pageant
December 26, 2010  No Christian Formation
2010-2011 Calendar for Families

Winter – Spring

January 2, 2011  No Christian Formation
January 4, 2011  School Resumes
January 7, 2011  Twelfth Night Party
January 9, 2011  Christian Formation Resumes
January 16, 2011 Catechesis Open House
February 13, 2011 Young Family Social
February 18-21, 2011 Mission Trip for Youth & Families
February 20, 2011 Catechesis of the Good Shepherd,
                   Parent Meeting
February 21-25, 2011 Community School Winter Break
February 27, 2011  Fourth Youth Spiritual Forum
March 5, 2011  Mardi Gras Social at the Gleason’s Home
March 6, 2011  Mardi Gras Sunday & Parade
March 8, 2011  Pancake Supper & Youth Fund raiser
March 9, 2011  Ash Wednesday
March 21-25, 2011 Public School Spring Break
April 10, 2011  Fifth Youth Spiritual Forum
April 15-16, 2011 Young Family Retreat (Day Spring, Parrish, FL)
April 17-22, 2011 Holy Week
April 18-22, 2011 Community School Spring Break
April 24, 2011  Easter Sunday & Easter Egg Hunt
May 1, 2011  Catechesis Liturgy of the Light
May 8, 2011  Final Youth Spiritual Forum
May 15, 2011  Catechesis Open House
               Young Family Social
May 22, 2011  Youth Sunday
               Last Sunday of Christian Formation
June 3, 2011  Community School Last Day of Classes
June 9, 2011  Public School Last Day of Classes
June 11, 2011 Second Annual Trinity-by-the-Cove Fishing Tournament
Mission Statement
The Mission of Trinity-by-the-Cove Episcopal Church is to spread the Good News of the Gospel and provide a loving and compassionate environment for the continuing transformation of a life in Christ Jesus. We believe this journey is shaped by God through worship, learning, friendship and service to others.