



***The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd*** is a religious formation program for children ages 3-5 (the Level I atrium). It is based on the principles of education of Maria Montessori. The Catechesis recognizes that children have a deep bond with God and a need to grow into a deeper relationship with God.

The specially prepared room where the Catechesis takes place is the atrium. This is a holy place where children enjoy being with God. The Word of God is proclaimed from the Bible and the materials created for the children's use help them to learn about the Kingdom of God. They deepen their personal experience of God's love and also gain some foundation for greater participation in Mass with the community.

The atrium is furnished with special materials to draw the children into a deeper relationship with God. The child-size furnishings and materials have been particularly chosen or handmade to make the "mystery" of God more of a reality for the children. All the materials in the atrium are intended for hands-on-use by the children.

The Good Shepherd parable is the theme in Level I of the *Catechesis*. The children come to know Jesus' love for them through the image of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd cares for the sheep, provides for their needs, and will even lay down his life for his sheep.

The trained catechists are not "teachers" of religion. Jesus is the Teacher in the atrium. The catechists who have been trained in this Montessori approach offer presentations on the Liturgy and on the Life of Christ. Catechists learn to step back and not get in the way of God and the child with their own words.

In the atrium the children spend most of their time in self-directed activity -involved in their own prayer, meditation, or working on their own with the materials. The atrium is a place for them to enjoy being with God. It is a place of peace, a space to deepen one's personal experience of God's love and also gain some foundation for greater participation in Mass with the community.