

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

For the past several years, St. Bartholomew's has offered the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd as its Sunday School program. Following is an article written by Shelly Buchan, Director of St. Bartholomew's program, explaining the program and goals:

As baptized Christians, God invites us from the time we are very young and throughout our lives to continue to learn about Jesus and the Christian faith. One way of spiritual formation for children is Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS). CGS, a Montessori-based religious formation program, is dedicated to life-long learning around the celebration of the Word and sacraments, with spiritual formation for the child as its focus, helping them know God personally through Scripture, prayer and Holy Eucharist.

We believe God knows his creation intimately and personally, long before his creation knows and acknowledges him. Since a relationship between God and his creation exists, we begin to know and hear God's voice from a very young age. For this reason, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has a 'first step', inviting the children at the age of three into the atrium (classroom). Because the Good Shepherd knows his sheep, calls them by name, and loves them so much as to lay down his life for his sheep, we want the children to hear his love for them proclaimed when they are very young.

The focus of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is spiritual formation. This ministry is scriptural, liturgical, worshipful, prayerful, developmentally- and age-appropriate. It honors the child's already existent relationship with God and proclaims the love of God for his children. The deep desire of CGS is to help the children grow closer to God by themselves, creating a prayerful environment in which the real Teacher is always Jesus.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd changes the lives of the children and also the adults in the atrium (classroom). For the adult, there is an increase in knowledge and understanding of God's Word, of liturgy and worship. Along with knowledge, faith and love grow through the study of the lessons leading the adult to increased love, faith, service, prayer, and worship.

What are the "results" in the lives of the children? One of the hallmarks of this work is that it is not content and results driven. Adults like to see quantifiable returns for investments in time and money. When it comes to the spiritual formation of children, this

cannot be the focus. CGS emphasizes that the relationship between God and the child is personal and intimate.

The real work of spiritual growth in the child is done by God, for God, and through God. We are called to faithfully “plant seeds” and give the children space and quiet to hear and respond to the Good Shepherd’s voice in their own ways and in their own time. It is God’s work to faithfully and mysteriously grow those seeds. If God chooses to give us a taste of the results, we rejoice! Consider the parable of the Growing Seed (Mark 4:26-29). We plant the seeds not knowing how or when they will grow. God does and God will. We leave that work to him. Our job is to simply plant those seeds -- faithfully sharing the love of God and the truth about God with the children.

If you are interested in learning more about this ministry, there is a Catechesis of the Good Shepherd training this summer at St. Paul’s Parish in Genesee Depot, WI. Tuition for Level 1 training, Part 1 is \$200. Level 1, Part 2 tuition is an additional \$200. Contact Karen Farrell (kfarrell@stpaulgenesee.net) or Shelly Buchan (sbuchan@gmail.com) for more information.