

St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Church Faith Formation



“Help me come closer to God by myself.”

Sofia Cavalletti

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Our Curriculum



Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a curriculum new to St. Vincent de Paul but has been used in parishes throughout the world for over 60 years. It is based on building a personal relationship with God through prayer, the Bible, and Liturgy.

The Diocese of Orange has decided to join many of the other Diocese throughout the country who have already adopted this program into their faith formation curriculum. It involves a tremendous commitment for catechist formation (training), space and materials. We have been implementing this program at Saint Vincent de Paul for over seven years. We rejoice in the dedication, expertise, and ongoing training of our staff, the support of our priests and parish community, and most importantly, the growth that we anticipate seeing in our children's spiritual development.

History



Since 1954, in Rome, Italy, Sofia Cavalletti has pursued the revelation of the young child's religious potential through 60 years of research and published material at both the preschool and elementary levels. With the "self-teaching" principles of Maria Montessori and the theological knowledge of Hebrew scholar, Cavalletti and her co-worker, Gianna Gobbi, developed an approach which not only appealed to the profound religious intuition of younger and older children, but evolved from the children themselves. Today the work (still active in Rome) has emerging centers all over the world.

Philosophy—God and Child with the Adult

An interpersonal relationship is always a mystery; all the more so when that relationship is between God and the child. We believe that there is a deep bond between God and the child which produces in the child the desire to draw near to God. The catechists' role is to prepare the environment and to make presentations that “call forth” the child’s response rather than “pour in” information. They listen with the child and together ask, “God, who are you? How do you love us?” The adult is a co-wonderer with the child as they together enjoy meditating on the questions generated by the Scriptures with the prepared environment as a developmental aid.



By: Thomas

The Atrium—The Prepared Environment



The *atrium* is one of the elements that helps the relationship between God and the child flourish. After a theme has been presented, the child is free to choose an activity that will make possible the inner dialogue with the “Interior Teacher” Holy Spirit. The atrium helps to nourish this relationship in several ways: the atrium can be compared to a retreat house facilitating recollection and silence; the atrium is a place for religious life, for community and worship—not a classroom for instruction; the atrium is a place of work which becomes a conversation with God; the atrium was the place in the early church where the catechumens were prepared. For the child, too, the atrium is a place of preparation for involvement in the larger worshipping community.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Level 1—For the Young Child (Ages 3-6)



The 3-6-year-old child is particularly capable of receiving and enjoying the most essential elements of our faith—the announcement of God’s love in the person of the Good Shepherd, who died and is risen.

Materials on the life of Christ and his teachings helps make the mystery of God concrete for the child. The geography materials establish Jesus as a real person in time and space and Israel as the land through which God realized salvation for all. Infancy narratives announce the Incarnation with the words of Scripture, moving from the Annunciation, to the Birth of Christ, to the Flight into Egypt. The model of Jerusalem and the empty tomb are the starting point for the Paschal narratives, which the child lives in a special way in celebrating the Liturgy of Light.

Selected parables serve as keys to unlock the mystery of the kingdom of God and to nurture the child’s natural sense of wonder. How beautiful and precious is the kingdom of God! How small it begins! How slowly it grows! How magnificent it becomes!

Through the arranging of the chalice, paten, altar cloth, candles, and crucifix, the child becomes familiar with the articles of the Holy Mass. The child lives his relationship with God in a particular way in the liturgy—the child enters the mystery of the Eucharist through the most important gestures, including the preparation of the chalice, the epiclesis and offering, and the gesture of peace. From these gestures the Eucharist emerges as the Sacrament of the Gift. The child becomes acquainted with the historical character of the liturgy through the events of the Last Supper, Christ’s death, and His resurrection.



By: Amber

The liturgical colors and calendar establishes the child in the Church year, expressing the Paschal Mystery—Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again. Our prayer table reflects the liturgical cycle with appropriate colors, prayers, and songs.

Level 2—For the Older Child (Ages 6-9)



While the heart of the catechesis for the child under six revolves around the parable of the Good Shepherd, the elementary age child is captured by the image of the True Vine. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing.” (John 15, 5) The proclamation responds to the deep need of the older child to know better his relationships with God, family, friends, and the larger community.

The child, at this age, seeks guidelines. The moral parables offer a model of comparing behavior with that of the Pharisee, the Tax Collector, the Good Samaritan, the Found Sheep, the Found Coin, and the Prodigal Son. The proclamation and meditation stress God’s love, which is constantly forgiving. The elementary children see the parts

of the Eucharist—the Liturgy of the Word, the Preparation of the Gifts, the Eucharistic Prayer, and the Communion—as one unity.

The imagination of the older child and his or her agility with the concept of time are powerful stimuli to explore the past and the future. The first time line, a ribbon fifty meters long, focuses on the high points in the history of salvation from the creation through the redemption to the parousia. Another presentation focuses on the many gifts received from God—rocks, minerals, flowers, fruit, friends, family—culminating in God’s gift of His own divine life in the person of Jesus, a gift which will pervade the whole universe at the completion of history. In Level 2 the children are also prepared at their own pace to receive the Sacraments of First Reconciliation and First Eucharist.

Level 3—For the Oldest Child (Ages 9-12)

In the 9-12 Atrium, the child is invited to enter more deeply into a relationship with Jesus by exploring the “Plan of God” as a plan of communion, in which all people are connected through God’s love and our response to this love. Through extensive study of scripture, particularly of the Old Testament, the child begins to reflect on his/her role in this plan. In the study of the prophets, the child is introduced to the struggles these men endured answering God’s call to turn His people away from sin and back to Him. Through moral teaching and messianic prophecies, which becomes signs of comfort and encouragement. The child is led to ponder and meditate on the moral parables, the Holy Mass, sacraments and miracles of Jesus by which He shows us how to live in the kingdom of God.



By: Jordan

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

The Materials

The materials in the atrium are attractively displayed, inviting children to explore and deepen experiences at their own rhythm. The most important characteristic of the materials is their close link to the biblical and liturgical sources.



By: Vykanh

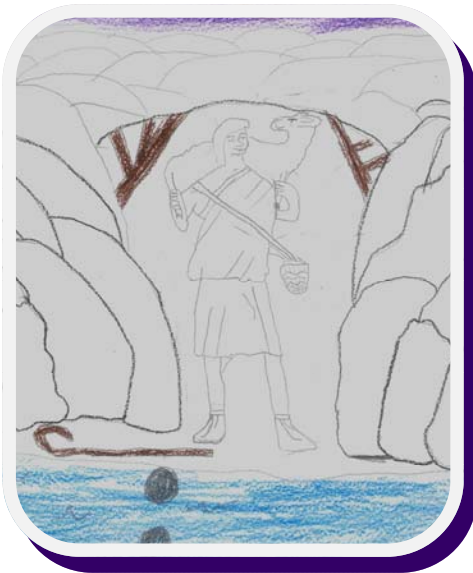


By: Ian

The shelves include maps of Israel and miniature environments representing the elements of the parables and historical events from Scripture that have been shown to satisfy the spiritual needs of the child. The arrangement of the altar and its related furnishings conveys the centrality of the Eucharist. The Baptismal font and other liturgical items initiate the child into the liturgical life of the Church.

Volunteer Opportunities

Each atrium is led by catechists who complete over 90 hours of training in the curriculum. All of our catechists are in the process of completing Level I and Level II, Level III begins in 2018. The role of the catechist is compared to that of a matchmaker between the child and God, who should take the greatest care not to interfere between God and the child.



By: Luke

In addition, because of the great opportunity to relate to children individually during the sessions, and because of the necessary management of materials, parent and volunteer assistants are essential during sessions.

We are still looking for more parishioners who are interested in becoming catechists or volunteers. We also need volunteers to prepare, restore and maintain materials. We also need volunteers for set up and tear down the Atrium when needed.



Saint Vincent De Paul
Catholic Church

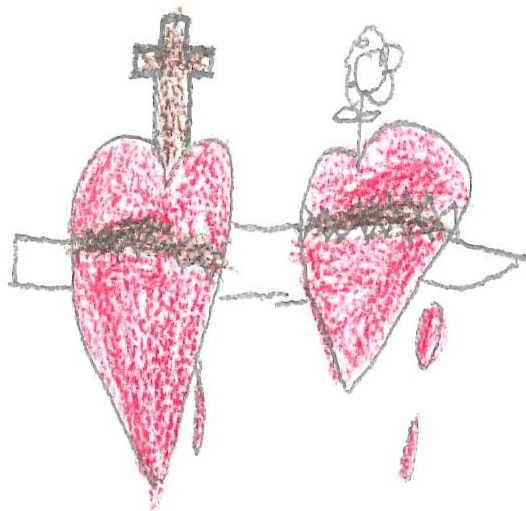
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"Behold the hearts of Jesus
and Mary."



By: Emily

"If we want to help the child draw nearer to God, we should with patience and courage... seek to go always closer to the vital nucleus of things.

This requires study and prayer.

The child himself will be our teacher if we know how to observe him."

Sofia Cavalletti

All artwork was made by children in our Saint Vincent de Paul Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Program.