

Church of Saint Benedict

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Catechesis of the **Good Shepherd** – **CGS**

(Not a program but rather a way of experiencing God for children 3 years old through 12)

Catechetical Policy 2024-2025

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Our Mission: To share our faith with the children so they will recognize the Shepherd's voice, and truly fall in love with Jesus.

Welcome to Saint Benedict's Catechesis of The Good Shepherd

GOAL

The goal of our CGS is to assist the children to enter in the mystery of our faith. The Catechist serves the mystery of God and the child and listens to God with the children. Children will intuitively encounter God's living word to come to their hearts inside of the Atrium.

At the Atrium, the children are engaged to make connections with Mass and there is a sense of reverence and celebration of God's love for each child. The CGS is based upon the belief that young children can and do experience God. Central to the catechesis is the Atrium, a special environment created to nurture the child's spirituality with handmade materials.

METHOD

Founded on the pedagogical principles of Maria Montessori, with the child at the center of learning, catechesis is rooted in the Bible and liturgy.

CGS USA was formed in 1984, in North America, with its main aim being that of "involving adults and children in a common religious experience in which the religious values of childhood (contemplation and enjoyment of God) are predominant." This method has been developed over the last 60 years, beginning in Rome with the work of two Roman Catholic women, Hebrew Scripture scholar Dr. Sofia Cavalletti and Montessori educator Gianna Gobbi. The method and the vision of the child is based on the work of Dr. Maria Montessori, a deep love for God and the child, and the faith of the Catholic Church.

FAITH

The key of CGS is to assist and support the children falling in love with God. It is about an encounter with God. Presentations draw from two main sources, the Bible and the Liturgy and are age appropriated.

After a child is introduced to a Scripture or a Liturgical moment, the child is given the option to use a material to further explore the presentation. The work time leads to prayer and gives time for the child and the Inner Teacher, Christ. During each week's communal prayer, at the end of the Atrium session, the children gather around a prayer table for a celebration of God's love that involves songs, gestures, and silence.

In this faith formation method, the catechist serves the mystery of God and the child and listens to God with the children. In the Atrium, children grow in relationship with God, community with one another, in the Presence of Jesus to them in the church. Children will be presented the historical Jesus as who he was and who He is now.

ADMISSION POLICY

Our **CGS is open for children 3-12 years old (they must be potty trained)**. Attendance to Atrium I is required at least for one full year. Since space inside of the Atrium is limited, we prioritize first our own parishioners before we open to other parishes. Each level is built upon the level before; therefore, we prefer that a child attend their age-appropriate level for at least one full year before advancing to the next level. To complete registration, the parent must present a copy of his/her child/children's Baptismal Certificate accompanied by the fee. It is also required that all pertinent health information of any unusual condition be brought to the attention of the Director.

REGISTRATION

Each Level follows a 3-year cycle as we follow the Liturgical Calendar with new material presented each of the 3 years.

Level I age, 3-6 (Preschool through K) is offered Sundays and Thursdays.

Level II age, 6-9 (1st through 3rd grade) is offered on Sunday and Thursdays.

Level III age, 9-12 (4th through 6th grade) is offered on Sunday and Thursdays.

New students will need a copy of their baptism certificate. Registration forms are available online www.stbenedictprepcgs@gmail.com or via e-mail. Please return it with a copy of the child's Baptismal Certificate and the Registration Fee. Note that **we do not register by e-mail or online**; the form needs to be printed and sent to the PREP office.

FINANCIAL

A **CGS** fee will be assessed to each student annually and is *payable upon registration*. Finances should not be an impediment. Assistance can be obtained on an as needed basis.

SESSIONS

Classes are scheduled **Thursday** evenings from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM and we encourage **starting with Mass 5:30 PM** for Levels I, II and III.

Sundays' sessions are from 9:30 to 10:45 AM we encourage family to attend **Mass 8:30 AM or 11:00 AM** for Levels I, II and III.

- **Please note:** Once Sunday or Thursday is chosen, it cannot be changed after the beginning of the school year.

SUNDAY MASS

Sunday Mass is our central act of worship, our “peak experience” as a community of faith that nourishes us and gives us the strength to love and serve one another for the rest of the week. **It is, therefore, our privilege to be able to participate in Mass every Sunday.**

A child acquires a sense of belonging to St. Benedict’s Parish as a Roman Catholic community of faith by coming to Sunday Mass, participating in parish activities. CGS attendance does not replace Mass on Sunday or Saturday.

STUDENT DRESS CODE

Dress needs to be modest, neat, and in good taste. All extremes in attire should be avoided and good judgment should prevail. If students come to class from the sports field, please make sure that your child will change their muddy shoes before they enter the building.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

We will follow the example of Jesus when we gather. Our expectation is that everyone gathers with a spirit of welcome, caring and cooperation.

Respect and courtesy are required from all students. At the Atrium, children will be encouraged to use a low voice. In case of misbehavior or use of inappropriate or abusive language by any student, the director, catechist, and parents/guardians will counsel with the student to achieve a code of conduct conducive to a good learning situation.

PUNCTUALITY

To cover required presentation, the catechist needs to begin and end all sessions on time. **Students are expected to come on time and parents/guardians are expected to pick them up on time.** Excessive tardiness will be brought to the attention of the parents/guardians and dealt with on an individual basis.

ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

Arrival for Thursday Sessions: Mass start promptly at 5:30 PM and children will be dismissed to the atrium immediately after Mass. It is very important that the children attend Mass. Families should use our church front door for entering the building and report to church. Parents/guardians may stay for Mass. Parents/guardians, without clearances filed in our office, will not be allowed to enter the Atrium while students will be in session.

Dismissal for Thursday Sessions: Our Atrium I and II students will be dismissed from inside of the church/chapel at 7:30 PM and parents/guardians should wait at the gathering area. Atrium Level III students will walk toward the gathering space of our church and meet their families there or outside at the parking lot. Please note that we will not allow any child to exit from the educational wing door, unless in company of one of our PREP or CGS catechists.

Arrival for Sunday Sessions: Our goal is that families will attend one of the Masses we offer on Sunday. Our session needs to start promptly at 9:30 AM. We encourage Mass attendance every Sunday as part of

our CGS program. Starting our Atrium session with Mass will help enhance your child's religious encounter with Jesus.

Dismissal for Sunday Sessions: Parents/guardians may wait at the gathering area in front of the PREP office until their children's dismissal at 10:45 AM. Please do not line up in front of the Atrium's doors since that may disrupt the children finishing their sessions. **Parents/guardians without the clearances filed in our office are not allowed inside of the Atrium while students will be in session.

ATTENDANCE

All children of the Parish who follow their age cut off may participate in our CGS program.

It is ideal, but not necessary, that children have experience in the Level I atrium before advancing to other levels. A child with no experience in Level I who wishes to enter a subsequent level will require an introductory class before regular scheduled sessions begin. The Levels follow a 3yr cycle, so a child remains in one level for 3yrs while being presented with the new material each year. To enter Level III, a student should have had experience in Levels I & II.

All students who attend CGS, will be prepared to receive their **First Penance and First Holy Communion Sacraments**. After completing Level III of CGS, a student will go on to receive **Confirmation preparation class in 7th grade** and the sacrament at the age of 13 or 14 years old while **in 8th Grade**.

All students who attend CGS will be prepared to receive their First Penance and First Holy Communion Sacraments. Only Confirmation will be taught apart from the Atrium at the age of 13 years old (7th or 8th) Grade.

Regular attendance is important at each level since new material is presented during each class, and they can only work with a new

material if it has been presented to them by the Catechist. If a child is ill or unable to attend class, *an e-mail to the catechist is appreciated.* This will aid in starting class on time.

PARENTS'/GUARDIAN MEETING

At the beginning of each year, we will have a parent's/guardian presentation of material of the Atrium before we start our session with the children. Another meeting with families will be offered in the second half of our program. It is crucial that families will understand the connection with The Good Shepherd Catechesis and the Eucharistic Presence during Mass. To experience how Jesus is truly present in body, soul, and divinity in the Eucharist at Mass is the reason for all that we do at the Atrium.

ATTENDANCE FOR MASS

Our CGS is based on the Bible and Liturgy and the presentations in class use familiar items that we have at church and that are used during the Mass, such as small models of an altar, sacred objects, and the priest's vestments. Our catechesis is aimed at experiencing God's life with us and this is offered to us by participation in the sacraments. Your children will desire to share simple words and images of our faith to you while attending Mass. The Mass is the time and place when the Good Shepherd "calls his sheep" to a particular encounter, in the Bread and in the Wine that truly IS Jesus. May you and your children enjoy many moments together.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE ATRIUMS

Level I Atrium:

Is for children **ages three to six (Preschool through Kindergarten)**. Into this space the Holy Spirit is invited to be the true Teacher, of all present. Whether the children are listening to God's Word, working with materials we have placed in the room to aid meditation, or singing together, all is prayer in the atrium.

The most essential truths of the Christian message are proclaimed to the children. Those truths are drawn not just from **Scripture**, but also from the other great treasure of the Church- the **liturgy**. One of the first presentations introduces the liturgical seasons of the Church, including a discussion of the vestments "Father" wears at different times of the year. As we proceed through the school year, we observe those Liturgical seasons in the atrium.

In addition, children gain greater understanding of what they will see and hear at Mass. They learn the correct names of the objects of the altar, and never tire of setting the model altar themselves and naming the articles. We also meditate with the children on the gestures of the priest during Mass, including preparation of the chalice, lavabo, epiclesis, and offering. The children learn a language of prayer through Scripture and liturgy. They feel a strong connection to Jesus after hearing the Parable of the Good Shepherd. Children recognize the Shepherd's voice, and truly fall in love with Jesus.

Level II Atrium:

For children between **ages six to nine (while in 1st through 3rd grade)**, the new image of God is the True Vine, a Trinitarian representation of God, where the disciple's role is not just to stay close and follow (as with the Good Shepherd), but to participate in the life of

the Vine. A timeline of the history of the kingdom of God highlights the three great moments in salvation history: Creation, Redemption, and Parousia (when God will be all in all), while inviting the children to ponder what they are being called to write on the “blank page” of history that is being lived now. We visualize the Bible as a library of books, using a box filled with small wooden models, color coded for Old and New Testament, to represent each book of the Bible.

As preparation for **first Reconciliation**, the children are first assured of the mercy of God through the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Forgiving Father. They are introduced to the Great Commandment and a work called “The Maxims” (virtues) which highlights specific moral directives of Jesus and helps the children to **examine their conscience**.

Level III Atrium:

For children **ages nine to twelve (4th through 6th grade)**, the presentations build on the foundations of personal and social morality introduced in Level II. The children know their Baptism calls them to follow Jesus and spread his light in the world. After having meditated on the Great Commandment, the Maxims, and parables such as the Good Samaritan in Level II, the children are introduced to Ten Commandments and the virtues. They continue to ponder salvation history with a timeline called the Plan of God – God self-revelation to the Hebrew people, the Incarnation of Jesus from among that people, and God’s continued presence with us in history and through the sacraments and the Word. Since these children are grounded in a relationship with Christ and knowledge of liturgy, we turn our attention to the Old Testament. We examine the history of the *Jewish* people and do typology studies of creation, sin, Abraham, Noah, and Moses. A

detailed exploration of sacramental rites and of the Mass rounds out the Level III experience.

Mass-centered presentations continue to foster not only an understanding of, but also a great hunger for Jesus' presence in the Eucharist. Children will grasp how much they are loved by God to the point of desiring to set up a prayer space at home expressing a desire to keep a Bible at their bedside and read it before they go to sleep.

RECEPTIONS OF THE SACRAMENTS

First Penance and First Holy Communion will be at the discretion of Catechists (Formation Leaders or "Mentors") and the DRE with the communication with our pastor, after discussing the child's maturity for the reception of the sacraments of First Penance and First Holy Communion. Usually, children coming from Catholic Schools and Home Schools are ready earlier to receive the sacraments in 2nd Grade while others are called to wait until the end of 3rd grade for the reception of First Holy Communion.

The **Sacrament of Confirmation at Saint Benedict Church** will be received in the 8th Level PREP for all students every year in the Fall after a student receives the proper formation the year before in Level 7 class. We will offer a formal catechesis for Confirmation preparation for all Level 7 students in our parish. Level 8 will go to review classes prior of the coming of the bishop in the late fall.

CANCELLATION/EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSING

Occasionally it becomes necessary to cancel classes due to the weather. In case of inclement weather, the following policy will be in effect:

- If Public Schools cancels or has an early dismissal, there will be no CGS that evening.
- For Sunday Sessions please use common sense. If Mass is canceled, our CGS sessions will be cancelled.
- Check your e-mail: Catechists will communicate with you about cancellations.

VOLUNTEERS

Parents/guardians are invited and encouraged to assist at CGS after a short training. All **volunteers must have completed our List of Clearances to be inside of the Atrium with children.** Please call the Religious Education Office if you wish to help in any way. Every year we look for volunteers to be certified and lead the Atriums. If you think you could help God's children to this amazing adventure of establishing a relationship with God, this call is for you. The Second Vatican Council Document Catechesis Tradendae express the Church's belief that the "aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy, with Jesus Christ."

HANDBOOK REVISIONS

Saint Benedict's PREP Office reserves the right to amend this Handbook for just cause. Revisions were last made on March 1, 2024.

*This program voluntarily complies with the provisions of the Buckley Amendment. Non-custodial parents will be given access to unofficial copies of student records, and catechists will be available to discuss the student's progress **unless** a court order providing otherwise is filed with the Director.*