



A Parent's Guide to the Atrium

Summary of Frequently Used Terms

The **Catechesis of the Good Shepherd** is an approach to the religious formation of children. It is rooted in the Bible, the liturgy of the Church, and the educational principles of Maria Montessori. It began in Rome in 1954 and has spread to different countries around the world.

The **atrium** is the room where the children meet. The atrium is more like a "retreat center for children" than a classroom. In the early Church, the atrium was the place where the catechumens prepared to share in the Sacraments. In a similar way, our children today are preparing to participate in the Sacraments also, sometimes for the first time, and sometimes in a deeper and fuller way. Fuller participation in the liturgy is always a goal in the atrium!

Traditionally, children are in mixed age groups in the atrium. A Level I atrium refers to one for the youngest children 3-6 years old. A Level II atrium is for the middle children 6-9 years old. A Level III atrium is for the oldest children 9-12 years old. At St. Peter, some of our children are in mixed age groups, and some not. All the atria are named for a patron saint.

- St. Francis Atrium, 3-6 Year Olds (Level I)
- St. Catherine of Siena Atrium, 3-6 Year Olds (Level I)
- St. Rose of Lima Atrium, 1st Graders (Level II)
- St. Dominic Atrium, 2nd Graders (Level II)
- St. Martin de Porres Atrium, 3rd – 4th Graders (Level II/III)
- St. Thomas Aquinas Atrium 5th-6th Graders (Level III)

The **materials** in the atrium are specially prepared to help the child grow closer to God. They are designed to be age appropriate yet simple and beautiful. After a child has received the presentation (similar to a lesson), he is invited to **work** with the material as often as he would like. The activities of the atrium are treated and referred to as work rather than play. The children enjoy the dignity and respect of work!

A **presentation** is a short meditation or reflection (many times includes the reading of a scripture passage) that includes a step by step demonstration of the use of materials.

The **catechist** is the adult who walks the journey of faith in the atrium with the children. The catechist be called a teacher, but the real Teacher is Christ himself!

The word “**catechesis**” is often defined as oral instruction given to catechumens (those preparing for baptism). It is from a Greek word, related to the word “to teach,” and means “resounding” or “echoing down.” It refers to the passing on of the truths of our faith.

Practical Life refers to activities that develop concentration and motor skills in young children that involve practical real-life goals, such as pouring liquids or sweeping the floor.

The **Fettuccia** refers to the long ribbon used as a timeline for the History of the Kingdom of God (Salvation History) in the Level II Atrium. The older children continue to explore this mystery in many ways. The **Blue Strip** refers to a smaller timeline also used in the Level II Atrium. The **Plan of God** is the springboard timeline used by the children in the Level III Atrium.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a blessing for our children and families! However, it is a new approach for many families. Throughout the year, catechists will send home “Family Pages” that explain in more detail the children’s works and presentations in the atrium. In addition, we will offer sessions for parents to see the actual presentations that their children see. Please feel free to ask your child’s catechist if you have any questions, or to contact me at any time.

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