

# CATECHESIS of the GOOD SHEPHERD

In our Community Faith Formation (CFF) programs, beginning in the fall of 2009, Saint Patrick Parish will be following the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd method of faith formation.

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. Children gather in an "atrium," a room prepared for them, which contains simple yet beautiful materials that they use.

Godly Play® is a development of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd by Rev. Jerome W. Berryman, Director of the Center for Theology of Childhood in Houston, Texas. Below is a brief overview of the philosophies and methods we will be using adapted from Reverend Berryman's work.

## About Children

- Even young children today face and wrestle with complex existential issues.
- Young children already have a spiritual life of depth that adults may not understand or honor.
- Young children can discover and use the language of religious narrative and symbol that will allow them to explore their own experiences of God, express themselves spiritually and "make meaning."

## About Children's Work

- Children's *play* is their work. Play has essential qualities that can open doors to grace.
  - Play is pleasurable, enjoyable.
  - Play has no extrinsic goals. It is played for itself.
  - Play is spontaneous and voluntary. It is freely chosen by the player.
  - Play involves deep and active engagement on the part of the players.
  - Play has systematic relations to what is not play such as creativity, problem solving, language learning, the development of social roles and a number of other cognitive and social phenomena.
- Children are encouraged to choose their own work during each class.
- The choices for work include creative materials, books, church furniture (miniature altar, lectern, chalice, etc.) story materials. Everything in the Godly Play classroom is accessible to the children.
- Children like to work when it is work they have chosen for themselves.
- Adults do not interfere with the children's work unless the child asks for help.
- When a child seems unable to ask for assistance, it would then be offered by the adult.
- Part of the work of the community of children is the care of their own classroom environment and how they treat one another.
- Children like to feel self-sufficient: it is good to allow them the opportunity to clean up their own spills and put away their own work.

### **About Adults and Children**

- Adults are guides. They do not need to have all the answers.
- Children have much to teach adults who will take the time to listen.
- Children are encouraged to do the work of discovering answers.
- When a teacher takes time to listen and observe a child, the teacher can find more effective ways to lead the child into new discoveries.
- Children are treated seriously and with deep respect; they are subjects, not objects.

### **About the Classroom Environment**

- The Godly Play classroom is a place for children:
  - To be themselves
  - To learn how Christians live in community
  - To come closer to the mystery of God's presence
  - To learn the language of the Christian people
- Respect for the space and for one another is maintained in the Atrium to help children feel safe.
- The Atrium experience should help each child feel successful.

### **About Enabling a Community of Children to Develop:**

- In the Atrium, children are encouraged to form their own community and take care of one another.
- The Atrium is not "over-adulted." This allows children to form a community and empowers them to be responsible for their space. It also keeps the storyteller and doorperson focused on the children and their work.

For more information contact Margaret Conner at 924-3719 or [webelongsogod@yahoo.com](mailto:webelongsogod@yahoo.com)

The **Fall Training Schedule** for those interested in learning the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Method and volunteering as Storytellers or Doorkeepers is as follows:

Saturday, September 12 from 1:00pm - 4:00 pm (at St. Pats)

Saturday, September 26 from 1:00pm - 4:00pm (at St. Pats)

Saturday, October 10 from 10:00am -3:00pm (at the Green Gulch Zen Center)

Those interested must be able to attend all 3 sessions.

### **HOW ELSE CAN I PARTICIPATE?**

There are many other ways to participate in this program including, but not limited to:

- Offering to bring snacks for the 'feast',
- Offering to help set up and take down the Atriums. (The Atriums will be portable 'rooms' set up in the gym)
- Making play-dough at home to keep our Atriums well stocked.
- Make a financial contribution to the Parish specifically for our Good Shepherd Materials.