



April 2022



Dear Parishioner,

Take a moment and ask yourself, “why am I Catholic?” Each of our responses is a product of two things: our personal relationship with God and our knowledge of the Catholic faith. Our children, without knowing it, are preparing their answers to this question each and every day. Their experiences at home, at Mass, and at Catholic school or through parish faith formation programs are defining what their answers will be both as children and as adults. All religious education programs faithfully share knowledge about the Catholic faith, but if a child of any age does not know the joy in discovering these truths for themselves, those facts can feel cold and impersonal. Our hope as a parish is to offer a different method that addresses this challenge in a program called Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

In 2017, parents approached the Saint Patrick Faith Formation Commission seeking approval to begin a different method of faith formation called Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS.) The first Atrium (classroom) was opened in fall 2018 at Clover Patch Preschool in a room not used fully in use at that time. Due to the popularity of CGS and the preschool’s need to use the space, the CGS program moved to the lower level of the church, taking over space once occupied by three storage rooms.

One of the easiest characteristics of the CGS method to see is that lessons are taught with physical, hands-on materials. While these materials make the lessons more engaging, they are primarily tools of meditation and prayer for a child after the first lesson. After the child has initially been introduced to a new material by a catechist, the child is able to return to the material any time they are in the atrium independent of an adult. This work is their prayer. The role of the catechist in CGS is to repeatedly make introductions between God and the child and then to get out of the way of their conversation.



The pandemic slowed the progress of the program at St. Patrick, but we are now ready to let you know more about CGS and consider the next steps. In this regard, it's helpful to first reflect upon CGS history and precepts:

- The catechesis began in Rome in 1954 with the approval of the bishops of Rome, including Pope John Paul II. Dr. Sofia Cavalletti, a scripture scholar, and Gianna Gobbi, a Montessori teacher, developed the catechesis through observing and working with children. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd can now be found throughout the world on six continents.
- The "Atrium" or CGS classroom is a special room created to nurture the child's spirituality with beautiful handmade materials that focus the child's attention on key moments of the Mass and scripture. This space is meant to feel uncommon, not as a classroom, but as a place of rest. Children grow in their relationship with the Good Shepherd through Gospel proclamations using the parable method, through prayer, singing, silence and exploring liturgical events. As children age, the work evolves as well. Older children engage in independent research and scripture study encouraging a peaceful partnership between critical thought and personal faith.
- The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a faith formation experience for children ages 18 months-12 years old. It is based on the belief that young children can and do experience God. At St. Patrick we currently serve ages 3 through 9 years old. We are prepared to serve children up to ages 12 within the next three years.

Now, coming back to Saint Patrick Parish...after five years of time and efforts dedicated to CGS, we have 14 catechists trained in our parish in this method. Three Atria are in use in the lower level of the church made from converted storage spaces. To serve a parish of this size and to expand to all ages of faith formation, we need four additional spaces and are delighted to have unfinished adjacent space that we can use. Due to city ordinances, we also need restrooms nearby to accommodate the increased number of children in one place.

The estimated cost for converting the unfinished space to classrooms and restrooms is \$250,000. Just over \$100,000 of this total can be covered with funds remaining from the Next Step campaign. With rising costs for construction, parish leadership has agreed that it is more cost-effective and prudent to ask for gifts to raise the remaining \$150,000 needed to expand the CGS program now. We have also applied for a grant to help with startup expenses, namely the CGS training for additional Catechists.

I ask you to prayerfully consider a gift to make this possible for our youth. Our goal is to repurpose this area over the summer so it is ready for children by fall 2022, thus I ask that you return your gift card by May 15. I invite you to spread your giving over the next year if that makes it easier for you to help us. Any excess funds will be designated for future improvements--urgent needs or wonderful opportunities like this may arise. Your gift of prayer for our success will also help the children of our parish.

I hope you had a chance to see the recent CGS displays in the Narthex and Atrium. Thank you to the parishioners who have helped by constructing the simple, beautiful materials the children use. I ask you to also join in our effort and help us grow CGS here at Saint Patrick Church. It is changing the faith lives of our children and their families.

Thank you!



Fr. Ivan Nienhaus

