



FAITH FORMATION

Family Handbook

2017-2018

Welcome from Fr. Bede

Dear Family,

Welcome to all of you - those who are coming to St. Elizabeth Ann Seton's Faith Formation programs for the first time and those who are returning.

We take very seriously the confidence you place in us by enrolling your child in our programs, and we will do everything possible to support you. You are your child's first and most important teachers in helping them to grow in faith and understanding of our Roman Catholic tradition.

We understand formation in faith as a life-long journey in discipleship that is enhanced by learning about the basic elements important to our faith - the Sacred Scriptures, the prayers, the sacraments, the liturgy, the history of our journey of faith from the beginning of creation down to the present day, and a future to which we look forward in joyful hope.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program is in its fourth year at SEAS this school year and we pray that you will continue to support and help the program to grow.

All of our sacramental preparation programs are offered on Tuesday and Thursday with the understanding that participation in the Sunday Liturgy is essential to the formation of the child.

For those preparing for the Sacrament of Confirmation, it is with the understanding that participation in the Sunday Liturgy is a part of class time.

In an effort to keep all our children safe, we present the protecting God's Children program as part of our curriculum. If you would like information regarding the program, or other parent information, please feel free to go online to the VIRTUS website at www.virtus.org.

I look forward to seeing you at Mass (the source and summit of all we do) as well as the many varied events hosted at our parish.

The Faith Formation Office as well as the entire parish staff is ready to help you in any way possible, and of course, my door is always open to you.

Thank you again for your participation in our programs.

In Christ,

Fr. Bede Wevita

Pastor

Table of Contents

<u>Topic:</u>	<u>Page:</u>
Welcome from Fr. Bede	3
Parish Mission Statement	5
Registration (Parish & Faith Formation)	5
Faith Formation Office	6
Youth Ministry Office	6
Introduction to Faith Formation	7
Faith Formation for Children	7
Children's Catechumenate - RCIC	8
Sacrament Preparation For Reconciliation & Eucharist	9
Continuing Faith Formation	9
Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS)	10
Arrival & Departure	11
Parking	11
Attendance and Illness	11
Tardiness	12
Medication	12
Dress Code	12
Behavior	13
Communication	13
Special Activities	14
Classroom Celebrations	14
Classroom Visitors	14
Lost and Found	14
Crisis Plan	15
Custodial Rights	15
Records	15
Diocesan Requirements	16
Media Release	16
Right to Amend	16
Catechists/Aids	16
Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) - Atrium Guidelines	17-20
Faith Formation Class Dates	21

Parish Mission Statement

We, the community of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Roman Catholic Church, are dedicated to continuing the mission of Christ by proclaiming the word of God, celebrating the sacraments, and exercising the ministry of charity. We strive to respond to the Lord's call of discipleship by nurturing a sense of belonging among parishioners and providing opportunities for living out the Gospel while joyfully embracing life and spiritual transformation. This commitment is our baptismal call and manifest in worship, education, evangelization, stewardship, fellowship, and service as we desire to do God's will under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, our patron saint, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and the teaching office of the Catholic Church.

Registration

Parish

Faith Formation registration is not registration in the parish. It is important to be registered in the parish and to use your donation envelopes so that we have records of your activity in the parish. If you ever request a letter for Baptism, Marriage, Confirmation, a tax statement, being a godparent or sponsor, or if you would like to have your child enrolled in our Faith Formation Program, or for many other reasons, we must check our records to confirm that you indeed attend here before we can make a statement to that effect. We also cannot sign affidavits stating that you are a member of the parish (even if you attend Mass here), if we have no records to that effect. Parents and families in Faith Formation are expected to fully and actively participate in the weekly Sunday liturgy and contribute to the support of the Church.

Faith Formation Procedures

Scheduled registration periods are announced at Mass and in the Parish bulletin.

To register for the program you must:

- complete a registration form for each child;
- provide a Birth, Baptismal and First Eucharist (if received) certificate for your baptized child at the time of registration;
- pay or arrange for payment of tuition and fees.
- a letter of transfer must be provided if the child has completed the previous year in another parish.

Tuition

All tuition fees must be paid by the last day of Faith Formation for the current year.

It is the practice of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish that no child will be denied admission to any Faith Formation programs due to financial considerations. Please contact the Faith Formation Offices.

Faith Formation Office

Main Phone: 702 804 8306

Faithformation@seaslv.org

1807 Pueblo Vista Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89128

Fax: 702-228-8067

www.seaslv.org

Helen Silva

Director of Faith Formation

702 804-8351

HSilva@seaslv.org

Patricia Pavliga

Secretary

PPavliga@seaslv.org

Amy Melancon

Assistant to Faith Formation

AMelancon@seaslv.org

Classes Times - All classes are held in the SEAS School.

Tuesdays and Thursdays

Grades 1- 8

Times: 4:30 – 5:40pm and 6-7:10pm

Tuesdays and Thursdays – Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Ages 3 – 5

Times: 4:30 – 5:40pm and 6-7:10pm

Youth Ministry Office

Meghan Hernandez

Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry

702 804-8313

MHernandez@seaslv.org

Sean Donohue

Assistant Director of Youth and Young Adult Ministry

702 804-8372

SDonohue@seaslv.org

1809 Pueblo Vista Drive, Las Vegas, NV 89128

Fax: 702-363-4849

www.seaslv.org

Classes Times -

All classes are held in the Parish Hall.

Sundays

Confirmation I & II

Time: 2:30 – 5:00 p.m.

Wednesdays

Salvation History

Time: 5:45 — 7:30 p.m.

Introduction to Faith Formation

The mission statement for Faith Formation programs of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish embodies the four-fold purpose of formation and education in the Christian faith, namely: *to provide an atmosphere in which the gospel message is proclaimed, community in Christ is experienced, service to our sisters and brothers is the norm, and thanksgiving and worship of our God is cultivated.* (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Renewing our Commitment to Catholic Education and Secondary Schools*, Washington, D.C., 2005)

Our commitment is to support the family's life-long relationship with God in the tradition of the Roman Catholic Church.

The most important element in our program is the family. At your child's Baptism, you committed to instructing your child in the Catholic faith. Through your guidance and example, your child comes to know the love and concern God has for him or her. Family cooperation and support is essential in opening the heart and mind of your child to God. It is the desire of the Faith Formation Office to work with parents, children, and catechists to support ongoing growth in faith.

Faith Formation for Children

Christ calls all the faithful to proclaim the Good News everywhere in the world and to hand his message on to successive generations by professing, living, and celebrating the faith in Liturgy and prayer. (National Directory for Catechesis, p. 41)

The Faith Formation Programs for children at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish are designed to nurture an ever-growing, life-long relationship with God. They offer support for ongoing growth in the child's life with God. The programs are designed for children in grades pre-K through high school. They feature innovative, age-appropriate faith learning and life application. Content is based on Scripture, Liturgy, the Sacraments, and Sacred Tradition. At the heart of the programs is liturgy and prayer. The programs encourage our children and youth to rely on their faith as they live in a world that does not always share gospel values.

Our programs stress that formation is a life-long process and that catechesis is the responsibility of the whole faith community. The whole community (parents and family, priests, and catechists) is called to pass on the faith through faith-sharing with the children and witness of daily life, as well as to participate, as fully as possible, in the Sunday liturgy.

Children's Catechumenate- RCIC – Christian Initiation of Children who have Reached Catechetical Age (7 years old or older)

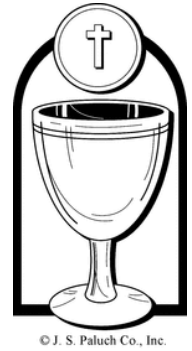


The Christian initiation of these children requires both a conversion that is personal and somewhat developed, in proportion to their age, and the assistance of the education they need. (The Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults, "The Christian Initiation of Children Who Have Reached Catechetical Age", p. 155)

- This is a two year process for children who were not baptized as infants, who have attained the age of reason (7 years), are of catechetical age, and who will participate in the Rite of Christian Initiation at the Easter Vigil.
- **All children in Sacrament Preparation Year 1 & 2 are required to attend Sunday Mass at least and not limited to 25 Sundays during the Faith Formation school year(October—May).** Attendance at Sunday Mass will be recorded using the Children's Offertory Envelopes. The envelopes will be given at the Parent Meeting.
- Parents or guardians are registered members of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish.
- The child is registered in and regularly attends Faith Formation sessions at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish.
- Parent and child will attend Sacrament Preparation Meetings periodically as required by the pastor.
- **Parents are required to attend 5 Adult Faith Formation Sessions in their Second year of preparation.**
- **Parent and child are required to attend 3 Reconciliation Meditations and 1 Eucharist Retreat in the second year.**
- Children will celebrate the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) at the Easter Vigil of their second year.
- Excessive absences will be determined and may affect the date of the reception of the sacraments.

First year participants will attend age-appropriate classes with children who are already baptized, and are preparing to celebrate First Eucharist. The parent and the child are required to attend meetings with the RCIC director in their first year of preparation. The second year of classes emphasizes the child's relationship with God, and their families within the body of Christ, the Church. A sponsor accompanies the child on his /her journey. All sponsors must fulfill diocesan requirements.

During the two years, special sessions are held to help children, families, sponsors prepare for the celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation, and parents are required to attend mandatory parent session and retreats.



Sacramental Preparation for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist

The liturgical life of the church revolves around the sacraments, with the Eucharist at the center. Catechesis for the Eucharist recognizes it as the heart of Christian life for the whole Church, for the dioceses, and parishes, and for each individual Christian. (National Directory for Catechesis, pp. 113 and 124.)

The two year preparation program to celebrate First Eucharist teaches children about the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist. All children preparing are **required** to follow the guidelines stated below-

1. First Eucharist preparation is a two-year process and the child is at least seven years of age at the time the sacrament of First Eucharist is celebrated.
2. **All children in Sacrament Preparation Year 1 & 2 are required to attend Sunday Mass at least and not limited to 25 Sundays during the Faith Formation school year(October—May).** Attendance at Sunday Mass will be recorded using the Children's Offertory Envelopes. The envelopes will be given at the Parent Meeting.
3. Parents are required to attend all Parent Meetings.
4. If the child has attended his/her First Year of Sacrament Preparation at a parish program or parochial school other than St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, a letter confirming the child's attendance and participation in classes must be presented at the time of registration.
5. Parents or guardians are registered members of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish or a Catholic Parish in the Las Vegas Diocese.
6. The child is registered in and regularly attends Faith Formation sessions at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish.
7. **Parents are required to attend 5 Adult Faith Formation Sessions in their Second year of preparation.**
8. **Parent and child are required to attend 3 Reconciliation Meditations and 1 Eucharist Retreat prior to the celebrations.**
9. Children baptized in other faith traditions will make a Profession of Faith and then celebrate First Eucharist.
10. Excessive absences will be determined and may affect the date of the reception of the sacraments.

Continuing Faith Formation

Children in 3 grade and higher who are baptized, and have received First Eucharist will continue their formation in age appropriate classes . It is the practice of our faith that formation is ongoing and is a life-long journey.

The children are eligible to serve as Altar Servers after they have celebrated First Eucharist. Children will have the opportunity to celebrate Reconciliation during Advent and Lent.

As a practicing Catholic, we are required to attend Sunday Liturgy weekly.

In order to enroll in SEAS Confirmation 1 program (9th grade), proof of attendance for 3 consecutive years (after receiving First Eucharist) in Faith Formation (Catholic School or Parish) is required. If a child does not have 3 consecutive years of formation he/she will attend a Salvation History class in their first year of Confirmation in addition to the Sunday class.

THE CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD



The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a program for the faith formation of children. The primary goal of this program is to deepen the child's existing relationship with God, to encourage the formation of a personal prayer life, and to participate in the liturgy. The Catechesis accomplishes this through the use of child-friendly materials, prayer, song, and listening to the Word of God with children. The children have time to work with the materials of their choosing.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a faith formation program based on the methods of Maria Montessori. Dr. Sofia Cavalletti and her co-worker, Gianna Gobbi, have worked for more than 45 years to develop the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program through observing and working with children from ages 3-12. The Catechesis uses Montessori's models of who children are, taking into account their developing spiritual and cognitive capacities. The program then matches Bible and Liturgy to the known needs and capacities of children, presenting these materials in a developmentally appropriate manner.

It is the joyful, peaceful response of the children themselves that has inspired and determined the ultimate content of this unique program.

Children are most sensitive to a relationship with God between the ages of 3-6. For this reason we provide formal faith formation for young children.

There are three levels of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd:

Level I atrium for children ages 3– kindergarten.

Level II atrium for children ages 6-9 (Grade 1-3)

Level III atrium for children ages 6-12 (Grade 4-6)

More details on page 14



Special Note to CGS Parents (with young children age 3-5 years)

In order to determine if your child is ready to join the other children in the Atrium (room) the following questions will assist you.

- Can/Does your child follow simple directions?
- Can/Does your child communicate in simple sentences?
- Can/Does your child transition from one activity to another with ease?
- Can/Does your child interact with other children?
- Does your child separate from you easily?
- Is your child completely potty trained?
- Is your child able to care for their bathroom needs without assistance?

We realize that children are unique and develop at their own pace. If your child has not acclimated to the Atrium by October 31, we would encourage that he/she return to the Atrium the following year. This is in the best interest of your child and the other children in the Atrium. Your tuition fee will be adjusted accordingly. Withdrawals after October 31 are not subject to tuition adjustments.

Policies of St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Faith Formation Programs.

Arrival and Departure

In the interest of your child's safety and to ensure proper supervision, children should arrive no earlier than 10 minutes before the scheduled class time. This will provide time for the volunteer catechist and assistant to arrive and set up for the lesson. The gates will open 10 minutes before each session and parents will walk the children to their classroom and Sign in with the catechist.

Under no circumstances may you "drop off" your children curbside and allow them to walk into class unsupervised. In such cases, a phone call will be placed to you to either pick up your children, or return to escort them to class.

At dismissal, the gates will open 10 minutes before the actual dismissal of class. Parents will meet the children at their class and Sign out the children each day. If you are delayed, the child will remain in the Faith Formation Office until you arrive. Please bring ID, and you will be asked to sign out the child on the Log Book.

Please note that any sibling(s) you send to either drop off or pick up your children must be at least 18 years of age.

Children are responsible to bring all assigned/provided books to class each day.

Parking Policies

In an effort to improve the safety of children, parents, and catechists during class times, we are asking everyone to adhere to the following guidelines-

- All families will park in a designated area only.
- No drop-off or pick-up is permitted at any time; all children must be walked into class and signed in and out by a parent/guardian.
- Vehicles are to proceed slowly into the parking areas, as children will be walking to and from class.
- Do not park immediately in front of the school building. For the safety of the children, cones and barriers block this area from any vehicles entering. Do not drive through or around the cones or barriers.
- Handicap parking is available.

Attendance and Illnesses

Children attend classes once a week. Children enrolled in the age-appropriate Faith Formation and Sacramental Preparation programs at St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish are expected to attend *all* classes. Parents/guardians should communicate with the Faith Formation Office concerning absences. Absence are limited to 5, excessive absences will be reviewed.

An absence is marked at any time when the child is not in class. We welcome advance notice if a child will be absent; however there is no distinction between an absence and an excuse. Excessive absences will be determined and may affect the date of the reception of the sacraments.

Please keep children who are sick at home until they recover. In the event of an illness or absence, we are unable to let children make up sessions on other days in order to keep consistency with each session.

If a child should become ill during session, he/she will be brought to the office and the parent will be called immediately.

Please have your child stay home if a member of the family is ill.

Tardiness

Participation in class is very important. Each child needs to be in class on time. Late arrival disrupts the class in progress. Please do all you can to insure your child's prompt arrival for class. In the event the child is late, bring him/her to the Faith Formation Office where the attendance will be marked. A child arriving 15 minutes after session begins will be marked tardy. **Children in Sacrament Preparation Year 1 and 2 are not permitted early dismissal.** Consideration will be given to special circumstances. **No early dismissal for sports or other extracurricular activities.**

Medication

No volunteer personnel may administer ANY medication to any child. Medication may only be dispensed to a child by parent on premises. Church is not responsible for any medical situations that we have not been notified at time of registration or when the situation arise.

Dress Code

Children are expected to dress modestly and comfortably to class. Parents will be called to pick up their child in the event an outfit is deemed inappropriate. The parent will be called and the child will be sent home. Since all modes of dress can't be addressed, the following are guidelines:

- Pants and skirts should be at least knee length
- No mid-drift shirts or blouses
- No spaghetti strap or low front shirts or blouses
- No shirts with words or inappropriate drawings (front or back)
- No slippers, pajama bottoms, etc.
- No pants or shirts with obvious holes or rips



Behavior

We are all called into relationship as human beings with God, self, other's and all of creation. To help foster this in all our activities, we expect mutual respect from both catechists and children. A child's behavior must not interfere with any activity in class or on Church premises. Everyone is expected to behave in a Christian manner, caring for and respecting one another.

Children who show disrespect in class, to the catechist, or to one another will be corrected by the catechist or a member of the Faith Formation staff. A meeting with parents may be requested to resolve a problem. Inappropriate behavior includes but is not limited to:

- disrespect to others
- disruptive actions or words
- intentionally injuring another person with physical or verbal abuse
- defacing or destroying Church or another's property
- bringing inappropriate items to class (including anti-Christian, dangerous, or offensive items or clothing)
- No gum, food, or drinks are allowed in the classroom.
- Children are not permitted under any circumstances to use any school supplies found in the desks
- Whiteboard is for the use of the Catechist only; children are permitted to use it during class if and when the Catechist calls for it. No child is permitted to "doodle" on the white board before, during or after session
- **No cell phones can be used during class time. In the event the child brings his/her cell phone to class it must remain in the book bag. If the Catechist deems the cell phone is a distraction, he/she will take it from the child and return it to the parent upon pick up.**
- **We will call the parent for advice and assistance in the event we are unable to maintain appropriate and expected discipline.**

At any time, families may request a meeting with Fr. Bede.

Our commitment is to help guide each child in his or her journey with the Lord. It is a commitment in love and patience.

Communication

The primary means of communication from the Faith Formation Office to families is the **monthly calendar/newsletter available through e-mail to the parent and on the parish website**. On occasion, special notifications may be sent home with the child. You may contact the Faith Formation Office with any questions regarding Sacrament Preparation, Continuing Formation, Tuition, and or Catechists/Assistants.

If you wish to speak with your child's catechist, please do so either before or after class. You may make an appointment through the Faith Formation Office to meet with the Faith Formation staff. You may make an appointment with Fr. Bede directly through the parish.

Parents are asked to provide any necessary medical information or special need of the child. Please notify the Parish and Faith Formation offices of any change of address or telephone numbers.

Parents are asked to provide **emergency contact** numbers in the event we are unable to reach you while your child is in session at SEAS. Parents are responsible to keep this information updated along with home address, phone numbers and especially email addresses, as our main mode of communication is email. Information regarding our program and updates will be included in the weekly parish bulletin and the website. **www.seaslv.org**

Special Activities

Throughout the year, in all Faith Formation programs, there are special activities scheduled to enhance and supplement catechesis. Parents/guardians will be notified in advance of the activity either through the bulletin and/or the monthly calendar/newsletter/email. Written permission will be requested before all off-campus activities. Telephone calls cannot replace signed permission slips. If seriously inappropriate behavior occurs while off-site, the parent/guardian will be notified to come to the activity or event location to pick up the child.

Classroom Celebrations

Liturgical seasons will be observed in classroom celebrations. For example, Christmas parties may not be held until **after** December 25. There is usually time for a Christmas celebration in January, during the Christmas season, when the children return to class.

Food or drink is not permitted in the classroom at any time. This applies to adults and children alike. The Faith Formation office will reserve an appropriate place for any classroom event involving food or drink refreshments, as space is limited.

Classroom Visitors

No friends or siblings of children are allowed in the classroom. We encourage parents and Godparents to observe the formation of their child. Parents wishing to observe their child must have prior permission from the Faith Formation Office and thereafter the catechist will be informed regarding the visit. This gives the catechist and the children time to prepare for the classroom guest.

Lost and Found

- If a child is missing anything, please inquire with your child's catechist, and inform the Faith Formation office.
- Please write your child's name on all jackets and sweaters.

Crisis Plan

All catechists and assistants over the age of 18 are required to be fingerprinted and attend training in “Protecting God’s Children.”

As part of the Faith Formation curriculum, all children in Kindergarten through grade 12 are required to participate in the “Protecting God’s Children” program that is presented during the school year.

Advocacy is available through the diocese for any individual who has been sexually and/or physically abused. The 24-hour hotline number is: 702-235-7723.

Custodial Rights

St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish (SEAS) abides by the provisions of the Buckley Amendment with respect to the rights of non-custodial parents. In the absence of a court order, we will provide the non-custodial parent with unofficial copies of records. If there is a court order specifying that no information is to be given to the non-custodial parent, it is the responsibility of the custodial parent or guardian to provide the appropriate Faith Formation Office with an official copy of the court order. (A copy will also be given to the Parish Office)

We respectfully request that all parents/guardians provide a copy of the court-certified copy of the custody section in a divorce decree which applies to the child(ren) being registered for the SEAS Faith Formation Program. This information will help us to determine when, if ever, a child can be released to a non-custodial parent.

Records

Records for each child are kept in the Faith Formation Office.

A copy of the Birth certificate and Baptismal certificate is requested at the time of registration. It is necessary to have this certificate on file stating where and when the child was baptized. Whenever the child celebrates other sacraments in our parish, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Church notifies the parish of baptism.

If a family moves or transfers to another parish, copies of the child’s records can be sent to the new parish upon request. Requests should include the complete address of the parish to which these documents are to be sent.

Diocesan Requirements

All employees, ministers, and volunteers in the Diocese of Las Vegas are required to be fingerprinted and to attend a “Protecting God’s Children” workshop held throughout the year at parishes in the diocese. Monthly *Virtus* updates must also be completed.

Media Release

There are many opportunities and occasions before, during, and after the faith formation year to photograph and videotape images of our children as they participate in the life of the church. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish reserves the right to use such images in parish publications including, newsletters, weekly bulletins, website, email and all outreach correspondence. All images captured of our children and their families are for the sole purpose of evangelizing and sharing the growth and life of the church. Parents must submit to the Faith Formation Office, in writing, any objections to the use of their children's images for parish purposes.

Right to Amend

The Faith Formation Office reserves the right to unilaterally change the policies contained in this handbook at any time, to cancel any policy, or to decline to apply a particular policy in a given situation, if, in its discretion, to do so would serve the interests of the children, families enrolled in this program, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Parish, or the Diocese of Las Vegas. Parents and catechists will be given prompt notification of changes.

Catechists/Aids

All our Catechists and Aids are volunteers and do not receive any monetary reimbursement for their time and talent. All Catechists and Aids commit to volunteering for one school year. There are monthly Catechist Meetings that are required for all catechizing our children. The catechists also attend ongoing formation, Parish Missions and Diocesan and National Conferences.

Anyone interested in volunteering as a Catechist/Aid or Hall Monitor please contact the Faith Formation Office at 702 804 8306

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS)



Level I encourages children ages 3– kindergarten to develop their innate potential for a faith-filled relationship with God. They encounter Jesus, the Good Shepherd who loves them, cares for them, and knows them by name. Catechesis includes Scripture, Mass gestures, prayers, artwork, and music.

Level II is for children ages 6-9(grades 1-3). The children deepen their understanding of Catholic identity, while the parables bring the children closer to the moral teachings of the Catholic Church. This time in the Atrium is very special as the children are preparing for First Reconciliation and First Eucharist. In order to prepare for the Sacraments the children (and parents) participate in meditations called True Vine. The children make their own Roman Missal in preparation for First Eucharist. The study of the Eucharist, the Eucharistic Presence, and The Cenacle help the child to prepare for the Sacraments.

Children must have attended Level I to move up to Level II.

Level III is for children 9-12 (grades 4-6) years. The children listen to the Old Testament readings, following the history of God’s plan for salvation, linking all people together in communion. They begin to ask, “What is the Reign of God, and what is my place in it?” It is a primary question which lays the foundation for a lifetime commitment to God. Moral development is continued at this level as well.

The Atrium (The Prepared Environment)

Children need their own place to work with these essentials and many other key elements of our faith. This place is called an **Atrium**.

Each atrium is specially designed with child-sized furniture including a prayer table for gathering, a model altar, as well as materials to deepen their familiarity with parables and the Mass itself. After being presented with new material in a small group, children are free to choose work, which particularly speaks to them to foster the growth of their own relationships with God.

So why have a prepared environment?

The small child has the power to absorb what is in his or her environment; what they take in becomes a part of them-enriching their intellectual and spiritual life. The family is the first and most important environment experienced by human beings. It is where cultural, social, religious, and moral characteristics are expressed.

Vatican II calls the family, “the domestic church,” or the primary educator of children in their faith.

The role of the **Catechist** (teacher) in the atrium is secondary. It is the child’s own inner guide and teacher, the Holy Spirit, who directs the mind and heart. The importance of the catechist is to place materials within reach and share scripture that fills a particular longing at each stage in a child’s spiritual life.

Each session has a lead catechist and aides to assist with the children. It is the responsibility of the catechist and aides to assist the children with materials and structure in the Atrium .

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd—Atrium Guidelines

SESSIONS

- Children attend classes once a week. Classes begin September and end in May

MASS

- Parents and children are encouraged to attend regular Sunday Mass, as the children need to experience the Liturgy in order to make the connection between what they hear in the Atrium and Mass.

CALENDAR

- The Atrium follows the liturgical seasons of the Catholic Church from mid September to May. Please refer to the monthly calendar and the web site for up dates.

DRESS CODE

- Dress children in comfortable clothing that allows ease of movement, as they will be working on mats on the ground, while keeping in mind the respectful attitude due to this special place. No blinking shoes and/or ballerina tutus please.

ARRIVAL

- Before arriving at the Atrium, please be sure children have eaten a well balanced meal and have gone to the bathroom.
- Let your child know you think their work is wonderfully important.
- Arrive 15 minutes before session begins. Please sign in your children when you arrive. Since the Atrium is a reverent environment, like a church, please encourage your children to use their Atrium voice and Atrium walk when entering. On-time arrivals are essential so that you do not disrupt group presentations given at the beginning of Atrium.

DISMISSAL

- At the end of Atrium, the children gather around the prayer table to listen to the Word of God, pray and sing. When Atrium is over, children are called by name for dismissal as the parents arrive for pick up.
- Please sign out your children when you pick them up. Children will only be released to designated persons authorized by parents or legal guardians. If you arrive late, your child will wait for you in the Faith Formation Office. In the best interest of your children and the catechists, please be prompt in picking up your children.

ILLNESS & ABSENCES

- Please keep children who are sick at home until they recover. In the event of an illness or absence, we are unable to let children make up Atrium sessions on other days in order to keep consistency with each session.
- If a child should become ill during session, he/she will be brought to the office and the parent will be called immediately.
- Please have your child stay home if a member of the family is ill.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd—Atrium Guidelines

CANDLES

- Candles are lit in the Atrium at the Altar, Prayer Table and during sacred moments. An adult always supervises the children when they are near candles. Only the adult handles matches.

PLANTS

- We have plants and flowers in the Atrium, if your child has allergies to any flora and fauna please let us know in detail.

LOST AND FOUND

- If a child is missing anything, please inquire with your child's catechist, and inform the Faith Formation office.
- Please write your child's name on all jackets and sweaters.

NO FOOD IN THE ATRIUM.

ATRIUM BEHAVIOR

- Occasionally a child has difficulty separating from the parent, we have successfully integrated such children in the past, usually by allowing the parent to stay with the child in the Atrium for one session. If it becomes consistent, the situation will have to be addressed.
- We encourage all families to share with us information about ideas to assist the child in getting the most out of CGS.
- If you have any concerns regarding your child adapting to the environment, or before you decide to withdraw your child from the Atrium please speak with the director of Faith Formation. A meeting will be scheduled with the catechists to decide how to assist the child.
- Following the discretion of the catechist or assistant, if a child hurts another person in the Atrium (hitting, kicking, biting, pinching, scratching, etc...) we will ask them to skip the next week of Atrium. This is to cultivate an atmosphere of respect in the Atrium. If it happens a second time, the child will be asked to wait until the next semester before returning.
- Redirection and/or changing the materials the child is working in the Atrium are the methods of correction— no corporal punishment will be used by any of the staff or volunteers at any time.

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd—Atrium Guidelines

CHILD'S PAPERWORK

- Each child will have a folder in which to keep their papers (coloring, gluing, etc...). At the end of the year, we will send the work home. We ask parents not to expect paperwork after each session, since one of the key Montessori principles is that young children work for the process and not the end product.

REFUNDS

- We realize that children are unique and develop at their own pace. If your child has not acclimated to the Atrium by October 31, we would encourage that he/she return to the Atrium the following year. This is in the best interest of your child and the other children in the Atrium. Your tuition fee will be adjusted accordingly. Withdrawals after October 31 are not subject to tuition adjustments.

VISITORS

- No friends or siblings of Children are allowed in the Atrium. Parents wishing to observe their child must have prior permission from the Faith Formation Office and thereafter the catechist will be informed regarding the visit. Parents will have the opportunity to meet and greet the catechist and assistant on the first day of class and during orientation.

Parents

As parents, we all want to know what our children learn. It is very difficult for adults to explain their relationship with God; this is true for the children as well. Here are a few suggestions for you to ask your child about the time spent in the Atrium.

- What did you hear in the Atrium today?
- What material did you work with today?
- Did you enjoy your time with God today?

We offer CGS training to all parents who are interested in assisting in the program or simply want to know about the development of children. Contact the Faith Formation Office for more information.

*All Faith Formation policies apply to all children in CGS.

National Association for Catechesis of the Good Shepherd www.cgsusa.org

