

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Summary of Presentations

“Help Me Fall in Love with God”

The philosophy of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program is that even very young children have a religious life. God is present to them in their deepest being and they are capable of developing both a conscious and intimate relationship with God. We provide materials based on age-appropriate Scripture passages and liturgical signs that nurture their relationship with God. The program balances exposure to our liturgy and the richness of our communal sacramental life with reading the Bible. Our program begins with presenting the New Testament to the children because it is the foundation of our faith. The youngest learn about Jesus and the beauty and wonder of the Kingdom of God through carefully chosen Bible verses that foster a deep love for Jesus. As they grow older they are encouraged to think about their personal responsibility to maintain this relationship with God and their social responsibility in the world. The oldest group studies the Old Testament in great detail and continues to deepen their understanding of the liturgy. They plan worship services and begin community service.

Each presentation has specific materials designed to draw the child into the Biblical and Liturgical themes. These materials are always available to the children during their work time so they have additional opportunity to absorb the lessons.

The following is a summary to the presentations offered for Level I. Classes are structured to offer a time of prayer and song, a time for the “presentation” and a time for individual work by the child. The work of the children is their prayer and is the most important part of their time in the atrium.

Level I (Children ages three through Kindergarten)

The theme for this level is the *Good Shepherd who loves his sheep and gives everything for them*. The child is introduced to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, and discovers who the sheep are. The enjoyment of the gift of God’s own self to the child is the foundation of further religious insight and moral development. This Level could be characterized as a “time of joy and wonder” in the lives of the children.



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Presentations offered over this three year period can be divided into several large groupings. Below are listed the names of the presentations and their purpose.

Prayer

The Prayer Table - each atrium has a prayer table that is the central “gathering place”. Its purpose is to offer a place to support the prayer of the child. Prayer table cloths reflect the colors of the church year. Children are encouraged to set the prayer table.

Prayer Cards – children are encouraged to select prayer cards for display on the prayer table which reflect their thoughts.

23rd Psalm – this psalm is read and explored; the psalm is a form of prayer and talks about God’s protective and restoring love for us. The Good Shepherd (an image the children are familiar with) will take care of our needs.

Song and Art – all presentations are supported by art and music.

Practical Life Exercises – are activities done to establish, maintain and restore order to the environment and to oneself. One catechist describes the benefits of these exercises as follows: “the Holy lives in our lives and we can experience God in our most simple acts when we open our hearts and minds to Him. God is present in our ordinary lives and His spirit can permeate our daily practical work.”

Bible

Scripture Booklets – most presentations are accompanied by scripture booklets that contain the scripture passages on which the presentation is based. Often we will read these passages directly from the Bible.

Land of Israel – a globe, a puzzle map and a large topographical map are introduced to encourage the children to realize that Jesus was a real person who lived in a real place – Israel. The cities of Nazareth, Bethlehem and Jerusalem are introduced as well as the regions and waters in Israel.

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Infancy Narratives:

All of the Infancy Narrative lessons are presented with figures, readings from the Bible and time to wonder at the events.

Annunciation (Luke 1:26 – 38)

Visitation of Mary to Elizabeth (Luke 1:39 – 49, 56)

Nativity and the Adoration of the Shepherds (Luke 2:1 – 20)

Adoration of the Magi (Matthew 2:1-12)

Presentation in the Temple (Luke 2:21 - 33, 36 – 39)

Paschal Narratives:

Jerusalem – a large topographical model of the walled city of Jerusalem is used to tell the events of the last days of Jesus’ life. Jerusalem is a real place where Jesus visited, celebrated the Last Supper, was arrested, tried, condemned, crucified, died, was entombed and resurrected.

Last Supper (Mark 14:12–17, 22-26; Luke 22:7–13, 17–20) – figures of Jesus and the disciples at the Last Supper are used and the lesson is read from the Bible. This meal was the first time the words, “This is my body, this is my blood” were said by Jesus. In this lesson we announce that Jesus gives himself to us in the bread and the wine.

Women at the Tomb (Mark 16:1-8) – a model of the empty tomb, with only the figure of an angel in it, and the figures of three women, are used, along with the Biblical text from Mark to announce the physical resurrection of Jesus in a historical setting. The angel instructs the women to share the good news of Jesus’ resurrection.

Pentecost – in this celebration we announce the gifts given by the Holy Spirit to the disciples and to announce that these gifts are given to all.

When the hour came, he took his place at the table with the apostles.

Luke 22:14

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Parables:

The Good Shepherd - (John 10:3b-5, 10b-11 and 14-16) this parable is read and a sheepfold, sheep and the figure of the Good Shepherd are used to announce the steadfast love of God. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and we are his beloved sheep.

The Found Sheep – (Luke 15:4-6) this parable is read and the materials from the Good Shepherd presentation are used to reinforce the image of how very precious we are to God as unique individuals and to explore concretely the love, care and trustworthiness of God.

The Mystery of Life and Death – (John 12:24) this parable is read and wheat plants at various stages of growth are used, to announce that death is the natural passage to risen life and that risen life is richer and fuller than life now.

Kingdom Parables:

Mustard Seed – (Mark 4: 30-32) this parable is read and a tiny mustard seed is given to each child to encourage the child to wonder at the power and strength of the Kingdom of God.

Pearl of Great Price – (Matthew 13:45-46) this parable is read and a model of a home, figures and pearls are used to encourage the child to wonder how the Kingdom of God is like a precious, beautiful pearl which is worth searching and sacrificing everything for.

Leaven – (Matthew 13:33) this parable is read and yeast, flour and water are used to illustrate the wonder at the mystery and power of the Kingdom of God, the additional message of patience is also present in this lesson.

Grain – (Mark 4:26-29) this parable is read and wondered about to encourage the child to understand that the Kingdom of God is eternally growing and expanding through faith and beyond our own understanding.

Hidden Treasure – (Matthew 13:44) this parable is read and wondered about to encourage the child to think about the mystery of God’s grace and unsurpassed worth/value of the Kingdom of God.

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Messianic Prophecies:

Prophecies are presented to the children to increase their understanding of Jesus and to increase their understanding of the plan God has for us.

Prophecy of Names – (Isaiah 9:6) this prophecy introduces some of the many names for Jesus – Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Prophecy of Light – (Isaiah 9:2) this prophecy proclaims that Jesus is the light of the world.

Prophecy of Mary, the Mother of Christ – (Isaiah 7:14) this prophecy proclaims that Jesus was born to a young woman and is God incarnate.

Prophecy of Bethlehem – (Micah 5:1) – this prophecy proclaims the birthplace of Jesus as Bethlehem.

Prophecy of the Star and Scepter – (Numbers 24:17) this prophecy proclaims that Jesus is a historical figure from the lineage of Jacob who will be an eternal light and ruler of the world.

Liturgy

Eucharist:

Altar and Articles of the Eucharist – through the use of models the children learn the names and uses for the: altar table, altar cloth, paten, chalice, cross, candles, lectern (ambo), lectionary, Roman Missal, sanctuary lamp, corporal, purificator, pall, lavabo bowl, lavabo towel, cruets, ciborium, credence table and sacristy cabinet.

Liturgical Colors and Vestments of the Priest – these lessons introduces the colors of the church year and the vestments – the chasuble, the alb, the stole, and the cincture.

Liturgical Calendar – through a puzzle of the liturgical calendar, the children learn that God’s time is different from our time and the church year revolves around the important events of Redemption. There is no beginning and no end to the church year. The children also learn the great feasts of the year – Christmas, Easter and Pentecost.

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Eucharistic Presence of the Good Shepherd – this lesson uses the materials from the Good Shepherd lesson and a new sheepfold (the church) to show how the love of the Good Shepherd can be found in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. Jesus, the Good Shepherd, is present in the bread and the wine and that is God’s gift to us.

Gestures of the Eucharist:

Preparation of the Chalice – this lesson helps focus the child on the gesture of the Preparation of the Chalice as a visual sign of our union (water) with Jesus (wine).

Epiclesis – this lesson helps focus the child on the gesture of the Epiclesis as a visual sign of our asking for God’s gift of the Holy Spirit.

Offering – this lesson helps focus the child on the gesture of the Offering as a visual sign of our response to God’s gift to us.

Peace – this lesson helps focus the child on the gesture of the Peace as a visual and tactile sign of unity and sharing within the Body of Christ.

Baptism:

Light and White Garment – candles and a white garment are used to announce that Jesus is the light of the world and that through Baptism we become part of the light.

Water and Word – water, the Bible and chrism are used to announce that we are given the gifts of new life, joy, the strength of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God at our baptism.

Gestures – the gestures are visual signs with great meaning. The gesture over the water asks God to send the Holy Spirit into the water so that it might have the power to give us new life. The sign of the cross on the forehead marks us as Christ’s own forever. The cross over the congregation is a sign of Christ’s help and protection over all of us.

A little lamb is born and it is going to get the light of Jesus.

Reflection of a 6 year old child; RPC, pp. 182

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Level II (Ages 6 to 9 - Children in 1st through 3rd Grade)

The overall theme for these years is the image of *Christ as the True Vine, focusing on both relationship and responsibility*. The History of the Kingdom of God is an important tool in introducing and illustrating God’s work and planning on behalf of humanity. As the children begin to discover the vast cosmic history of God’s plan of salvation, they begin to realize that they have something to contribute to it. Moral sensitivity/awareness begins here and grows as the work is presented.

Presentations offered over this three year period can be divided into several large groupings. Below are listed the names of the presentations and their purpose.

Prayer

Prayer Services – children continue to pray at the prayer table, and begin planning and leading prayer services for the entire class using familiar songs, readings and prayers.

Song and Art – music and art continue to support the curriculum at this level with more advanced songs, including “part” singing and rounds. At this age children learn about illuminated masterpieces and calligraphy. Frequently their art synthesizes work they have seen.

Bible

Books of the Bible – this lesson helps the child understand that the Bible is one book – made up of many books - which reveal the history of the Kingdom of God, it also begins to give the children a structure to locate various books in the Bible.

Bible Study – the children begin to read the Bible and participate in group studies of New Testament stories. This is favorite work for children once they begin to be comfortable with reading. Some of the Bible passages explored during these years include the announcement to Zachariah (Luke 1:5-25); the Birth of John the Baptist (Luke 1:57-80); the Baptism of Jesus (found in all the Gospels); the Feeding of the 5000 (Mark 6:30-44 or parallel text); the Healing of the Man born Blind (John 9); the Healing of the Paralytic (Mark 2:1-12 or parallel text) and various resurrection appearances in all four Gospels.

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Land of Israel – a pin map is used to highlight additional cities and geographic features important in the Gospels. The children also use the Bible to locate biblical accounts of events which occurred in these cities or at these geographical locations.

Infancy Narratives: the lessons presented in Level I are represented in more depth. The Flight into Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23) is presented for the first time with figures, the Biblical narrative and time to wonder at the work of God as seen through the actions of Mary and Joseph. The infancy narratives are looked at thematically as the children begin to see how they work together to demonstrate the love of God for his people through the gift of Jesus, and the response, still continuing, of all to this gift.

Paschal Narratives:

Passion Narrative Study – (Matthew: 26:57-68, 28:1-8; Luke 19:29-38, 23:1-12, 33-46; John 18:1-14, 28-37, 19:16; Acts 1:4-12, 2:1-11) this work includes a series of readings from the Bible associated with the Passion of Christ and the gift of redemption.

History of the Kingdom of God:

History of the Kingdom of God – this lesson begins by introducing the children to the three great moments in sacred history – creation, redemption and Parousia (a time when God will be all in all, no more war or sickness, etc.). Once these terms are understood, the lesson progresses by unrolling a timeline of history and telling the story, rooted in the Bible, of creation over the expanse of time, focusing on the wonder of the preparation of our world for us, God’s creatures; the coming of Christ; where we are today; and, what we know about the time of Parousia.

Unity of the History of the Kingdom of God – this more individual work helps the children personalize the information learned in the History of the Kingdom of God work.

Gifts of God – this lesson shows how over time, God has slowly, carefully and lavishly prepared earth to receive and nourish humanity. The gifts of God for humankind culminate in Christ and continue until Parousia. In response, humanity has a special responsibility to assist God, with both hands and heart, in the transformation of the world, bringing it into the fullness of the life that God desires.

Parables:

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Wolf and Hireling – (John 10:11–16) this parable is read and wondered about to call the child’s attention to the steadfast, protective and sacrificial love of the Good Shepherd.

Kingdom Parables:

Synthesis of the Kingdom of God Parables – this work revisits the parables heard in Level I and encourages the child to focus on two aspects of the Kingdom: its beauty and preciousness; and its growth and transformation.

Moral Parables:

Good Samaritan – (Luke 10:29–37) this familiar parable is read and wondered about to explore the idea of compassion and actions taken in response thereto.

Found Coin – (Luke 15:8-9) this parable is read and wondered about to deepen the child’s understanding of God’s love which is unconditional, active and unfailing even when we are separated from God. It also continues the theme that when we are in unity with God and the people of God it is a time for celebration.

Insistent Friend – (Luke 11:5–8) the parable is read and wondered about to begin to explore persistent intercessory prayer.

Pharisee and Tax Collector – (Luke 18:9–14) this parable is read and wondered about to explore our posture before God as one of humility and relationship.

Ten Bridesmaids – (Matthew 25:1–12) this parable is read and wondered about to announce the invitation to the banquet of the reign of God and the necessity of individual responsibility for preparation for Jesus’ coming.

Forgiving Father – (Luke 15:11–24) (also commonly known as the Prodigal Son) this parable is read and wondered about to announce that God’s gifts are freely given and God’s forgiveness is unconditional.

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Wedding Feast – (Matthew 22:1-13) this parable is read and wondered about to announce the universal invitation to the Kingdom of God and the call to respond and prepare for it, it also begins to introduce the message of God’s judgment.

Maxims and Summary of the Law – (Matthew 5:37, 5:44, 5:42, and 5:48, John 13:34, Luke 6:27, Matthew 7:7 and 7:12, Matthew 6:2 and 6:6, I Corinthians 6:19, Matthew 18:21-22) this lesson introduces some of the passages from the Sermon on the Mount that give us the guidelines for forming our moral codes. It also highlights and explores the meaning of the most important law (Deuteronomy 6:5, Leviticus 19:18, Mark 12:30, Matthew 22:39) – “You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, and with all your soul and with all your strength, and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Prophecies

Star and Scepter II – (Numbers 24:17) this revisiting of one of prophecies from Level I focuses anew on the child who Jesus is and what the kingdom He rules over is like.

Synthesis of the Prophecies – encourages the children to look again at the Level I prophecies as a whole to answer the question, “Who are you Lord?”

Valleys and Mountains – (Isaiah 40:35) through prophets, God prepares people for His gifts – including the vision of Parousia and in return, God’s people are called to prepare themselves and their world to receive God’s gifts.

The Peaceable Kingdom – (Isaiah 11:6-9) this prophecy provides a vision of the peaceable kingdom as an image of the Parousia that Advent anticipates.

The Shoot of Jesse – (Isaiah 11:1-3a) through the prophet Isaiah, God foretold the birth, lineage and spiritual gifts of Jesus.

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Liturgy

Eucharist:

Mystery of Faith – this lesson explores the words of the liturgy, “We proclaim your Death, O Lord, and profess your Resurrection until you come again” and encourages the child to connect to these words in a personal way.

The Lord’s Prayer – the children are introduced to this familiar prayer that Jesus prayed and begin to meditate on it line by line.

Synthesis of the Eucharist – this lesson shows the structure and order of the Eucharist, including our response to each other and to God within the liturgy.

Origin of the Eucharist – this lesson traces the development of the Eucharist from the Last Supper to today and encourages us to enjoy the continuity of the gift of the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist.

Prayer Book – the children begin working on their own, handwritten, version of essential prayers from the Prayer Book.

Liturgical Calendar - this lesson builds on the presentation in Level I and teaches the children how to find the date for Easter, a date set by the lunar calendar.

Gestures:

Sign of Peace and the Breaking of the Bread – this lesson introduces the breaking of the bread as a sign of Jesus’ sacrifice for our unity.

Lavabo (Washing of the Hands) – the lesson focuses on the gesture as a symbol of purification of the whole person as well as the community in preparation for the sharing of the Eucharist.

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Preparation for Solemn Communion – these meditations on several different parables are presented to the children over a five week period and are intended to deepen their understanding of the connection between the Bible and liturgy, strengthen their desire for the Eucharist and introduce the Rite of Reconciliation.

True Vine – (John 15: 1-11) presented in two different settings, the first meditation focuses on our union with Christ and one another and our call to remain in Him with God’s help; the second study focuses on our personal obstacles to this union and God’s desire to work with us to remove those obstacles.

Found Coin – (Luke 15:8-9) this parable announces that God’s love is active, unconditional and diligent and that unity with God and the people of God is to be celebrated.

Forgiving Father – (Luke 15:11-24) this parable announces God’s unconditional love and forgiveness when there is repentance.

Centurion’s Servant – (Matthew 8:5-13) this parable explores faith as trust, belief in God’s authority, power, love and mercy.

Baptism:

Rite of Baptism – this work introduces the essential moments that accompany the liturgical signs used in the Rite of Baptism.

And Jesus said to the centurion, "Go; it shall be done for you as you have believed.

Matthew 8:13a

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Conclusion

In the words of Dr. Sofia Cavaletti who developed the program, “If we want to help the child draw nearer to God, we should with patience and courage seek to go closer to the vital nucleus of things. This requires study and prayer. The child ... will be our teacher if we know how to observe....”

Sources:

The Religious Potential of the Child, Sofia Cavalletti

The Religious Potential of the Child 6 – 12 Years Old, Cavalletti

Course Notes, Catechist Training Levels I, & II

“Catechesis of the Good Shepherd”, by the Rev. Robert J. Gaestel

The summary prepared by Becky Rochford to provide information to the parents of Christ Church Cathedral, Nashville, TN - July 2010

The National Association of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd United States website
www.cgsusa.org

Good Sources for Parents:

The Good Shepherd & the Child – A Joyful Journey, Cavalletti, et al. – this is an easy to read overview of the philosophy and theology of the program

Sing with Joy - Music of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Catherine Maresca (and Beverly Sanders), includes a CD by the Cathedral choristers – a music book used in Level I (3-6 year old children)

Songs of Love - Music of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, Catherine Maresca (and Beverly Sanders), includes a CD by the Cathedral choristers – a music book used with the 6 – 12 year old children

Then He took a little child and putting His arm around him said, “Whoever welcomes a child such as this for My sake welcomes Me!”

Mark 9:36-37