

# **FAQ's for Catechesis of the Good Shepherd**

## ***What is CGS?***

CGS is a Montessori-based catechetical approach that takes into consideration the child's developmental level and engages their natural openness to God and spiritual realities. It teaches the children the truths of the faith through contemplation of Scripture and hands-on materials to assist the child with their contemplation. They work with a model altar, pin maps of the land of Israel, the Kingdom of God and moral parables, infancy narratives, liturgical calendar, and more. To learn more, visit <https://www.cgsusa.org/> or the St. Joseph CGS page at <http://school.stjosephlnk.org/parent-info/catechesis-of-the-good-shepherd/>.

## ***Why would our school want to adopt a new curriculum?***

Some have the impression that CGS is a curriculum that will somehow replace current curriculum used with the students. This is not the case. The same diocesan curriculum standards in religion, reading, math, science, social studies, etc. remain the same. Perhaps it would help to think of CGS more like classroom materials to teach the curriculum, such as textbooks, manipulatives, decodables, etc. It is a tool or means of imparting the curriculum standards more deeply so that learning becomes more than head knowledge.

## ***What is an atrium?***

An atrium is a special space designated specifically for CGS. It is furnished simply but beautifully with items that children use during their sessions, many of which are hand-crafted by volunteers (Shepherd, sheep, sheepfold, Scriptural characters, Mass vessels, etc.). Students are greeted individually each time they enter the atrium. They are taught to use quiet voices, to focus on works that interest them and to listen to Jesus, the Good Shepherd, as they work. Children are also taught to restore everything to its proper place before leaving.

## ***What do students do in CGS?***

Children are presented with a Scripture story, such as the Good Shepherd, parables, etc., as well as gestures and items that relate to the Mass, and are given time to ponder and respond to what they are shown. In addition, they are taught various "life works" (activities), such as pouring and sweeping, all of which lead to an atmosphere of contemplation. As one child responded when his mom asked him after school what he learned about Jesus in the atrium that day, "I don't learn ***about*** Jesus; I learn ***from*** Jesus!"

## ***How does CGS relate to Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)?***

The quiet atmosphere of the atrium and the repetitive and contemplative nature of many of the "works" (activities) allow children to settle, calm, and focus, thus leading to emotional and psychological self-regulation. These activities help to alleviate anxiety and counteract over-stimulus in the environment, including the impact on neural connections caused by frequent screen time.

## ***Why are children given such a long amount of time in the atrium instead of breaking it into smaller chunks?***

The ideal session for CGS is 90 minutes. While children have short attention spans, the options they have when they work in the atrium provide choices for them that keep them engaged. In addition, the

opportunity to focus in a quiet atmosphere for extended time allows their hearts to settle and provides fertile ground for listening to the voice of Jesus.

### ***Won't the atrium sessions cut into the academic learning of the students?***

Atrium sessions are only scheduled once a week. The time allotment is worked into the weekly schedule as part of the religion instructional time required by the diocese and other subjects fill in on days that students don't have CGS. The activities of CGS also meet many of the literacy standards of reading, writing, speaking, and listening which cannot be separated from any type of learning for a young child. Therefore, many overarching reading standards may be used during CSG while specific skill-based standards will be taught during reading instruction. Thus, it's more of a gain of instruction time rather than a loss of any sort. All early childhood learning (really, learning at all levels) involves both information/instruction plus processing time. CGS enables students to go deeper in their thoughts and conforms to their attention spans, thus better equipping them with the tools they will need to learn any information presented inside or outside the atrium.

### ***Won't the religion instruction suffer if students are spending that much time in atrium activities?***

Actually, the religious education in a Catholic school has always been woven into all we do daily: prayer, reading aloud, and student projects can be seen both inside and outside of "religion time." CGS not only complements student learning of their faith, but allows it to "soak in" to their hearts as they develop a personal relationship with Jesus along with learning religious concepts.

### ***Isn't CGS a liberal arts program?***

Acronyms can be confusing! Some mix up CGS (Catechesis of the Good Shepherd) with CLE (Catholic Liberal Education). While there may be some similarities, CGS is a specifically catechetical program, whereas CLE is a philosophy of education.

### ***Why isn't first grade having CGS atrium sessions in school?***

Because CGS takes a lot of dedication and coordination (materials, scheduling, training, volunteers to assist at each session), it made the most sense to grow the program slowly in our school and parish. Since 2nd grade was the first to use the program, it will be easy to maintain their presence in the program. As the "works" (activities) ideally build upon one another, it made the most sense to add our youngest students next. We will need to examine the feasibility of adding grades depending on how well this year goes. Factors such as volunteers, training, and scheduling, as well as parent and teacher interest, are all taken into consideration

### ***Can children who are not registered at St. Joseph School participate in CGS?***

Absolutely! Parents who are trained in CGS that homeschool, or who do not have children currently in preschool at St. Joseph School, are welcome to organize atrium sessions during the week or on weekends. They will need to schedule access through the rectory.