

CHRISTIAN FORMATION
Director of Christian Formation
Tommie Moore

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a faith formation experience for children ages 3 to 12 years old. It is based upon the belief that young children can and do experience God. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd's work is done in an Atrium, an environment created to nurture children's spirituality. This is done by proclaiming the Gospel through the parable method, prayer, singing, silence, and exploring liturgical events. Hands-on materials are used to help children and adults reflect together upon the great mysteries of the Christian faith.

In Level I (for children ages 3 – 5 years of age), the exploration begins with building a loving relationship with Jesus the Good Shepherd. The image of Jesus as the Good Shepherd is central to this atrium. We focus on Jesus' life and His teachings through parables to make Him more concrete—a real person in a real time and a real place.

In Level II (for children in 1st – 3rd grades), many works from Level I are repeated, but have been expanded to suit them developmentally. Moral formation is also beginning at this age so moral parables are added. The image of Jesus as the True Vine is central to this atrium. The child's work with the Holy Eucharist and Baptism materials becomes more detailed and specific as they explore the order and prayers for each rite.

In Level III (for children in 4th – 6th grades), moral formation continues, so many more of Jesus' moral parables are added. This child has the ability to move through time easily and is able to think abstractly, so more in-depth studies of Salvation History are explored in this atrium.

We are fortunate to have as our certified catechists: Natalie Sparks Bullock, Stacy Carroll, Tricia Edmonson, Mary Howard King, Joellen Murphree, Kamme Riddle and Marrion Winders. Assisting in the atria each Sunday is Robin Bryan. This group is strongly committed in helping your children deepen their relationship with God and Jesus the Good Shepherd while helping them to participate more fully in our liturgy.

In 2014, we completed our Level I and Level II adult formation courses led by Mary Howard King, who is a certified Level I and II formation trainer. We are thankful for her guidance and leadership, not only in our formation training, but within Catechesis each Sunday. Sue Ann Averett, Fredda Robinson and Michele Waits completed their Level I certification, while Marrion Winders and I completed our Level II certification.

We hope to again offer Level I and Level II adult formation trainings in 2015. In order to continue to grow Catechesis, we need adults (male and female) who will attend the training with intentions of working with our children in the atria. Those that have been through the training and are now working with our children in this atmosphere comment that their own spiritual journey has been enhanced and enriched by the experience. However, please know that you do not have to be a certified catechist to spend time with the children in the atria. We are always looking for volunteers to assist the Catechist and children during their time in the atria. The assistant training only takes about an hour and we'd love to have you! If you would like to learn more about CGS, we have numerous books and resources available in the Christian Education office or you may join us in the atria on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. or we welcome your presence during the adult formation training course. Simply observing the children at work or enjoying the peaceful environment can be meaningful to adults of all ages.

We also continued growing our other Sunday morning Christian formation offerings for our adults and older youth. Lucy Adams, Amber Buckley, Mike Fitzpatrick, and Josh Westmoreland led our 7th – 12th graders through topical Bible based lessons tied to what teens are talking about. Bible lessons are linked to the issues and events that are relevant right now. Some of the topics they explored in 2014: poverty and homelessness; the importance of personal reputations; dealing with grief and sorrow; little and big fears. The leaders help our youth connect their faith with situations they are experiencing in their lives. These teachers really have a heart for the work they are doing with our youth and they have my deepest appreciation. This class meets in the Sr. High Sunday School room at 9:30 a.m.

For the adults in 2014, we offered several classes that explored a variety of topics. Fr. Paul led the confirmation classes which explored the Episcopal Church, our Anglican history, traditions and our rich liturgy and music. During Lent, Fr. Paul and Fr. Stanford facilitated "Called to Work" helping people to connect their faith and their work while exploring questions of vocation and calling in relation to their professional work. In the fall, Fr. Paul led "Good Enough Parenting: Is It Realistic in Today's World" which explored the challenges of raising confident, self-reliant, compassionate and ethical children in a world where entitlement and competition abound. *Understanding the Sunday Scriptures* (now led by Les Alvis) continued in 2014, studying the revised common lectionary for each Sunday. My deepest thanks to Fr. Paul, Fr. Stanford, and Les Alvis for sharing their gifts through teaching these classes during 2014.

My thanks to Sue Ann Averett and Kamme Riddle for directing "God's Helping Hand" Vacation Bible School in the summer of 2014. The children learned the importance of helping others and reaching out to our community, which seemed particularly appropriate in the aftermath of the tornado that devastated parts of Tupelo in April. VBS was held on a Saturday, which allowed children to attend that aren't normally able to come due to parents working, day care situations, transportation issues, etc. In addition, we invited the children in our surrounding neighborhoods! Another added benefit to having a Saturday VBS was that our volunteer base, previously limited due to work issues, was expanded. Almost fifty children attended and numerous teenage and adult volunteers helped throughout the day. This was the third year we tried this model for VBS and we will continue to evaluate it as we plan for VBS, 2015. If you would like to help, please let me know!

The *total* Christian Formation budget for 2014 was \$6,500. Of this amount, Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was allocated \$3,700 for materials, supplies, bibles for Level II, resources for all 3 atria and costs associated with adult formation training. During the very tight 2014 budget year, the Vestry asked that any additional monies needed for Catechesis be spent from our Money Market account. We spent \$3,700 from our operating budget and an additional \$2,598.17 from the CGS Money Market account.

The balance of the Christian Formation budget in the amount of \$2,800 was allocated for materials/curriculum for youth and adult Sunday School classes, materials for confirmation classes, Vacation Bible School, Lenten meditation booklets, prayer books for our graduating seniors, Advent meditation booklets and supplemental materials. We spent \$1,033.69.

I offer my thanks to all of the parishioners that volunteer their time in Christian Formation. They are a dedicated group of folks and it shows! I encourage you and your children to take advantage of all of the Christian Formation offerings and I welcome your ideas and input anytime.