

John XXIII Montessori Children's Center

First Communion Preparation in the CGS Atrium:

*An enhancement to the work of the parent, and also approved
by St. John the Baptist parish for preparing
the child to receive Holy Communion.*

The Atrium is designed to invite the child to hear the call of the Good Shepherd

The Atrium is a place of prayer. It is a weekly retreat where all present may "Be still and know that He is God." Both the environment and the materials are designed in such a way as to invite the child to discover the great secret that God calls each of us personally into relationship with Him. All of the work and prayer the child does each year in the Atrium assists in the discovery and development of their relationship with the Good Shepherd, who knows them each by name and calls them to Himself. Each child is invited and encouraged to hear the call of the Good Shepherd in their own hearts.

The Good Shepherd calls each of us . . . to Mass

After the child has been in the Atrium for a few years, he/she is hopefully growing in the knowledge and enjoyment of this relationship with Jesus, their Good Shepherd. It is at this time that the 5-6 year old child begins to ponder and pray with the materials that present "The Eucharistic Presence of the Good Shepherd." We invite the child to reflect with us on the fact that there is a uniquely special place the Good Shepherd calls all of His sheep to – the Holy Mass. We ponder that the Good Shepherd, even though we do not actually see Him in church as such, is present in the bread and wine which become His Body and Blood during the Mass. This meditation in particular, as well as the presentations on the Articles, Gestures, and prayers of the Mass assists them in their growing understanding of the Holy Eucharist.

The Good Shepherd calls us to follow His teachings . . .

It is in the 6-9 Atrium that we also begin lifting up Jesus' moral parables at a time when the child is entering what Montessori calls "The Sensitive Period for Justice." The children also begin meditating on the "Maxims" – the moral teachings of Jesus, such as "Love your enemies," and "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit," to name just a few. This pondering of Jesus' moral teachings assists the child in the formation of their conscience. The Good Shepherd, with whom they are in relationship, now calls them not only by name, but also to the challenge of following Him and His teachings.

It is not always easy to follow the Good Shepherd . . .

In the 6-9 Atrium we often discuss the fact that it is not always easy to follow Jesus' teachings. The parable of the Found Sheep previously presented takes on a new meaning for us as we realize in our own lives that we do not always choose to follow the Good Shepherd's call. The child works with the Maxim tablets and is encouraged to copy them to make a booklet for their own examination of conscience. Work on the words of the Act of Contrition, as well as card materials that help to explain the procedure for going to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, assist the child's readiness to celebrate their first penance, either with the parish or at our spring retreat. There is much "jubilation" for the Good Shepherd as He welcomes back His lost sheep!

Preparation of "My Missal"

An additional meditative project which may be undertaken by the child who is reading and writing well is the preparation of his/her own personal Missal. This is a big work which helps the child to synthesize the various gestures and prayers of the Mass that they have meditated upon to discover their meanings. The child may copy the prayers that go with the gestures as well as choose to do their own illustrations. The Missal is often very painstakingly prepared by the child and worked on over an extended period of time while pages are placed in a temporary working notebook kept in the Atrium. Upon completion of all of the pages, the child can sew the Missal together to take home and then to Mass with them. Usually this work is not completed until after several years in the Atrium.

First Communion Meditations – offered this year during regular Atrium time.

In addition to all of the above foundational work, for the 6-9 year old child who will be receiving First Holy Communion in the late spring of the Atrium year, we provide five focused meditations. These meditations help the child to enter more deeply into the mysteries of the two Sacraments they are preparing to receive. In order to involve the whole Atrium community in the First Communicants' preparation, these meditations are offered during the regular 6-9 yr. sessions. In this way older children who have already received Communion may also ponder and recall these mysteries.

This series of First Communion Meditations initially assist the child to develop an understanding of the Sacrament of Penance by lifting up the Parables of the True Vine, The Found [Lost] Coin and Sheep, and The Forgiving Father [Prodigal Son.] These meditations are pondered over the course of the first several weeks of February. The final meditation is a proximate preparation for reception of Holy Eucharist offered later in the spring. The scriptural words of the Roman Centurion are proclaimed and pondered: "Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof, speak but the word and my servant shall be healed." We meditate on these words . . . what can they mean? How are they like the words we say at Mass before Holy Communion? Can anyone ever really be worthy? And yet Jesus calls us to come to Communion, and He, Himself, makes our soul worthy to receive Him . . .

John XXIII Montessori Children's Center is now affiliated with St. John's parish CCD program.

Our Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program, fully approved by the Arlington diocese, has also received recognition by St. John the Baptist parish. Our program is now a CCD option for parents who would like this excellent means of formation by which to prepare their child for First Communion. As such, children participating in any of John XXIII's programs fully at the 6-9 year level are considered ready to receive their First Communion and **do not need an interview with the St. John's D.R.E.** Nevertheless, we view our work with your child in the Atrium as an *enhancement* to your own work of preparing your child for First Holy Communion. We do not want to usurp your primary role, but rather see our work as part of a collaborative effort with you as parents, and also with the parish in catechizing the youngest members of our community.