

First Confession/Communion Preparation

In the CGS Atrium:

An enhancement to the work of parents and approved by the Arlington Diocese as preparation for the Sacraments of Confession and 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 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 a personal relationship with the Good Shepherd, who knows each of His sheep by name. Each child is invited and encouraged to hear the call of the Good Shepherd in his/her own heart.

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, as well as the presentations on the Articles, Gestures, and prayers of the Mass assists children 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 based on love assists in the formation of 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 by living life to the full in His Kingdom of love.

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 first penance shortly before the First Communion day. 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 and choose to do their own illustrations. The Missal is often very painstakingly prepared 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 bind the Missal together to take home and then to Mass. Usually this work is not completed until after several years in the Atrium.

First Communion Meditations Series

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 and are usually offered to the group of First Holy Communion children during the regular 6-9 yr. sessions.

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 weeks of March/April. A group walk-through of the confessional is scheduled so that the children may become familiar with the confessional. The final Meditation offers the scriptural words of the Roman Centurion to reflect upon: "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... Usually the day prior to the First Communion Mass is offered a day-long Retreat which includes First Confession. Parents may attend the First Confession and are also invited to the closing prayer service.

Affiliation with St. John the Baptist parish

Our Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program, fully approved by the Arlington diocese, is also recognized by St. John the Baptist and surrounding parishes. Our program is a catechetical option for parents who would like this excellent means of formation by which to prepare their child for the Sacraments. As such, children participating in any of John XXIII's programs fully at the 6-9 year level are considered ready to receive first Reconciliation and First Communion. Nevertheless, we view our work with your child in the Atrium as an enhancement to your own work of preparing your child for the Sacraments. 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. A special Mass of First Communion is scheduled each year in the spring with St. John's parish for John XXIII children and their families.