

CHILDREN'S SUNDAY SCHOOL

AT HIGHLANDS UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



"LET
THE
CHILDREN COME"
MATTHEW 23:14



CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD

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The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a different way of doing Sunday School. We use specially designed rooms called Atria. An Atrium is a dedicated space prepared to meet the spiritual needs of the child. It features soft carpeting, natural lighting, and hand-made materials for lessons that center on scripture, liturgy, and prayer.

Each Atrium is designed for a three-year grouping of children: Level One is for ages 3–6, Level Two is for ages 6–9, and Level Three is for ages 9–12. Each of these age groupings recognize distinct developmental periods and phases of growth of the child, based on principles of the Montessori Method.

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is grounded in the belief that the child already has a relationship with God before she or he arrives in the Atrium, but desires to more fully understand the nature of that relationship and to celebrate it. The Catechesis seeks to help the child's relationship with God flourish by introducing and pondering with the child core mysteries of the faith in a way that is respectful of both the child at this phase of her/his development and the rich scriptural and liturgical heritage of our faith tradition.

Sunday School teachers in the Atrium are called Catechists. These individuals undergo over 100 hours of Atrium training, and fill the unique role as both the preparer and facilitator of the Atrium space and as a co-listener with the child before the Word of God.

LEVEL ONE: AGES 3-6

The Level One Atrium is designed with the goal of helping the young child fall in love with God. Lessons begin with and center on the idea that the Good Shepherd loves and cares for his sheep. Children are introduced to the Prophet who announces the way of Jesus, and the infancy narratives of Jesus. Level One also introduces the parables of the Kingdom of God like The Mustard Seed, The Pearl of Great Price, The Leaven, The Lost Sheep, The Hidden Treasure, and The Grains of Wheat. In Level One, children begin to understand the liturgical colors and seasons of the Church, Communion, the Altar, and the Sacrament of Baptism. Through map puzzles and a model of Jerusalem, children learn the geography of where Jesus lived. In this first level Atrium, children are given lessons that introduce them to care of the environment, care of self, and care of the community around them. Because of this developmental period of the young child, there are a number of practical life lessons and skills employed at this level that help the child gain concentration and stillness, which aid in listening to God's Word.



Lessons offered in Level One are intentionally few, essential, and repetitive. Observing the child in this level, we see that the work of the child is his or her prayer. The child aged 3–6 is encouraged to pray spontaneously, especially in the form most natural to the young child – praise and thanksgiving. Over time, prayers from the larger Christian tradition are introduced to help link the child's prayers to the prayers of the larger Church.



LEVEL TWO: AGES 6-9

The Level Two Atrium expands upon the work begun in Level One, understanding that the child aged 6-9 now has a wider social sphere. While work is done individually in Level One, children in Level Two will often work with a partner or in small groups. This Atrium is designed with the goal of helping the child build a right and loving relationship with God. Having meditated on the nature of the Kingdom of God in Level One, the older child begins to ask new questions about the Kingdom: “When did it begin?” and “Will it end?”

In Level Two, the child is introduced, by way of a cosmic lesson, to the unfolding of history in a great work called The History of the Kingdom of God. The child is invited to ponder three key moments of creation – creation, redemption and Parousia (a time when God will be all in all, no more war or sickness, etc.) – and to wonder how God has become increasingly known to humankind through a series of gifts: creation, fellow humans, and the gift of God’s very own self in the person of Jesus.

The Level Two child begins to explore the mystery of Jesus by studying more intensely the land in which he lived and the core events of his birth, life, death, and resurrection. At this level, we focus more deeply on the teachings of Jesus, expanding upon the Kingdom parables introduced in Level One and introducing the parables of The Pharisee and the Tax Collector, The Insistent Friend, The Ten Bridesmaids, The Good Samaritan, The Sower, The Found Coin and The Found Sheep, and The Forgiving Father, as well as the Maxims, or sayings, of Jesus.

Through expanded presentations on the Sacraments of Baptism and Communion and continued meditations on scriptural images of Christ, the Level Two child is shown how to love and listen to God, and is invited to a joy-filled path of abundant living in the Christian Faith. Children in this level also begin to plan prayer rituals for themselves that include reading from scripture, praying the Psalms, petition, praise, and song.

LEVEL THREE: AGES 9-12

The Level Three Atrium child is invited to enter into history more deeply exploring the “Plan of God” in greater detail through extensive study of the Old Testament and the evolution of civilizations of the Middle East and Europe. The child in this level is introduced to key moments and figures in the history of Israel particularly and is aided in identifying common threads that run throughout this history. Detailed Bible Studies called Typologies are undertaken on the topics of Creation, Sin, Flood, Abraham, Moses, Exodus, and the Call of the Prophets. Other important work revolves around the Miracles of Jesus, expansion of work on the Parables, sayings from the Sermon on the Mount, and the Virtues. The Level Three Child comes to understand the basics of Church history, with particular emphasis placed on deeper understanding of the two sacraments of the church: Holy Communion and Baptism. The Concept of Social Justice is introduced, and students plan and lead communal prayer services as a part of their Level Three work.



ALL ARE WELCOME!

We invite you to visit our Atria and to observe our children as they work, study, and pray. The best way to better understand this unique and transformational means of Christian Formation for children is to experience it for yourself, and you are warmly encouraged to do so. The Atrium is open on Sunday mornings, 9:00 AM - 10:15 AM. Contact Reggie Holder or Lauri Song to schedule a visit.



Highlands

UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Love God & Serve Your Neighbor