

Church of Saint Benedict

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Catechesis of the **Good Shepherd** – **CGS**

Catechetical Policy

2026-2027

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Our Mission: To share our faith with the children so they will recognize the Shepherd's voice and truly fall in love with Jesus.

Welcome to Saint Benedict's Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

GOAL

The goal of our Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is to assist the children to enter in the mystery of our faith. The catechist serves the mystery of God and the child while listening to God with each child. Children will intuitively encounter God's Living Word to come to their hearts inside of the Atrium.

At the Atrium, the children are engaged to make connections with the Mass while developing a sense of reverence and celebration of God's love. The CGS is based upon the belief that young children can and do experience God. Central to the catechesis is the Atrium, a special environment created to nurture the child's spirituality with handmade materials.

METHOD

Founded on the pedagogical principles of Maria Montessori, with the child at the center of learning, CGS is rooted in the Bible and the Liturgy.

CGS USA was formed in 1984, in North America, with its main aim being that of "involving adults and children in a common religious experience in which the religious values of childhood (contemplation and enjoyment of God) are predominant." This method has been developed over the last sixty years, beginning in Rome with the work of two Roman Catholic women, Hebrew Scripture scholar Dr. Sofia Cavalletti and Montessori educator Gianna Gobbi. The method and the vision of the child is based on the work of Dr. Maria Montessori, on a deep love for God and the child, and on the faith of the Catholic Church.

FAITH

The key of CGS is to assist and support the children falling in love with God. It is about an encounter with God. Presentations draw from two main sources, the Bible and the Liturgy. Presentations are age appropriate.

After a child is introduced to a Scripture or a Liturgical moment, the child is given the option to use the material to further explore the presentation. The work time leads to prayer and gives time for the child with their Inner Teacher, Christ. During each week's communal prayer, usually occurring at the end of the Atrium session, the children gather around a prayer table for a celebration of God's love that involves songs, gestures, and silence.

In this faith formation method, the catechist serves the mystery of God and the child, and the catechist listens to God with the children. In the Atrium, children grow in relationship with God, in community with one another, and in the Presence of Jesus in the Church. Children will be presented the historical Jesus as who He was and who He is now.

ADMISSION POLICY

Our CGS is open for children 3-12 years old (they must be potty trained). We recommend attendance in Atrium I for a minimum of one full year. This provides for easier acclimation of our youngest children in CGS. We also recommend that a child attend their age-appropriate level for at least one full year before advancing to the next level since each level builds upon the previous level.

Since space inside of the Atrium is limited, we prioritize first our own parishioners before we accept registrations from other parishes. If you are not a member of the Church of St. Benedict, you must submit a letter from your current Pastor which gives his permission to attend CGS here. All documentation must be presented at registration.

Parents must present a copy of each of their child's Baptismal Certificate accompanied by the fee and the completed registration form. It is also required that all pertinent health information of any condition be brought to the attention of the DRE at registration.

REGISTRATION

Each level follows a three-year cycle as we follow the Liturgical Calendar with new material presented each of the three years.

Level I - age 3-6 (Preschool through K) is offered Sundays and Thursdays.

Level II - age 6-9 (1st through 3rd grade) is offered on Sundays and Thursdays.

Level III - age 9-12 (4th through 6th grade) is offered on Sundays and Thursdays.

Registration forms are available online on our website, www.churchofsaintbenedict.com, under the Religious Education tab. We will also be allowing registration online with payment via credit card or bank account.

FINANCIAL

A CGS fee will be collected annually and is payable at registration. If you are unable to pay the registration fee, assistance can be obtained on an as needed basis. Please contact the Church if financial assistance is required.

SESSIONS

Classes are scheduled Thursday evenings from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM for Levels I, II and III.

Sunday sessions are from 9:30 to 10:45 AM for all levels. We encourage families to attend 8:30 AM or 11:00 AM Mass before or after the session each week.

SUNDAY MASS

Sunday Mass is our central act of worship where we can join together as a community of faith. Our attendance nourishes us and gives us the strength to love and serve one another throughout the week. It is a privilege to be able to participate in Mass every Sunday.

A child acquires a sense of belonging to St. Benedict's Parish as a Roman Catholic community of faith by coming to Sunday Mass and by participating in parish activities. CGS attendance does not replace Mass attendance on Sunday or Saturday.

Our CGS is based on the Bible and the Liturgy and the presentations in class use familiar items that we have at Church and that are used during the Mass. Our catechesis is aimed at experiencing God's Life with us and this is offered to us by participation in the sacraments. The Mass is the time and place when the Good Shepherd "calls his sheep" to a particular encounter in the Bread and in the Wine that truly is Jesus.

STUDENT DRESS CODE

Dress needs to be modest, neat, and in good taste. All extremes in attire should be avoided and good judgment should prevail. Cleats and muddy shoes/sneakers may not be worn.

LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

We will follow the example of Jesus when we gather. Our expectation is that everyone gathers with a spirit of welcoming, caring, and cooperation.

Respect and courtesy are required by all students. At the Atrium, children will be encouraged to use a low voice. In case of misbehavior or use of inappropriate or abusive language by any student, the director, catechist, and parents/guardians will counsel with the student to achieve a code of conduct conducive to a good learning situation.

PUNCTUALITY

Students are expected to arrive on time and parents/guardians are expected to retrieve their students on time. Due to the limited amount of time of each CGS session, catechists must begin promptly to cover the required presentations. Excessive tardiness will be brought to the attention of the parents/guardians and dealt with on an individual basis. Excessive tardiness may result in a student not advancing to the next level or not receiving a Sacrament when expected.

ARRIVAL & DISMISSAL

Arrival for Thursday Sessions: We gather inside the Church for arrival at 6:00 PM. Families should use the front door to enter the building and report to Church.

Dismissal for Thursday Sessions: Our Atrium I and II students will be dismissed from inside of the Church/chapel at 7:30 PM and parents/guardians should wait at the gathering area. Atrium Level III students will walk toward the gathering space of our Church and meet their families there or outside at the parking lot. Please note that we will not allow any child to exit from the educational wing door, unless in company of one of our PREP or CGS catechists.

Arrival for Sunday Sessions: On Sunday mornings, our sessions begin promptly at 9:30 AM. Parents/guardians may drop their students at their Atrium. Parents/guardians may not enter the Atrium. We encourage Mass attendance every Sunday as part of our CGS program. Starting or ending the Atrium session with Mass will help enhance your child's religious encounter with Jesus.

Dismissal for Sunday Sessions: Parents/guardians may wait at the gathering area in front of the PREP office until their children's dismissal at 10:45 AM. Please do not line up in front of the Atrium's doors since that may disrupt the children finishing their sessions.

ATTENDANCE

All children of the Parish age three to sixth grade may participate in our CGS program. It is ideal, but not necessary, that children have experience in the Level I Atrium before advancing to other levels. A child with no experience in Level I who wishes to enter a subsequent level will require an introductory class before regular scheduled sessions begin. Each level follows a three year cycle, so a child remains in one level for three years while being presented with new material each year. To enter Level III, a student should have experience in Levels I & II.

All students who attend CGS will be prepared to receive their First Penance and First Holy Communion Sacraments. Students will receive these Sacraments in third grade. After completing Level III of CGS, a student will then attend Introduction to the Sacrament of Confirmation preparation class in seventh grade and attend the Sacrament preparation class in eighth grade. Eighth grade students will receive the Sacrament of Confirmation in the Fall.

Regular attendance is important at each level since new material is presented by the Catechist during each class. Excessive absences may result in a student not advancing to the next level or not receiving a Sacrament with their classmates. If a child is ill or unable to attend class, an e-mail to the catechist is appreciated.

A GLIMPSE INTO THE ATRIUMS

Level I

This Atrium is for children ages three to six (Preschool through Kindergarten). The Holy Spirit is invited to be the true Teacher of all present in this space. Whether the children are listening to God's Word, are working with materials to aid meditation, or are singing together, all is prayer in the atrium.

The most essential truths of the Christian message are proclaimed to the children. Those truths are drawn not just from Scripture, but also from the other great treasure of the Church, the Liturgy. One of the first presentations introduces the Liturgical seasons of the Church, including a discussion of the vestments worn by the priest at different times of the year. As we proceed through the school year, we observe those Liturgical seasons in the Atrium.

In addition, children gain greater understanding of what they will see and hear at Mass. They learn the correct names of the objects of the altar, and never tire of setting the model altar themselves and naming the articles. We also meditate with the children on the gestures of the priest during Mass, including preparation of the chalice, lavabo, epiclesis, and offering. The children learn a language of prayer through Scripture and the Liturgy. They feel a strong connection to Jesus after hearing the Parable of the Good Shepherd. Children recognize the Shepherd's voice, and truly fall in love with Jesus.

Level II

This Atrium is for children ages six to nine (first grade through third grade). Students learn the new image of God is the True Vine, a Trinitarian representation of God, where the disciple's role is not just to stay close and follow (as with the Good Shepherd), but to participate in the life of the Vine. A timeline of the history of the kingdom of God highlights the three great moments in salvation history: Creation, Redemption, and Parousia (when God will be all in all), while inviting the children to ponder what they are being called to write on the "blank page" of history that is being lived now. We visualize the Bible as a library of books, using a box filled with small wooden models, color coded for Old and New Testament, to represent each book of the Bible. As preparation for First Reconciliation, the children are first assured of the mercy of God through the parables of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Forgiving Father. They are introduced to the Great Commandment and a work called "The Maxims" (virtues) which highlights specific moral directives of Jesus and helps the children to examine their conscience.

Level III

This Atrium is for children ages nine to twelve (fourth grade through sixth grade). Students experience the presentations built on the foundations of personal and social morality introduced in Level II. The children understand that their Baptism calls them to follow Jesus and spread his Light in the world. After having meditated on the Great Commandment, the Maxims, and parables such as the Good Samaritan in Level II, the children are introduced to the Ten Commandments and the virtues. They continue to ponder salvation history with a timeline called the Plan of God – God self-revelation to the Hebrew people, the Incarnation of Jesus from among that people, and God’s continued presence with us in history and through the sacraments and the Word. Using the Old Testament, we examine the history of the Jewish people and do typology studies of creation, sin, Abraham, Noah, and Moses. Level III concludes with a detailed exploration of sacramental rites and of the Mass.

Mass-centered presentations continue to foster not only an understanding of, but also a greater hunger for Jesus’ presence in the Eucharist. Children will grasp how much they are loved by God. They may desire to set up a prayer space at home and keep a Bible at their bedside to read before going to sleep.

RECEPTION OF THE SACRAMENTS

First Penance and First Holy Communion

CGS students will usually receive these Sacraments in second grade.

Confirmation

Students in PREP eight will receive Confirmation. A student receives the proper formation by attending both PREP seven and PREP eight.

Confirmation takes place in the Fall at the discretion of the Bishop. PREP students from St. Benedict, LaSalle students, and PREP students from St. John de la Salle receive the sacrament together. The sacrament is celebrated either at the Church of St. Benedict or at St. John de la Salle Church in Shillington. The location alternates annually between the two Churches.

CANCELLATION/EMERGENCY SCHOOL CLOSING

Occasionally it becomes necessary to cancel classes due to the weather. In case of inclement weather, the following policy will be in effect:

- If public schools cancel or have an early dismissal, there will be no CGS that evening, unless the weather improves in the afternoon.
- For Sunday Sessions please use common sense. If Mass is canceled, our CGS sessions will be cancelled.
- Check your e-mail: Catechists will communicate with you about cancellations.

VOLUNTEERS

Parents/guardians are invited and encouraged to assist at CGS after the proper training. All volunteers must have completed all required clearances to work with the children. Please call the Religious Education Office if you wish to help in any way or if you have further questions. Every year we look for volunteers to be certified and lead the Atriums. If you think you could help God's children to this amazing adventure of establishing a relationship with God, this call is for you. The Second Vatican Council Document Catechesis Tradendae express the Church's belief that the "aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch but in communion, in intimacy with Jesus Christ."

HANDBOOK REVISIONS

Saint Benedict's PREP Office reserves the right to amend this Handbook for just cause. Revisions were last made on April 22, 2026.

*This program voluntarily complies with the provisions of the Buckley Amendment. Non-custodial parents will be given access to unofficial copies of student records, and catechists will be available to discuss the student's progress **unless** a court order providing otherwise is filed with the Director.*