

## Good Shepherd Catechesis Catechist

### ➤ Overview

The *Good Shepherd Catechesis* is a parish-based approach to the religious formation/development of children from birth through adolescence, established in the Archdiocese of Toronto over twenty years ago. This catechesis originated in 1954 in Rome, inspired by the Montessori principles of education.

The *atrium*, an essential element in the Good Shepherd Catechesis, helps the relationship between God and the child to flourish. It is the prepared environment/room that can be compared to a retreat house where recollection and silence are facilitated. The atrium is a place in which the only Teacher is Christ; both children and adults place themselves in a listening stance before his Word and seek to penetrate the mystery of liturgical celebration. After a theme has been presented by one of the Catechists, the child is free to choose an activity that will make possible the inner dialogue with the “Interior Teacher”.

In the atrium, children and adults live together a religious experience, which facilitates participation in the wider community of the family, the Church and other social spheres. It is a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation and prayer.

### ➤ Activities/Responsibilities

- The primary commitment of the adult is to serve as a Catechist with the children in the atrium. The groups may involve children approximately 3-6, 6-9 or 9-12 years of age. The duration of each session with the children in the atrium is usually about 2 hours, meeting once per week. There are at least two Catechists, always the same persons, with each group of children during each session.
- The Catechist prepares the atrium and maintains order within it, so that the atrium can foster concentration, silence and contemplation in both the child and adult (Catechist).
- The Catechist prepares the catechetical materials used by the children in the atrium as much as possible, while collaborating with others in areas that are beyond one’s abilities
- The Catechist presents key themes from the Bible and liturgy to the children.
- The Catechist is also concerned with helping the adults of the parish community (e.g. parents, priests, other Catechists, etc.) open their eyes to the hidden riches of the child, especially to the child’s spiritual wealth, so that the adults will be drawn to learn from the child and to serve her/him.

*(Individual Parishes: Schedule of Atrium sessions and age groups served)*

**The Activities/Responsibilities listed above may not completely reflect the ministry performed at this parish. Please refer to the ‘Other Specifics’ box for duties that are specific to this parish.**

#### Other specifics:

---

---

---

---

➤ **Skills, Experience, and Qualifications**

- Is a fully initiated member of the Catholic Church in good standing.
- Must be at least 18 years of age.
- Is recognized within the parish community as a person of good reputation.
- The Catechist is willing and able to observe and study the vital needs of the child and the manifestations of those vital needs according to the developmental stage of the child
- The child, particularly the religious life of the child, is central to the interest and commitment of the Catechist of the Good Shepherd.
- The Catechist and the child live a shared religious experience according to the teaching of the gospel: “Except if you become as little children, you cannot enter the kingdom of God” (Matthew 18:3)
- The Catechist has a desire continually to go deeper into the Christian message through knowledge of the biblical and liturgical sources and of the ongoing living tradition of the Church, including the theological, social and ecumenical movements, which enliven the Church today.
- The Catechist is able to work with adults in a variety of settings, in a mature, friendly and cooperative manner.
- The Catechist is able and willing to make the time commitment required.
- In cases of emergency, knows contacts and/or procedures.

➤ **Personal Traits and Qualities**

- The Catechist is able to work together with other *Catechists* in a spirit of unity and harmony, in tune with God’s plan for communion in the history of salvation and in keeping with the theme of unity so strongly expressed in the parables of the Good Shepherd (John 10:1 ff). They generously offer their talents and experiences for the good of all. (22) This close collaboration is manifested through the many levels of community within the Good Shepherd Catechesis i.e. Atrium Community, National Association and International Association
- The *Catechist* has a deep sense of spirituality with an ongoing desire for a growing faith life and nourishment of the same
- The attitude of the adult has to be marked by humility before the capacities of the child, establishing a right rapport with the child, that is to say, respecting the personality of the child, and waiting for the child to reveal himself/herself.
- Is comfortable with being accountable and is sensitive to the observance of proper boundaries.

➤ **Orientation and Training**

Standard parish orientation program.

The *Catechist* has participated in, and met all requirements of the, Level I: Foundations Course; the child birth – 6 component of the Good Shepherd Catechesis Certificate Programme, jointly offered by the University of St. Michael’s College and the Archdiocese of Toronto Catholic Office of Religious Education.

Before journeying with the older children in the atrium, completion of Level II: The Child 6-9 and Level III: the child 9-12 is required.

The Catechist has personally prepared a comprehensive, and yet developing, collection (album) of guidelines for presentations given to children.

The Catechist has personally prepared a comprehensive, and yet developing, collection of sources for theological background to presentations.

The Catechist has personally prepared a comprehensive, and yet developing, collection of sources for pedagogical background to presentations.

When possible, the newly formed Catechist will “mentor” or team with another more experienced Catechist in the atrium setting with children.

The Catechist is able and willing to be faithful to the tradition of the Catechesis as handed to us by Sofia Cavalletti and Gianna Gobbi, when working in settings bearing the name Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

➤ **Participant Group**

The Catechist may serve children 3-6, 6-9, 9-12 years of age and their families

The Catechist will minister with fellow Catechists of the Good Shepherd Catechesis with the support of the parish community.

*(Individual Parishes: Names of Catechists, director of atrium, families, etc.)*

➤ **Support, Supervision, and Evaluation**

The director and co-directors of the Good Shepherd Catechesis atrium within a parish will facilitate mutual support/evaluation among the Catechists of that parish. As well, support and resources are offered through the Good Shepherd Catechesis Office (Catholic Office of Religious Education, Archdiocese of Toronto) to all those journeying with children in this catechesis. The support and collaboration extends to the American National Office and then to the International Council centered in Rome.

Good Shepherd Catechesis Office, Catholic Pastoral Centre, Tel. #(416) 934-3400 ext. 511

The Catechists are ultimately responsible to their Pastor and pastoral staff, on whose behalf they minister in their parish.

➤ **Length of Ministry Appointment**

\_\_\_ year term.

The Catechist makes a commitment to be with the children weekly for the full liturgical cycle.

Some parishes ask for a three year commitment in order that the Catechists and children form a group that does not change for that period of time.

➤ **Benefits and Working Conditions**

It is the wonder and joy of the children’s encounter with God that has given birth to the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd. It is that joy and wonder that is experienced by the adult, too, through the time spent together with the children in the atrium. This is the greatest benefit to the Catechist as they share this environment of prayer and contemplation.

The atrium is usually a closed room with access to washroom facilities. The number of children in each group will depend on the size of the room. Two Catechists are present with the children at each session.

This is a volunteer position which requires a time commitment of \_\_\_ hours per week/ \_\_\_ hours per month.

➤ **Screening Recommendations**

This is a High risk position.

Completion of a Volunteer Information Form is required.

An interview and personal reference checks are required.

A Criminal Record Check is required.

Training and orientation are required.

There will be supervision and periodic evaluations.

Participant follow-ups will be conducted.

**This ministry position description accurately reflects the Ministry of Good Shepherd**

**Catechesis Catechist currently practiced at \_\_\_\_\_.**  
(Parish Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parish Volunteer Screening Committee

\_\_\_\_\_  
Pastor

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Prepared by: Archdiocese of Toronto**