

# Why The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd?

## *A letter from our Pastor*

Every church has to wrestle with the question, “How do we minister to our kids?” To what degree can our children comprehend the Bible and what is the best way for our church to teach our kids about the Scriptures?” The heart of that second question “how best to teach our kids about the Scriptures” is what lies behind our decision to implement something called Catechesis of the Good Shepherd with the children of Faith Presbyterian Church.

It comes down to a matter of preferred *pedagogy* – a little known word that simply means ‘the science of teaching’. We’ve been giving a lot of thought as to what is the means by which we can most effectively help our children to learn the Scriptures. For example, many Children’s Sunday School materials can tend towards either trivializing or moralizing the Scriptures. This becomes especially problematic when so many of the stories of the Scriptures themselves were not originally written for the purpose of a moral lesson, but rather to teach us in the larger story of knowing God. The widespread practice of striving to make a moral lesson out of the various stories of Scripture has caused generations of kids to miss seeing the very heart of God that is revealed within these stories.

Our concern is that, if our children get anything out of their time in Children’s Sunday School, then what we need to be most concerned with is that they grow closer to God and know Him better. We believe that the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program will best enable us to help our kids to know God and understand the Scriptures – in a way that will stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Perhaps the best way to explain **The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd program** is to see it as an approach to spiritual formation for children. We don’t typically hear the words ‘spiritual formation’ and ‘children’ mentioned in the same sentence. Many churches can sometimes operate as if the process of spiritual formation doesn’t begin to take place in a person until they become teenagers. We strongly beg to differ!

We are working from the approach that the Children’s Sunday School hour is not a time for mere ‘babysitting’, but rather a time that bears tremendous potential for spiritual growth in the hearts of our kids and we see the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd as the best means we have found to help develop that spiritual formation.

The “pedagogy” of the Catechesis is rooted in the Bible, in the liturgy of the church, and in the educational principles of Maria Montessori.

The Catechesis program is used in 35 countries around the world – primarily in Catholic and Episcopal churches. It is innovative at best (and perhaps even controversial) for a Presbyterian/ Reformed church like Faith to be implementing a children’s Sunday School that is used primarily in Roman Catholic churches. To that concern, I bring up the word *pedagogy* again. What we find appealing is the method by which children are instructed.

We certainly differ with the Catechesis material in regards to some of the theology that is taught in the Catechesis curriculum and, where the material does not square with our understanding of the Scriptures and with our theological values, we will prepare lessons that reflect how we interpret the Scriptures. Indeed, we have been given express permission by the Catechesis instructors to adapt the material to fit our theological values. Were that not the case, we would not be implementing the curriculum to begin with.

We see the method of the Catechesis curriculum as a vehicle to help us immerse our kids in the Scriptures. As we make the Catechesis material our own (theologically speaking), we see the Catechesis program as an effective means to help us get our kids understand God and His word in a way that will stay with them for decades to come. In other words, you may have a different theological perspective from your neighbor who goes to a Catholic church, but you will each drive your respective mini-vans to arrive at your respective places of worship. We are implementing the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd curriculum because we see it as an *effective vehicle* to bring our kids to the story of the Bible.

In closing, I want to extend my appreciation to our Catechesis Children’s Sunday School teachers for the specific sacrifice they have made in preparing to teach this material. This past June (in an un-air-conditioned building, no less!), Claire Cross, Cheryl Dorsch, Suzanne Dorsch, Lisa Cadora and I spent an entire week (40 hours) attending the Catechesis training. These ladies have committed to teaching Children’s Sunday School because they see that as their primary calling and ministry to the congregation of Faith Presbyterian Church. We as a church are indebted to them for their time and effort, not only in recent months, but also in the years to come. Please be in prayer for them in this essential ministry to our children.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact either myself or my wife Lisa. Grace and Peace, *Pastor Matt*