

## CATECHESIS OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD AND CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The atrium, or special environment, is carefully prepared with beautifully designed materials to foster learning and contemplation, growth and concentration. It paves the way for a greater participation in the liturgy of the Church. Each child is enabled to participate more fully, consciously and actively in Mass and the other sacraments, as well as in the larger parish community.

The materials in the atrium offer a full spectrum of learning styles. The different mediums employed help strengthen children's concentration and various motor skills and thereby contribute to growth in their self-confidence.

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is that children progress according to their own pace of learning. Children with special needs of all kinds



experience acceptance among peers and more of a comfort level with the learning process because they are not hurried or required to complete a particular task within a certain time frame before having to move on to yet another new concept or experience. This approach focuses more on nurturing individual capabilities rather than covering a predetermined amount of content as a group, allowing each child to participate as fully as possible.

The catechist observes each child individually as he or she is engaged in the learning process and then presents additional formational opportunities to draw the child deeper into a knowledge and experience of their faith based on that child's interest and ability. It is particularly this individuality and child-centered

approach to learning that lends itself to full inclusion because it can more readily accommodate the rich diversity of gifts and abilities of children who come to the atrium. Moreover, with the child-centered approach to learning found in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, children with special needs are less likely to suffer the loss of self-esteem and confidence which often results in anxiety and provokes inappropriate behavior.

Allowing quiet, individual experiences, together with group and one-on-one interactions in the atrium empowers each child to encounter God in his or her own way and time. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd recognizes that all children are in a relationship with God and seeks to foster that relationship as much as possible.