

CHRISTIAN FORMATION

Director of Christian Formation

Tommie Moore

Catechesis of the Good Shepherd is a faith formation experience for children ages 3 to 12 years old. It is based upon the belief that young children can and do experience God. The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd's work is done in an Atrium, an environment created to nurture children's spirituality. This is done by proclaiming the Gospel through the parable method, prayer, singing, silence, and exploring liturgical events. Hands-on materials are used to help children and adults reflect together upon the great mysteries of the Christian faith.

Here's just a sample of what we explored with your children in 2015:

Children 3 years old-K explored the way in which the Magi responded when God's slow and careful plan reaches a moment of fruition in the birth of Jesus. They explored the meaning of the parables, The Hidden Treasure, The Growing Seed and The Pearl of Great Price. They explored the city of Jerusalem to understand that Jesus was a real person who was born, lived, died, rose again in the land of Israel and that the resurrection was the fulfillment of God's plan. They learned gestures used in the celebration of the Eucharist and explored the relationship between Jesus, the Good Shepherd and humankind. They also learned the sign of the cross and how to exchange the Peace.

Children in 1st – 3rd grades explored the parable of The True Vine, The Good Samaritan and The Found Coin. They explored the empty tomb and the resurrection as the historical "evidence" that forms the bedrock of our faith. They also explored the gift of light and life of the Risen Christ in the sacrament of baptism. They studied The Lord's Prayer phrase by phrase, lifting up Jesus' model for prayer and explored what Jesus' is trying to tell us about prayer. The children received their own Bibles for their use in this atrium. They worked with La Fettuccia, the long blue ribbon that explores the big picture (globalita) of the history of the kingdom of God.

Children in 4th – 6th grades explored The Plan of God as worked out in the Bible and human history. They explored the growth of the Kingdom of God and the paradigm of Creation-Redemption-Parousia served as a guide for a more thorough exploration of scripture. They learned about Abraham's journey in faith, focusing on worship during his time and the nomadic life at that time. They studied the maxims focusing on the order and rules of creation, and the rules of humankind, God's order and our place in it. They examined Rite II of the Holy Eucharist and its structure, including the prayers of the Liturgy of the Word, the preparation of the Gifts, the Eucharistic prayer and Communion. They also examined the Propers of the Eucharist, what they are and how they change throughout the liturgical year. They studied the Creation Typology, with a focus on Adam and The Garden of Eden.

We are fortunate to have as our certified catechists: Natalie Sparks Bullock, Stacy Carroll, Tricia Edmonson, Mary Howard King, Joellen Murphree, Kamme Riddle and Marrion Winders. Assisting in the atria each Sunday is Ashley Arthur and Robin Bryan. This group is strongly committed in helping your children deepen their relationship with God and Jesus the Good Shepherd while helping them to participate more fully in our liturgy.

While the training to become a certified catechist involves 90+ hours of instruction, please know that you do not have to be a certified catechist to spend time with the children in the atria. We are always looking for volunteers to assist the Catechist and children during their time in the atria. The assistant training only takes about an hour and we'd love to have you! If you would like to learn more about CGS, we have numerous books and resources available in the Christian Education office or you may join us in the atria

on Sunday mornings at 9:30 a.m. Simply observing the children at work or enjoying the peaceful environment can be meaningful to adults of all ages.

For our youth in 7th – 12th grades, they explored topical, Bible-based lessons based on current events and other trending subjects that have an immediate relevancy to youth. With the wise guidance of Mike Fitzpatrick and Josh Westmoreland, our youth delved in to such topics as football's "deflategate" controversy as they examined God's desire for us to live our lives with integrity. They discussed how social media feeds are full of pictures of dresses, tuxes and couples around Prom time and talked about relationships, specifically about how God pursues us and the hearts of all humanity. They explored the impact of technology on our ability to live as faithful Christians and about Facebook's announcement of a new "dislike" button and how learning empathy can shape our spiritual lives. They also discussed our Christian response to the Syrian refugee crisis and how to find and provide community.

Amber Nichols-Buckley directed this year's Vacation Bible School as we returned to a 5-day format. Children ages 3 years through 6th grade joined us in our week long "Quest for the Kingdom." We learned about God's love and protection when we wear the whole armour of God. With the help of Charlie Buckley, the children made a shield with each of their hand prints on it, which now hangs in the Christian Education hallway, as a reminder of God's love and protection for all of His children. A short program with the VBS children during our Sunday morning service helped wrap up our time together for the week.

As you can see, our time with your children is very full and our conversations with them are always enlightening. We look forward to our time with them in the new year, as we continue helping them explore and learn to live out their faith.

For adults:

Education for Ministry is a 4-year course studying the entire sweep of the Christian tradition from the earliest period to the present. Participants learn the disciplines of biblical exegesis and interpretation, systematic theology, church history, ethics, liturgics, and ascetical theology. Through study, prayer, and reflection, EfM groups move toward a new understanding of the fullness of God's kingdom. Participants are given weekly assignments to study with the help of resource guides. In the weekly seminars, members have an opportunity to share their insights and discoveries, as well as discuss questions which the study materials raise for them. Through discussion and guided reflection, the seminars furnish an opportunity to deepen understanding of the reading materials. More important is the development of skills in theological reflection. The goal is to learn to think theologically. By examining their own beliefs and their relationship to our culture and the tradition of our Christian faith, participants can learn what it means to be effective ministers in the world. In coming to terms with the notion that everything we do has potential for manifesting the love of Christ, we discover that our ministry is at hand wherever we turn. Year 1: The Old Testament; Year 2: The New Testament; Year 3: Church History; Year 4: Theological Choices. We are fortunate to have Pam Carman and Ken Murphree serving as co-EfM mentors. Their role is not that of a teacher but as a guide for the group as they navigate the study material. Ken and Pam are both EfM graduates and received their mentor training at Sewanee in the summer of 2015. I am grateful for the leadership, experience, knowledge and discernment Pam and Ken bring to their role as mentors.

EfM meets on Tuesday evenings during the traditional school year and registration is required for this course. We will open registration for the 2016/2017 session of EfM in June and welcome your participation! For more information, I invite you to contact me at tommie@allsaintstupelo.org or Pam Carman or Ken Murphree.

In addition to EfM, we offered several adult classes in 2015 that explored a variety of topics. In the spring, Fr. Paul led "All Saints' 101", which offered an in depth look at the programs and ministries of All Saints'. In the fall, he led the confirmation classes, for youth and adults, which explored the Episcopal Church, our Anglican history, traditions and our rich liturgy and music. "Understanding the Sunday Scriptures", led by the very capable Les Alvis continued in 2015, studying Biblical texts appointed by the Revised Common Lectionary. This class is made for those who wish to journey deeper into the message and meaning of each Sunday's lesson. The class critically analyzes the Biblical texts, asking questions such as: Who wrote the text and when was it written? What is the historical and social context of the text? What was the author's intent in writing the text? The class then discusses what the texts tell us about God and what the texts mean for us today. This class meets year round in the south breakout room of the Parish Hall on Sundays at 9:30 a.m. and all are invited to join in for the weekly, lively discussions. My deepest thanks to Fr. Paul and Les Alvis for sharing their gifts through teaching during 2015.

The total Christian Formation budget for 2015 was \$4,650. Catechesis of the Good Shepherd was allocated \$1,750 for materials, supplies and resources for all 3 atria. We spent \$626.78. The balance of the Christian Formation budget in the amount of \$2,900 was allocated for materials for youth and adult Sunday School classes, materials for confirmation classes, Vacation Bible School and supplemental materials. We spent \$2,591.46.

I offer my thanks to all of the parishioners that volunteer their time in Christian Formation. They are a dedicated group of folks and it shows! I encourage you and your children to take advantage of all of the Christian Formation offerings.