



### **Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Program**

St. Catharine Church and School are very excited about the new preschool/ early childhood center, opening in September, 2018. It will be a beautiful facility that will house a 5-Star excellent early childhood program!

The first and second floor of the new early childhood center will be classrooms to house multiple programs. The lower level of this center will be the Large Muscle/ Activity Room for the center and also the "Atrium". This Atrium houses the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Program. It is a way of religious formation for children that is quite different from published programs. It does not use a catechetical series of books or take place in a classroom. In this approach, there is a room (Atrium) prepared for children in which every object is a help to knowing God. It is a place of simplicity and order, prayer, work and community. Everything in this room, known as the atrium, is intended to be appropriate to the ages and sizes of the children who gather there. It is their religious needs that guide the catechesis. The atrium allows the children to come into contact with scripture and the liturgy of the church. This program is not new. It began in Rome in 1954.

The qualities most noticeable about the materials in the atrium are their simplicity and their order. Each material has its own place on the scripture shelf or on the liturgical shelf. There are also other centers in the room: a baptism area, an altar table, a geography area, a prayer corner. Above all, the room has a certain solemnity. The young child is shown how to walk slowly and speak softly to that, even though everyone in the atrium is busy and active, an atmosphere of silence permeates the atrium. Currently we have some materials for this room and will be adding on as we find additional funding.

- Due to the philosophy of the program, only those adults who are "certified" are to support the activities within this sacred space. We are very fortunate to now have three (3) of our preschool teachers complete the training. In order to complete this training, they must attend 80 hours of information sessions, read assigned texts, and observe in a Montessori and atrium environment for ten (10) hours.
- Currently, since we have three preschool teachers that have been trained, they will be the only ones able to supervise the Atrium.
- Looking ahead, the preschool will always have access to the Atrium during school hours. No additional students can be in the preschool during their hours due to licensing numbers.
- Continuing to plan for the future, we are hopeful to get the Parish School of Religion involved in this program once they have had at least one person trained in the program. In addition, we will look to having other school teachers work toward certification so that it can be utilized by primary aged children.