

Dear Catechists of the Good Shepherd,



During our recent Consiglio gathering in Rome, we marveled once again at the incredible spread of the Catechesis throughout the world and the ever-increasing numbers of children who are getting the opportunity to listen to the voice of the Good Shepherd in an atrium or in working with the *I am the Good Shepherd* book series. We also celebrated the fact that there are groups of catechists in various parts of the world that have organized themselves in order to strengthen bonds of friendship and mutual support in their work with the catechesis, even though they have not yet fulfilled the requirements to be a Consiglio member association.

Yet we also needed to grapple with some problems that have arisen in the face of such rapid growth, including:

- Too much disparity in the way courses are given in various parts of the world (as to number of course hours, amount of course time dedicated to the participant's personal work, expectations regarding the album page work, etc.)
- In situations where a formation leader is invited by another country to give a course, there has often been a lack of communication between the formation leader and her/his own association as well as with the association most closely connected to the course site. This has sometimes resulted in course inconsistencies as well as unnecessary confusion and discord among catechists and associations.
- Another challenge is in countries where there might be an organized group, one which might even call itself an association, but which has not yet fulfilled the requirements (delineated in the 2002 Consiglio Assembly document) to be a member association of the International Consiglio. How will new formation leaders be recognized and approved if there is no member-association to accompany the catechist through the process of becoming a formation leader?

Once again, we must confront one of the greatest paradoxes of our work in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, one that the Gospel proposes and that Maria Montessori grappled with as well. It has to do with the true meaning and supreme importance of **freedom**, which is inseparable from "**the straight and narrow pathway.**" The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd has invited us to think of the "straight and narrow" pathway as "the essentials", the "ABC's of Christianity" for children but also for adults, which are reflected in the 32 Characteristics of the Catechesis. Our on-going challenge to remain on the level of essentiality with the children is mirrored in adult formation courses.

There is much room in the work of catechists' formation courses for the personality and particular gifts of the formation leader to shine through. Indeed, if we have deeply absorbed the essentials of our catechesis and have remained with the children in the atrium, and IF we adhere to the discipline of the "straight and narrow" as to the course content, the "atrium-like" mode of presenting and nurturing the personal work

of the participants, and the team approach, then those personal style differences can serve to enrich the message we are transmitting to other adults

Along with the importance of formation leaders (in whatever country) being unified as to the content and modality of CGS courses, the Consiglio members reaffirmed the essential guideline that **CGS courses must be offered by a team**. In the past, there has been a fair amount of resistance to this requirement, largely for financial reasons. What hosting body can afford to bring in two recognized and experienced formation leaders? Yet, a team could consist of only one such formation leader working with an “apprentice formation leader”, hopefully a local one who is somewhere on the path of becoming a recognized formation leader and needs the experience of assisting in a course. Nevertheless, the Consiglio re-affirmed the team approach as vital to the CGS course identity.

All of the Consiglio representatives agreed that raising up excellent formation leaders is a major priority of our associations’ work. We found that we were already in agreement as to what constitutes a strong formation leader. Among the many qualities named were:

*Someone who has fallen in love with this work and feels called to serve both the children and adults • who desires to be true to the spirit of the work. • who has completed Levels I, II, and III courses and has substantial experience in the atrium. • who is a prayerful person as well as a lover of God’s Word and the Eucharist. • someone who respects adults in the same way we respect children. • someone who not only offers courses but who is committed to on-going mentoring of those she has trained • a bridge-builder. • someone who is committed to ongoing study and refinement of her/his work, is open to change and ongoing formation. • someone who is not power-hungry but does what he/she does for the love and the joy of it. • a person who is faithful to the sources, remains in communication with the association and makes adjustments according to directives agreed upon by the larger CGS community. • someone who can collaborate on a team. • **someone who recognizes the child as the theologian and the necessity of remaining with the children in the atrium in order to stay fresh and essential with adults in courses...** (Bold font is used here because this guideline is both “counter-cultural” and very essential in our work of forming others to work in an atrium.)*

We asked ourselves: “How easy is it to find such people?” An even more challenging question for us is, “Can we simply recognize formation leaders and trust that they will be true to the essentials articulated in the Characteristics of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd as well as in the Formation Leader Handbook? What about accountability, on-going formation, and collaboration with one’s association? Big questions with no easy answers. However, in confronting some of the various challenges and in reaffirming CGS guidelines already in place, we also agreed on a few, concrete, **new directives**:

- **For all catechist formation courses, offered in the name of The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, anywhere in the world, at least one of the team members must be a “recognized formation leader” who is faithful to the 32 Characteristics of the Catechesis and the formation guidelines of the International Consiglio.** [Note: While we continue to honor the need for trained and experienced catechists to share the vision and content of CGS with fellow parishioners, especially parents and atrium assistants, we have found it necessary to make this distinction between “formal” and “informal” formation of adults in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.]
- **Recognition as a formation leader in the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd must come through one of the International Consiglio member associations, which currently are: Colombia, Mexico, USA, Italy, Germany, Australia.**
- **Those wishing to become recognized formation leaders in countries without a Consiglio member association shall apply to one of the Consiglio member associations, depending on language and**

where one has received one's training as a catechist. Certificates for "recognized formation leaders" will be issued by the corresponding Consiglio member association and will bear the Consiglio logo of the Good Shepherd image surrounding by the True Vine, indicating compliance with the formation standards of the International Consiglio.

The Consiglio representatives underscored the need for greater communication between formation leaders and their respective Consiglio member association when they are invited to give a course within their own country so that the course might be registered and supported, as well as to qualify for the course participant certificates to be issued by the Consiglio member associations.

- This protocol becomes all the more important **when a formation leader is invited to a lead a course outside her/his own country.** The Consiglio member association who has recognized the formation leader needs to be informed of the invitation so that they can in turn inform the Consiglio member association which is closest to the course site. Also, the formation leader leading a course will be asked to submit a brief report on the course at the conclusion of each part, so that another formation leader coming into the same area later can offer greater consistency to the participants
- The Missionaries of Charity leadership are being newly directed by the Board of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd to contact a Consiglio member association when they want a course. Likewise, **those who are invited to give courses to the Missionaries of Charity need to inform a Consiglio member association.** This will enable us to offer more consistency in their courses.

We also spent a good amount of time discussing **the importance of the catechist's album** as part of one's formation as a catechist and that the simplicity, objectivity, and essentiality of one's album becomes even more important as a formation leader. We shared our various experiences and input as to "best practices" in assisting course participants in the making of the album and acknowledged that there is no one and only way to do this. The fruit of these discussions will be shared by the respective Consiglio member associations directly with their formation leaders.

This Consiglio gathering felt very "new" in the history of our Consiglio gatherings since its founding in 1996; there was a far more active participation on the part of all the members. It seemed that, in these six years since Sofia's passing, we have realized how important it is that we work together more intentionally if we are to continue to be a "sign of unity" in safe-guarding the essential nature of our catechesis and its growth and strengthening in the world.

In the love of the Good Shepherd,  
and with renewed hope and confidence in the power of his voice and in our capacity to hear it as catechists,  
formation leaders and Consiglio members,

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International Board of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd  
November 2017