

## Catechesis of the Good Shepherd

Since 1954, In Rome, Italy, Sofia Cavalletti has pursued the revelation of the young child's religious potential, marking over thirty years of research and published material at both the preschool and elementary levels. With the "self-teaching" principles of Maria Montessori and the theological moorings of Hebrew scholarship, Scripture studies and Roman Catholic liturgy and doctrine, Cavalletti and her co-worker, Gianna Gobbi, developed an approach which not only appealed to the profound religious intuition of younger and older children, but which evolved from the children themselves. Today the work (still active in Rome) has emerging centers in Italy, Chad, Argentina, Columbia, Canada, Mexico and the United States.

### For the Young Child (Ages 4-6)

The 4-6 year old child is particularly capable of receiving and enjoying the most essential elements of our faith.

Materials on the life of Christ and his teachings help make the mystery of God concrete for the child. The geography materials establish Jesus as a real person in time and space and Israel as the land through which God realized salvation for all. Infancy narratives announce the Incarnation with the words of Scripture, moving from the Annunciation, to the Birth of Christ, to the Flight into Egypt. The model of Jerusalem and of the empty tomb are the starting point for the Paschal narratives which the child lives in a special way in celebrating the Liturgy of the Light.

Selected parables serve as keys to unlock the mystery of the kingdom of God and to nurture the child's natural sense of wonder. How beautiful and precious is the kingdom of God! How small it begins! How slowly it grows! How magnificent it becomes!

Through the arranging of the chalice, paten, altar cloth, candles, and crucifix, the child becomes familiar with the articles of the Mass. The child lives his relationship with God in a particular way in the liturgy. The 4-6 year old child enters the mystery of the Mass through the most important gestures including the preparation of the chalice, the epiclesis and offering, and the gesture of peace. From these gestures, the Mass emerges as the Sacrament of the Gift. The child becomes acquainted with the historical character of the liturgy through the events of the Last Supper, Christ's death, and, His resurrection.

The liturgical colors and calendar situate the child in the church year expressing the Pascal Mystery – Christ has died, Christ is risen, and Christ will come again. A prayer corner reflects the liturgical cycle with appropriate colors, prayers, songs, banners and readings to enhance the rituals and celebrations of the seasons.