



The theme for the 60th Anniversary Celebrations of Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, held in Phoenix, Arizona, USA from 1st October to 4th October, 2014, was “**The New Child – The New Adult – encountering the Good Shepherd TOGETHER**”.

Almost 600 delegates from 22 countries around the world, gathered to celebrate 60 years of this Catechesis work, which began in Rome.

I would like to share just a little of the thoughts from speakers who were part of the **Plenary Session 1: Remembering Our Origins**.

Sofia Cavalletti was the founder of this work and we were privileged to have heard thoughts from her colleague, **Augusta Poluzzi**, speaking about the early years of establishing the Atrium in Rome.

Augusta shared with all of us that “It makes her happy that so many people come to know the mustard seed reality in which this love is carried and we carry forth into the world that it might grow.”

Francesca Cocchini and her sister, **Patrizia**, shared their stories with us. They were both children in the Atrium where Sofia worked. They both prepared to receive their Sacraments in the Atrium, and attended until they were 15 years of age. At the age of 17, they were part of a group who became Catechists. They worked in the Atrium and helped Sofia to prepare children to receive their Sacraments.

Fr Giancarlo Pani, SJ – was a Priest who worked in the Atrium in Rome for 30 years. He met Sofia while on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in 1971. He was not yet a Priest, and Sofia was a guide at the time.

He worked especially with the children in the Atrium who were preparing to receive their Sacraments. Sacraments were prepared for with great care and solemnity, especially the Word and the Eucharist.

Readings were chosen by the children themselves and proclaimed and shared by the children.

During the part which is celebrated at the altar – the Eucharist – the Priest gives particular solemnity to these special moments – the Consecration, the Our Father.

The other important moment is the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Fr Giancarlo shared that the task of the Priest is to administer the sacrament, and this is where all the elements of the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd converge.

He said that in celebrating Reconciliation just before Eucharist there was a sense of joy of the celebratory nature of the sacrament. The Scripture of the True Vine leads us to the celebration of the Eucharist - he described this as all the important layers converging.

In preparing for first confession the catechist exercises respect for the child. This is a great responsibility as each child is unique. The child is encouraged to grow and blossom not to be thwarted or blocked.

Fr Giancarlo said that children have an innate and keen sense of justice and of the truth. A child who tells a lie knows they have done something wrong. They have a conscience that is formed in the light of their parents. Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation their faith and sense of security are born and they have an ability to know the love of God.

The new law “This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you.” John 15:12

For children preparing for the Sacrament of Reconciliation, it is not necessary that they are instructed in the 10 commandments. They already have them in their hearts. All of us know the Maxims that the children have become familiar with. The Lord is inviting us in a positive way to live this life with Him.

The children are invited to have a personal conversation with the Priest. The children are invited to have a private consultation with the Priest. Each child’s encounter with the Good Shepherd is important. Each child has a time of personal encounter with the Priest. He speaks about the special meeting with the Good Shepherd. He invites them to remember the special gifts that they receive from the Lord. The children would write these gifts down, and keep a journal of these encounters.

During the days of a retreat the First Communion is reflected upon as an encounter with the Good Shepherd.

During the confession children were personally invited to focus on their gifts. The conscience of the child is transparent. They would speak about it without fear. Their faces afterwards are radiant. Their joy is palpable in an extraordinary way.

The sacrament of the Eucharist becomes the feast of the Good Shepherd. The Good Shepherd is moved by what is happening.

Then at the Consecration the Priest invites the children to join him around the altar, as con-celebrants. The children like it and do it with great joy. There is a moment of great silence after Communion and then a sharing of their prayers with gratitude and joy.

Claudia Margarita Schmitt shared her story about her experience of learning with and working with Sofia and Gianna Gobbi in Rome. She was told to go to Rome to train in Montessori and had no idea what it was. When she went to Rome she didn't know what to expect. On meeting Sofia, Claudia thought she would be an old woman with white hair.

When asked to speak about formation, Sofia said that "the children are the formation".

Study the material. Live the material. Understand. Sofia was so humble. If she didn't have a definition they would talk about it and come to a definition. Sofia was not the law. Sofia and Gianna were great, but humble. Sofia was a catechist – not a doctor or a professor.

Sr Jelica Duzel – Dakovo, Croatia – Sofia taught her something – that behind every wall of suffering one finds the precious pearl.

Nora Bonilla – Bogata, Columbia

To observe the children's reaction - it is a great privilege as catechists to have this great experience.

God reveals himself through prayer, mystagogy, grace, presence, action.

Children are able to express these through shapes and colours with an understanding of the parable of the Good Shepherd and the Pascal mystery. Through their art expression they are able to find a connection with the text.

"Every exterior carries itself interior" – Kandinsky. Kandinsky expresses how "the inner necessity creates". La necesidad interior, crea la forma' expresa Kandinsky.

"The intuitive mind is a sacred gift" – Einstein

Francesca Cocchini spoke about The New Child

The Child was 9 and had been through the armour of light. Alejandro had made his first communion and prepared the letter that children write to place in the pew where his family would sit during the celebration. For this message he copied some Maxims for his parents. This child's parents were not practicing Catholics. It was his grandmother who had taken him to go through the process. So at the end of the letter he wrote "it was incredible what these maxims can do". He adds "How I wish my father could experience this ... but in Parousia".

This child had total trust – he knew that "if not today that it will come - in Parousia".

For us to be able to see the new child we need to have new eyes. Sofia and Gianna definitely had those eyes and we learn each day to have these eyes and we learn little by little and a little more each day.

Sofia usually and quite often took notes in her diaries of the things that happened in the atrium, so in this process it was a day of Testament. This was in 2006 and Fr Giancarlo would celebrate the Eucharist.

That day Sofia wrote in her book – Consignment of the Gospel 2006. How wonderful, 8 children to whom I had to consign the Gospel. Beginning with the first child it dawned on Sofia that a few words would not be enough. A conversation came forth between Sofia and each child born with eyes and words and ended with a kiss. Where I found the words I do not know but Psalm 105 v1 - 5. That book was held in our hands and passed from our hands as a precious treasure.

Psalm 105

God's Faithfulness to Israel

¹ O give thanks to the LORD, call on his name,
make known his deeds among the peoples.

² Sing to him, sing praises to him;
tell of all his wonderful works.

³ Glory in his holy name;
let the hearts of those who seek the LORD rejoice.

⁴ Seek the LORD and his strength;
seek his presence continually.

⁵ Remember the wonderful works he has done,
his miracles, and the judgments he has uttered,

Plenary Session 2: The International Council (Consiglio) – Dan Teller

The Consiglio consists of two representatives of each of the member nations – it is not a business organisation . It is a council committed to going more deeply into the nature of our work, especially through prayer.

This year the Consiglio reflected on two themes – the difference between catechism and catechesis – to and with. Echoing the Word of God. When we proclaim the Word of God to 20 children – 21 are listening.

How do we live it out? Experience *with* the children. Fruits of reflections are communicated as a starting point of a continued communal reflection.

You have already been a part of these already by attending here. Many of the talks focus on what catechesis is, etc. Second purpose – missionary work.

The Consiglio considers this amazing group throughout the world and works out how to help. Many places are receiving catechesis for the first time, eg Africa, Asia. How do we help? Service to the community = Communication – through missionary work and with reflections to guide us.

Also helps with facilitating and compiling worldwide information. Compilation of all work throughout the nations around the world. Information is gathered to help build a network to assist everyone involved in the work.

A Prayer -

God of Sacred History,
The work of many catechists brought us
To this place and time.
We have come to celebrate and remember,
To gather the memories of many decades.

You have been the Shepherd for each one of us;
For Sofia and Gianna,
For Tilde and Tina,
For Father Mongillo and Maria Christleib,
For every Formation Leader who has led a course,
For every artist and artisan who has made materials,
For every catechist and child in the atrium.

You have been the quiet Presence in the atrium,
While we walk the line and pour grain,
When we light candles and read scripture,
When we name and identify the articles of the Mass, and
While we meditate on the mystery of the Kingdom of God.

You give the new child and the new adult
An encounter of contemplation and joy,
In the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd
Kept alive these 60 years through the prayers and generosity
Of those who have been called to this work.

May we who hear and recognize Your voice,
Find nourishment at Your table,
Rejoice at Your return, and
Look forward to the time
When there will be one flock with one Shepherd. Amen.

The Gift

'Sofia Cavalletti, from the first meeting of the *Consiglio*, has always echoed the same message to participants at these meetings to be shared with catechists in each country and that is:

"whatever we do, nothing, neither the Mystery of God, nor the children, nor anything we do to further the work - belongs to us. It is all gift and therefore the response should always be as one responds to any gift - it is to be welcomed in joy and gratitude and to be shared so that it may not lose its dynamism. This is a gift that we have not earned but one that has been given freely out of love. Joy springs from an awareness of the greatness of the gift and the unfathomable goodness of the Gift giver." '

(From the website www.cgsusa.org)