



# Parent Pages

## Preparing the environment of the Domestic Church\*

\* The term "Domestic Church" refers to the family, the smallest body of gathered believers in Christ. Though recovered only recently, the term dates back to the first century AD. The Greek word *ecclesiola* referred to "little church." The early Church understood that the home was fertile ground for discipleship, sanctification, and holiness.

## Jesus, the Good Shepherd

Because Christ is the fullest manifestation of God, we center on the person of Jesus when speaking with the children about God's love. We focus especially on Jesus as the Good Shepherd and use two parables, in particular.

- **The Parable of the Good Shepherd, John 10: 3b-5, 10b-11, 14-16**

The theme of the shepherd who calls and the sheep who are listening to his voice, introduces the child to the reality of the covenant relationship. The covenant theme is central to the Bible: God in search of us and our response to God's initiative.

The element of the parable that most strikes young children is the fact that the shepherd knows and calls each sheep by name. This reveals in an explicit way that the Good Shepherd has a personal relationship with each of us.

- **The Parable of the Found Sheep, Luke 15: 4-6**

The image of the shepherd who searches for his sheep that was lost has a great impact on children. For the little child this parable offers yet another proof of the Good Shepherd's infinite love. In the parable of the found sheep children find the uniquely personal and intimate relationship for which they hunger most. It is especially when children are in a situation of suffering that they identify with the sheep the Good Shepherd embraces in his arms and rests on his shoulders.

The Good Shepherd image resonates so deeply within young children and recalls for them the intimacy and security of the maternal womb. This is often expressed in the children's words as well as in their drawings.

- **Psalm 23, verse 1**

The prayerful response to the parable of the Good Shepherd is further nurtured by offering a "prayer sample" that another shepherd of long ago wrote as he was pondering this same beautiful truth we have been pondering: "The Lord is my shepherd; I have everything I need" (Psalm 23:1). Initially, for the youngest children we only lift up this one verse. It is recommended to use this particular translation (from the *Good News Bible*) since the more traditional translation ("The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" or "The Lord is my shepherd; I lack nothing") requires some explanation for the very young child. For them, the verb "to want" is basic to their life: "I want my Mommy"; "I want my blanket," etc., so that to "not want" is a confusing phrase. Moreover, the words "lack nothing" are both negative words. A simple rule of thumb in this regard is that the fewer words we offer the young child, the more important it becomes that each word speaks for itself and does not require explanation.



Matilda, age 8, St. Augustin, Des Moines, IA  
Notice the smiling sheep and shepherd

– Sofia Cavalletti, *The Good Shepherd and the Child: A Joyful Journey*