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RMS ATRIUM

Parent Handbook 2023-2024

Renaissance Montessori School (RMS)

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# The Renaissance Montessori School (RMS) Mission:

* To empower cultural renewal by promoting the work of Maria Montessori and Sofia Cavalletti in revealing the truth about the human person.

## RMS Goals:

* To offer spiritual, doctrinal, and Montessori-pedagogical formation courses for adults.
* To establish and support the growth of prepared Montessori environments that fulfill the mission of RMS in the context of Catholic cultural renewal: within the home, parish (Atria), and school.
* To offer a variety of formation courses for parents, catechists, teachers, future teachers, seminarians, priests, and religious. These courses will include but will not be limited to all levels of CGS formation.
* To coordinate and sponsor events—including workshops, talks, and retreats—that foster the spread of the Montessori approach and the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd.

# Welcome

Welcome and thank you for enrolling your family in the RMS Catechesis of the Good Shepherd Atrium! We are excited to begin/continue this great work with you. May God bless us all and “make all things work for good, for those that love him.”

# What is the Catechesis of the Good Shepherd and the Atrium?

The Catechesis of the Good Shepherd (CGS) is an approach to the spiritual formation of children ages three through twelve. It is grounded in prayer, Sacred Scripture, Liturgy, and the educational principles of Maria Montessori. At the heart of the Catechesis is the development of the religious potential of every child in a loving and lasting relationship with Jesus. The primary theme presented is that there is Someone (Christ as the Good Shepherd) Who knows each of us, calls us by name, and attends to our every need. The children gather in an Atrium, a prepared environment, containing beautiful yet simple materials. The materials are given to the children to aid their meditation on and absorption of the theme presented.

The word “atrium” means “portico, or porch entrance to a large house.” In the early church there was a special room called the Atrium, generally adjoining the Church, which was used for the instruction of catechumens. Maria Montessori introduced the concept and function of the Atrium into her schools as a place to be set apart for the preparation of little children for their full participation in the life of the Church.

For the child, too, the Atrium is a place of preparation for life in the Catholic Church. The children gather in the Atrium one session per week. The Atrium is one of the elements that assists the relationship between God and the child. CGS takes special care in preparing the religious environment suited for the developmental needs of the child. Everything done in the space is aimed toward helping the child enter into a more authentic relationship with God.

* The Atrium is a community in which children and adults live together a religious experience that facilitates participation in the wider community of the family, the Church and other social spheres.
* The Atrium is a place of prayer, in which work and study spontaneously become meditation, contemplation and prayer and come to know Jesus, the Good Shepherd.
* The Atrium is a place in which the only Teacher is Christ; both children and adults place themselves in a listening stance before his Word and seek to penetrate the mystery of the liturgical celebration.

The themes presented in the Atrium are those to which the children have responded with depth and joy. These themes are taken from the Bible and the liturgy (prayers and sacraments) as the fundamental sources for creating and sustaining Christian life at every developmental stage and, in particular, for illuminating and nourishing the child in his/her most vital religious needs.

# RMS Atrium Schedule (2023-2024)

Level I (ages 3-6 years old)

Level II (ages 6-9 years old)

Level III (ages 9-12 years old)

**Sessions are:**

**Tuesday mornings, 9:00AM – 12:05 PM, Levels I & II**

**Tuesday afternoons, 1:30-3:30 PM, Levels I, II-III**

**Thursday mornings, 9:00AM – 12:05 PM, Level I**

**Drop-off for morning sessions is 9:00 AM and pick-up between 12:05-12:15 PM.**

**Drop-off for the afternoon session: from 1:15-1:30 PM and pick-up between 3:30-3:45 PM.**

***All pick-ups and drop-offs are through Door 5.***

# Life in the Atrium

## First Days of Atrium

Just as in the Montessori classroom, the Tuesday morning atria orientation period helps ease into the full three-hour period. The schedule allows an orientation visit to the Atrium the first week, the next week a one-hour session, the second and third weeks a two-hour phase-in session, and by the fourth week there will be the full three hour sessions.

The Tuesday afternoon Atrium will have an orientation visit the first week, the next week a one-hour session, and the full two-hour sessions beginning week 3.

## Snacks

Very young children often experience difficulty in work performance if they are hungry. In the Level I Atrium your child may bring a simple snack from home. Please refer to the email from the lead catechist for guidelines.

The Atrium is a place of prayer, so there are only a few times in the Level II Atrium when there will be celebrations that include food.

Be sure to fill out the appropriate section on the Emergency Contact Form if your child has food allergies so that we can make adjustments accordingly.

## Candles

Candles are lit in the Atrium when Scripture is read and during sacred moments. An adult always supervises the children when they are near candles.

## Child’s Paperwork

Each child will have a folder or bin in which to keep their papers of their work. It is up to the child to either keep it in the folder or bin, or bring home his/her work after each session. At the end of the year, the catechists will send the work home. We ask parents not to expect paperwork after each session, as paperwork is not the focus of the experience in the Atrium.

## Sacramental Preparation

Level II includes First Reconciliation and First Communion Sacramental Preparation. RMS requires a two-year enrollment to be part of the Sacramental Preparation with the Atrium. For the children ready to receive the sacraments of First Reconciliation and the Eucharist, the Atrium works together with all sessions for sacramental preparation. The reception of the sacraments is through All Saints Church. There will be further correspondence and a parent meeting for more information.

# Dress

## Level I Atrium

It is especially important that the clothes of the young child not hinder their movement. Their clothes should allow them to run, climb, work, and play freely. The children need to be able to handle their clothes independently, particularly in the bathroom. For small children this is not possible with jeans, overalls, jumpsuits, belts, and pants with tight straps. Pants with elastic waists are easiest for young children to manage.

For each atrium session, have your child bring a backpack with an optional snack and a full set of extra clothing (shirt, pants, underpants and socks) for the occasional accident or for enthusiastic Practical Life work. **We ask that your child have one pair of PLAIN “inside shoes” that your child can put on by himself. These will be worn only when in the Atrium. Fitted, rubber-soled shoes are the best options, as slippers encourage the children to slide or shuffle around. These will also be included in the backpack.**

There is also a possibility of having outside work for the children, so your child should dress for that option, boots when muddy, raincoat for rain, etc.

## Level II/III Atrium

Please have your children wear clothing that allows ease and grace of movement, but also conveys the attitude of reverence towards this special place. Please have your child wear clean, dry, non-distracting shoes that stay on the feet (no flip flops or slip-on shoes). Bare or socked feet are not permitted for safety reasons. It is not required, but the children are welcome to bring “inside shoes” similar to Level I.

# Standards for Behavior

Every student, regardless of age, is expected to respect the people, animals, materials and property that comprise our community. Learning these lessons is a social responsibility which begins with our youngest students and their families.

Children need constructive, supportive guidance to feel secure, and to learn what is acceptable, and what is not. This guidance will be presented in a way that is respectful of the child’s dignity and nurtures self-discipline and confidence.

In the Atrium, presentations in appropriate behavior are given in much the same way as academic lessons. “Grace and courtesy” presentations are part of Atrium life. Children learn to be respectful and kind to each other by taking turns, using appropriate language to express their feelings, caring for Atrium plants and respecting the Atrium materials.

We take steps to first provide knowledge to help everyone live respectfully together within the Atrium environment and take proper care of the materials and environments. As this is an ongoing process, there may be times when a child is encouraged to participate in the replacement of something that was damaged or broken, based on their level of knowledge.

If a child forgets, or behaves inappropriately, often a gentle reminder from the catechist is all that is needed. At times, the student will be asked to take some time to regain their self-control and choose a more appropriate course. At no time is misbehavior ever handled or addressed in a physical or verbally abusive way.

If a child continues to have difficulty with self-control, a progression of interventions will be utilized, working with the catechists, parents and child. There might be an occasion that a child will have to be withdrawn from the Atrium.

# Parent Collaboration

## Atrium Observation

As the foundation of this entire way, i.e. the Montessori Method and Catechesis of the Good Shepherd, observation of the child is essential for everyone in the child’s life. This is *the* way we discover who the child is, where they are in their journey and what they need next. We highly recommend parents observe their child both in the home and in the Atrium. A schedule of observation times will be kept by the Atrium Coordinator. We usually open up observations by November. Please email your child’s catechist to schedule.

We usually wait until after ½ hour of atrium to begin the observation, to allow the children to settle into the Atrium environment. Also, we recommend these visits be around 20 to 30 minutes, in order to be long enough but not disturb the flow of work in the Atrium.

## Open House/Child-Led Tours

In February there will be an **Open House** for parents (and grandparents) to see the Atrium, led on a tour by their child.

# Communications

RMS considers open communications with parents to be an essential part of our mission. Only through open, healthy and regular communications can we work together as partners in your child’s religious education.

## To the Catechists

Your child’s catechist is available to answer any questions you have about your child’s Atrium experience. Things to contact a catechist about:

* If your child is going to be absent for any reason
* Any change in pick-up arrangements
* A planned late arrival or early pick-up
* Any communicable disease in the family
* Any events that might alter your child’s emotions
* Any questions related to your child within the Atrium or about the Atrium environment

## To the RMS Office

* Atrium Coordinator email: atrium@rmsmail.org
* The office phone: 703-368-4442
* Office email: admin@rmsmail.org

Things to contact the Coordinator and Office about:

* Registration and all accompanying paperwork
* Any change in contact information
* Billing/Accounts

## From the RMS Atrium

In order to effectively and inexpensively communicate with parents, RMS utilizes email to make announcements and keep parents informed about Atrium happenings. Most notices will be sent out via email through the Atrium Coordinator, atrium@rmsmail.org, with other mailings through Mail Chimp or another email administrator. Please make sure to check your email frequently as you are responsible for all information contained in the emails.

**Also, to ensure receipt of our emails, please “White List” the RMS domain name (@rmsmail.org) by adding it to your safe senders list(s).**

# Policies

## Health Screenings By Parents Before Arrival

Parents play a pivotal role in protecting our community. Please be alert and aware of potential indications of illness and proactively keep your child home if there is any question as to possible contagion. We ask that parents conduct pre-screening each day and to keep your child at home if he/she exhibits any viral symptoms.

## Healthy Hand Hygiene

Handwashing will continue to be an important part of our infection control. Each Atrium space has its own sink for use for washing hands.

## Absences

When your child exhibits any physical signs of illness your child should remain home.

**In cases of fever, vomiting, diarrhea, or any communicable illness (such as but not limited to: Strep, Pink Eye, Pertussis, etc.), your child must be symptom free for 24 hours before returning to Atrium for their own health and that of the Atrium community.**

## Atrium Closings

In the event of inclement weather, the RMS Atrium will follow Prince William County

Schools (PWCS) closings provided they remain in-person and continue with activities.

● IF PWCS are closed, the Atrium will be closed as well.

● If PWCS run on a delayed schedule, arrival time for the morning Atrium session will be 10:00 AM, and pick-up time for the morning Atrium will remain at 12:05 pm.

● If PWCS dismiss early and Atrium needs to be canceled, parents will be notified by

email, using the information provided on their emergency contact lists.

● If PWCS dismiss early before the start of Atrium session, atrium session will be

canceled. If PWCS dismiss early and Atrium is currently being held and needs to be

canceled, parents will be notified by phone, using the information provided on their

emergency contact lists.

● If PWCS have a scheduled day-off during inclement weather, we will follow Manassas

City Public Schools for a closing or delay and parents will be notified via email.

Should an occasion arise when it is necessary to close the Atrium when PWCS have not closed,

parents will be notified by phone and email.

●If Prince William County calls a Code Orange, we will email by 7:00 AM to indicate a delay or closure for RMS.

## Transportation

For Pick-up and Drop-off, our staff will assist your child in exiting your car and accompany them into the building.

Children will begin their work cycle upon arrival. Arrival times are as follows:
**Morning sessions 9:00 AM.** Late arrivals will miss a portion of their individual work cycle.

**Afternoon session 1:15-1:30**
The procedure for drop off and pick-up will be as follows:

* Please pull up your car as far as possible near Door 5. Please have your children remain in the car until the catechist or assistant will meet your child(ren) at the car and escort them into the building.
* To ease in separation and help maintain the solemnity of the Atrium, we ask that parents do not enter the building at drop-off.
* At pick-up, the children will gather in the hallway at Door 5. Please pull up in line and your child(ren) will be brought out to you.
* Please practice utmost safety in the carpool line. Do not pass other parked cars in the line, even if your child(ren) has exited or entered the car unless directed by the assistant.

Late arrivals are disruptive to the Atrium, and make it harder for the child to engage fully in the recommended work cycle. If you happen to arrive late, please park and bring your child to Door 5. Under no circumstances should your child be allowed to walk from the car to the Atrium unaccompanied. Please ring the doorbell and wait with your child until someone answers the door.

If you will be late for dismissal, please contact the catechists so that we may assure your child that you are safe and on your way. **Dismissal time for morning sessions is 12:05 PM and for the afternoon session at 3:30 PM**, allowing a 15-minute window for pick-up. After that time-frame, the catechist/assistants will return inside the Atrium with the children. If you happen to arrive late for pick-up, please park and walk to Door 5.

If your child is absent because of illness or an appointment, please email the catechist.

It is also disruptive for a child to leave Atrium early, although we recognize that this situation can and does occur. If this is unavoidable, please notify the catechist that this will be necessary as far ahead in advance as possible.

## Medication

The Atrium, as a matter of policy, does not administer medication to students, except for those required by emergency, a doctor’s order or by law. If your child should be taking medication please make sure that they receive their medication prior to the Atrium beginning and/or after Atrium has ended. This policy extends to cough drops, skin treatment and protective salves such as sunscreen, insect repellant, etc.

If your child is required to have medication during the Atrium session, you are welcome to come to the Atrium to administer it to your child. Please do NOT give medications of any kind, including over the counter medications (this includes cough drops), to your child to self-administer**.**

## Building Safety Procedures

During the day, all doors of the building are locked.

Renaissance Montessori School conducts fire and other emergency drills on a regular basis throughout the year. Since we share this building, RMS Atrium will participate in all drills.

In case of an event which would require evacuating our building, we will escort the children to the field behind the school, and parents will be notified of the situation. A cell phone and emergency numbers will be readily available for such an event. Safety is our primary concern. Please be assured that the staff will remain with the children supervising them at all times.

In case of an event occurring, such as a tornado warning or other event requiring us to take shelter, we will Shelter-in-Place according to each room’s designated spot. After the warning has expired or we are given the all-clear, we will contact parents to assure them everyone is safe and to come and pick up their children.

# Enrollment

## New Applicants

While applications are accepted throughout the year, the admissions process formally begins in the spring for the next Atrium year. Interested families should follow the steps outlined below throughout the admissions process:

* Interested families can email atrium@rmsmail.org to schedule an in-Atrium observation. It’s best to visit before the Atrium sessions end in mid-May.
* Parents or guardians can then submit a completed application online with a non-refundable fee of $50.00 on behalf of the child applicant.

## Re-Enrollment

Re-enrollment for the next atrium year begins in the spring. Current families should follow the steps outlined below in the re-enrollment process:

* Contact your child’s catechist and/or the RMS Atrium Coordinator if you have any question regarding which program your child should be in next year.
* Registration and payments are processed through TADS online tuition payment program.