

HOME-BASED RELIGIOUS EDUCATION GUIDELINES 2000

BACKGROUND

A time-honored tradition within the Catholic Church is the “handing on” of the faith in the home by the example and instruction of parents to their children. Catholic schools and parish schools of religion came into existence to assist families in their responsibility for the education of their children. Some parents, however, choose neither Catholic schools nor parish schools of religion, and thus provide religious instruction and sacramental preparation at home.

Through the years, the Church has always called parents to be the “primary educators” of their children. In his 1994 “Letter to Families,” Pope John Paul II wrote: “Parents are the first and most important educators of their own children, and they also possess a fundamental competence in this area; they are educators because they are parent” (16).

The Second Vatican Council in its “Declaration on Christian Education” (5) also affirmed the “primary and inalienable right and duty” of parents to educate their children. In the “Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” the council fathers go on to say: “By their very nature the institution of matrimony itself and conjugal love are ordained for the procreation and education of children . . . Graced with the dignity and office of fatherhood and motherhood, parents will energetically acquit themselves of a duty which devolves primarily on them; namely, education and especially religious education (48).

The Catechism of the Catholic Church says that parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children: “They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and . . . service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues.” (2223).

Catholic home educators have taken these teachings literally and have taken them to heart. They have responded with their time, attention, and love, giving their days over to the personal care and tutoring of their children. Yet they do not labor alone. Catechesis is the work of the whole Church, and the members have different responsibilities (cf. “Catechesi Tradendae” 16). Parents are their children’s primary educators, but not their only educators.

The Church calls herself mother and teacher. As teacher, the Church is the guarantor of the soundness of Christian doctrine whenever that doctrine is conveyed. Pope John Paul II urged bishops to “let the concern to foster active and effective catechesis yield to no other care whatever in any way (“Catechesi Tradendae” 63). He directed bishops to take on the “chief

management of catechesis,” while at the same time surrounding themselves with competent and trustworthy assistants. A bishop serves all catechists, whether in the school, the parish, or the home, by offering them clear Catholic doctrine and ensuring the soundness of their teaching.

In this service, pastors, according to Pope John Paul II, are “the immediate assistants” of their bishops and are urged to “neglect nothing with a view to a well-organized and well-oriented catechetical effort” (*Ibid.*, 64). Because of this charge, pastors have the chief responsibility for fostering, guiding, and coordinating catechesis. Canon 777 clearly states:

“In accord with the norms established by the diocesan bishop, the pastor is to make particular provision:

1. that suitable catechesis is given for the celebration of the sacraments;
2. that children are properly prepared for the first reception of the sacraments of penance and Most Holy Eucharist and the sacrament of Confirmation by means of a catechetical formation given over an appropriate period of time;
3. that children are more fruitfully and deeply instructed through catechetical formation after the reception of First Communion;
4. that catechetical formation also be given to those handicapped in body or mind insofar as their condition permits;
5. that the faith of young people and adults be fortified, enlightened and developed through various means and endeavors.” (Canon 777).

Therefore, all engaged in the catechetical ministry are obligated to fulfill their duties in cooperation with the bishop and pastor in this single commission to educate in Christ’s name (Canon 774, 776).

GUIDELINES FOR PARENTS

1. Parents have the responsibility to register their household with the parish and state their wish to catechize their own children.
2. Parents are responsible to contact and to meet with the pastor/catechetical leader to discuss a suitable catechetical plan.
3. Parents will be offered the diocesan Religion Course of Study and appropriate catechetical resources. The Diocesan Media Library (419-244-6711) or (1-800-926-8277) is another valuable resource to help supplement their educational efforts
4. Parents and children are encouraged to participate in parish liturgies and/or other events prepared specifically for children and their families.
5. Parents are responsible to meet with the pastor, catechetical leader or their designee periodically to review the progress of their catechetical efforts.
6. Parents are responsible to present their children for the reception of the sacraments and to be in dialogue with the pastor/catechetical leader to ensure that the children are properly prepared:
 - a. since sacraments are community celebrations and not private events of piety, and Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are Sacraments of Initiation into the community, parents should be made aware that preparation includes parish community involvement.
 - b. the family will be apprised of the applicable sections of the 1995 Diocesan Policies for Sacramental Preparation.

GUIDELINES FOR PASTORS and CATECHETICAL LEADERS

Introduction: The emergence of home-schooling calls forth new approaches from those in catechetical leadership in recognizing this area in education so that the parents and their children will feel welcome, wanted, and included in all pastoral and sacramental activities and ministries of the parish.

1. The pastor or catechetical leader must meet with the parents and assist them in the following ways:
 - in choosing suitable catechetical materials, including textbooks and other appropriate resources;
 - in providing them with the diocesan Religion Course of Study and encouraging them to follow it;
 - in providing them training in the use of the catechetical materials they have chosen;
 - by inviting them to attend any parent meetings, liturgies, and prayer services prepared to include all the children of the parish.

2. The pastor or the catechetical leader must meet with the parents who present their children for the reception of the sacraments in order to ensure that the children are properly prepared.
 - a. since sacraments are community celebrations and not private events of piety, and Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist are Sacraments of Initiation into the community, parents should be made aware that preparation and celebration includes parish community involvement.
 - b. applicable sections of the 1995 Diocesan Sacramental Policies will be presented and discussed with the parents

3. The pastor or catechetical leader and the parents should agree on a regular means of staying in contact as well as on a process of evaluating the progress of the children.

