

Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching; for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck.
Proverbs 1:8-9

Introduction: Homeschooling and Its Place in the Church

When the Paschal Mystery had been accomplished, on the first Easter day, Jesus instructed His apostles ["Go, therefore, and make disciples of all the nations ... and teach them to observe all the commands I gave you"](#) (Mt 28:19-20).

The Apostles accepted this Commission of Jesus, even though they were unworthy. With their vocation, they received what is called the grace of state (cf *Catechism of the Catholic Church* 2004); God would provide all that they needed.

Indeed, He did, as the Church fulfilled her mission in astonishing and diverse ways. The Acts of the Apostles shows the many members of the emerging Church, both laity and clergy, actively engaged in the work of faith formation.

Over time we have witnessed an emergence of a new, yet traditional, way of instilling the faith in the young: through Catholic home education. For purposes of this policy, we must first understand what homeschooling is and is not. The terms Catholic homeschooling and Catholic home education are used to describe the work of parents who have undertaken the religious and academic formation of their children. Each homeschool is a unique, independent, private school focused intently on the needs, individual learning styles and formation of the children enrolled. For purposes of clarity, homeschooling is not an "all other" category that takes in any family that chooses not to attend a parish school, or a parish religious education program for children attending public schools, or a family whose child attends a Catholic school that does not provide for sacramental preparation.

Homeschooling is a calling within the vocation of marriage. It is a complete integration of faith not only in all subject areas, but in the living of daily life. While always mindful of the need to pass on the deposit of faith in an authentic manner, homeschooling is much more than merely a "home-based program of religious instruction." Parents who are called homeschool to their children are committed to fostering a love of faith and life-long formation. By the integration of the faith in all aspects of daily life, the homeschooling family grows, matures, loves, suffers, practices and internalizes the Good News of Jesus Christ. As paragraph 45 of the "Catholic Education and Faith Formation" section of the Synod of 2006 of the Diocese of Covington states, ["Emphasis is placed on living the faith, not just learning it. Practicing the faith is the most important thing a Catholic does."](#) Homeschooling families take this principle to heart and put it into practice in a most concrete manner.

A key issue for homeschooling in these guidelines is the topic of catechesis: the method or means that Catholic families use to pass on the faith.

Parents have, what Vatican II calls, the "gravest obligation" to educate their children. Because of this sacred duty, rooted in natural law, the Council's *Declaration on Christian Education* emphasizes that parents must ["be recognized as being primarily and principally responsible for their children"](#) (no. 3). Canon 2225 states that ["Through the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, parents receive the](#)

responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children." Parents who are called to homeschool their children humbly recognize that they are imperfect vessels, but are strengthened for their mission by their grace of state through the great generosity of our Father in Heaven.

Whenever someone has a duty to do something, that person must also have a corresponding right to do it. Pope John Paul II well expresses this principle in the context of the education of children: "The right and duty of parents to give education is essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is original and primary with regard to the educational role of others, on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and it is irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others" (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 36).

The Church has reiterated this teaching several times since Vatican II, including in the *Charter of the Rights of the Family* and the 1983 Code of Canon Law. The parents' rights in this context can be summarized as follows: "Parents have the primary and inalienable right to teach their children their faith. Parents have the right to prepare their children for the reception of the sacraments. Parents have the right to seek the assistance of others in fulfilling their duty without thereby forfeiting their rights." It is indeed a blessing that the Church recognizes and acknowledges that parents have "The duty and the right to select those means and institutions through which they can provide more suitably for the Catholic education of their children" (Canon 793, Section 1)

Parents who homeschool their children are fulfilling "the primary responsibility for the education of their children" (paragraph 5) and, as such are acting in a principal manner. Those who engage in catechetical ministry in a parish do so as delegates of the parents.

The Church

The Church calls herself *mater et magistra*, mother and teacher. A homeschooling parent, then, stands for the Church in a profound, unique and vivid way. Such parents are their children's educators and insofar as these parents fulfill their role faithfully, they are icons of the living Church. Taught rightly, their children will come to know the reality of the teaching Church in a profound way.

The Church serves families even as she rules them. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "Following the principle of subsidiarity, larger communities should take care not to usurp the family's prerogatives or interfere in its life" (CCC 2209). Pope John Paul II urged bishops to "let the concern to foster active and effective catechesis yield to no other care in any way," (*Catechesi Tradendae* 63). He directed them to take on the "chief management of catechists, while at the same time surrounding you [the bishops] with competent and trustworthy assistants." A bishop serves all catechists, whether in school, the parish, or the home, by offering them a 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. Pope John Paul II instructs priests to "neglect nothing with a view to a well-organized and well-oriented catechetical effort," (*Catechesi Tradendae* 64). Catechesis is the work of the whole Church, but the Church's members have different responsibilities. Parents are their children's primary educators, but not their only educators. The teaching Church is the guarantor of the soundness of Christian doctrine, the revealed truth that comes from Jesus Christ, whenever that doctrine is conveyed. Parents are obligated to fulfill their duties, as are priests and

bishops, and all must cooperate in this single endeavor to educate in Christ's name. There is no other authentically Catholic way to teach except in union with the pope and bishops. "Because of their charge, pastors have, at differing levels, the chief responsibility for fostering, guiding, and coordinating catechesis," (*Catechesi Tradendae* 16).

Parents

Catholic homeschooling is the very generous way some parents are responding to a particular charge from the Church. "Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children," says the Catechism of the Catholic Church (2223). "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."

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 parents" (16). And again: "The Church wishes to carry out her educational mission above all through families who are made capable of undertaking this task by the sacrament of matrimony, through the 'grace of state' which follows from it and the specific 'Charism' proper to the entire family community. Certainly, one area in which the family has an irreplaceable role is that of religious education" (16).

The Second Vatican Council, in the *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, stated: "[B]y 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).

This teaching of the Church corresponds to the promises a couple makes in the Rite of Marriage and during the baptism of their children: to accept children from God and to raise those children in the Catholic faith. Pope John Paul II in his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, has emphasized the sacred character of the parent's work in education: "For Christian parents the mission to educate... has a new specific source in the sacrament of marriage, which consecrates them for the strictly Christian education of their children... it enriches them with wisdom, counsel, fortitude, and all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit in order to help the children in their growth as human beings and as Christians" (38). Catholic homeschooling families have taken this teaching to heart. They have responded generously 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.

The principle of subsidiarity dictates that parents receive proper assistance from the Church in this, their task of education. "The State and the Church have the obligation to give families all possible aid to enable them to perform their educational role properly. Therefore both the Church and the State must create and foster the institutions and activities that families justly demand, and the aid must be in proportion to the families' needs. However, those in society who are in charge of schools must never forget that the parents have been appointed by God Himself as the first and principal educators of their children and that their right is completely inalienable" (*Familiaris Consortio* 40). The Church, at the diocesan and parish levels should in no way hinder parents from exercising their

option to homeschool. If the local Church can assist the family in any way, she should. Homeschooling families, on their part, value and recognize the importance of the relationship between the universal church, the diocese, the parish and the domestic church. These families will nurture this relationship and seek guidance and counsel as needed. Under the tutelage of the Magisterium, bishop, pastor and parents, homeschooled children will grow in their love of Christ and His Church.

Homeschooling

Catholic homeschooling displays a richness and diversity of styles, methods, and philosophies. One of the strengths of homeschooling is that each homeschool is as unique as each family. There are many successful methods of homeschooling. Though all human things fall within the loving interest of the Church, it is not within the scope of this document to examine the many issues surrounding academics in home education. The Church's primary concern in education is catechetical formation.

Pope John Paul II offered a description of the model teaching home: "Education in the faith by parents, which should begin from the children's tenderest age, is already being given when the members of a family help each other to grow in faith through the witness of their Christian lives, a witness that is often without words but which perseveres throughout a day-to-day life lived in accordance with the Gospel. This catechesis is more incisive when, in the course of family events (such as the reception of the sacraments, the celebration of great liturgical feasts, the birth of a child, bereavement), care is taken to explain in the home the Christian or religious content of these events" (*Catechesi Tradendae* 68).

This could well describe many of the teaching homes now thriving in our parishes. Indeed, the parish Church and the local Church should recognize and treasure such homes as exemplars of love and faithfulness. Catholic homeschooling is a vocation and a blessing to which some families have responded generously.

No individual or family can remain faithful apart from communion with the Catholic Church. We hear Christ the Teacher in the bishop whom the pope has appointed to teach, sanctify, and guide our diocesan Church. We find Jesus Christ sacramentally present today, by the grace of Holy Orders, in the person of the priest who has been placed in our parish.

The official documents of the Church, from Pius X's *Quam Singulari* to Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (37-38), speak of the need for close cooperation between pastors and parents, especially in the work of formation. In the spirit of this tradition, the pastor, as father of the parish Church, should offer counsel, as needed, as each family plans its catechesis. The pastor or his delegate should make available to homeschooling families the catechetical resources and guidelines used in the schools and parish religious education programs.

Homeschooling gives the Church a wonderful opportunity to consider the interdependence of the members of the Body of Christ. In humility, we acknowledge our need for each other, and God's goodness in providing for our need through the Church, His holy people. Formation succeeds with the cooperation of families and the support of the Church thus promulgating communion with the entire Body of Christ. The work of formation calls families and pastors to cooperate in authentic love and unity. Homeschooling parents encourage their children to be a vibrant part of parish and

community life. If these are our intentions, God will provide all that we need. To that end, we ask the help of the Holy Spirit. We beg the intercession of Mary, Our Lady Seat of Wisdom.

The Diocesan Synod

On August 13, 2006, Bishop Foys signed into law the documents of the Diocesan Synod. Within these documents are policies which pertain to religious education, adult faith formation and home-based catechesis. These policies confirm parents' right and duty to teach their own children the faith.

Policy Edu 19

56. The diocese, through its available resources, will assist each parish with materials to support parents in fulfilling their responsibility to hand on the faith to their children from the earliest age until they reach adulthood.

57. As the givers of life parents are the primary educators and the main source of faith development of their children.

61. Parents further support and encourage each child's faith development by enrolling them in the Catholic school, the parish religious education program or an appropriate home-based program of religious instruction.

Policy Edu 23

75. The purpose of all programs of catechetical instruction is to support and assist parents who bear the primary responsibility for the formation of the children to meet their obligation. The parish provides such programs either in a parish school or in parish religious education programs for children attending public schools. Parents may also meet their responsibility by utilizing an appropriate home-based program of religious instruction.

Policy Edu 24

78. The Bishop has direct oversight over Religious Education and Education policies regarding schools, parish religious education, home-based religious education programs and faith formation.

Homeschooling and Sacramental Preparation

General policy related to the reception of First Penance, First Eucharist and Confirmation:

The time of formation must be understood to include the whole period following the child's baptism. Thus, parents are to help their children develop a life of prayer, knowledge and a love of Jesus Christ and His teachings, and a practical relationship with the local Church.

Homeschooling families should not be unduly burdened in sacramental years. In general, if they are providing their children with regular and thorough catechesis, the children should not be required to attend additional parish religious education classes. The pastor, however, has the

responsibility to evaluate readiness for the reception of a given sacrament (cf. *Quam Singulari*), and he should clearly state for all parish families how he will determine that readiness. This process should not be burdensome to the family or traumatic to the children, and the requirements for homeschooled children should be neither more nor less demanding than they are for other children. When service projects or other work are required, the parents may be entrusted to oversee the works.

The parents of all candidates should be reminded of their unique and God-given role in the Christian formation of their children. They should be offered an opportunity to receive practical information concerning preparations for the reception and celebration of the sacraments of Penance, First Eucharist, and Confirmation. In addition, they should have the opportunity for personal spiritual preparation for these celebrations.

Parents who, for the first time, are leading a child to the sacraments are to be offered assistance to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the sacraments in the life of the Church and in their own lives. Parents who have previously availed themselves of such assistance are to be welcomed to take part again if they so desire. Many adult faith formation opportunities are available through the diocese and parishes. Homeschooling parents are encouraged to make use of programs and classes to aid in their own formation.

Parish staff should include homeschooling families in any informational mailings from the parish pertaining to the sacraments and surrounding events, as well as pertinent information about gathering the child's baptismal certificate, when necessary.

Parishes encourage homeschooling parents and children to participate in parent meetings, retreats, service, social activities and practices connected with the sacraments.

The code of Canon Law prohibits pastors from denying sacraments to candidates whose parents do not participate in special programs. ["Sacred ministers cannot deny the sacraments to those who seek them at appropriate times, are properly disposed, and are not prohibited by law from receiving them." \(Can. 843\)](#)

Children may not for this reason be deprived of the right to the sacraments; however, pastors have the obligation to make sure candidates are properly prepared.

The pastor has the final responsibility to evaluate readiness for reception of a given sacrament, and he should clearly state for all parish families how he will determine that readiness. It is recommended that this evaluation should include an interview of the homeschooled child which may be attended by the parent(s). In determining readiness of the child, the process should not contain requirements that are more or less demanding than they are for other children.

Parents and families with special needs are to receive particular pastoral attention to enable them to participate fruitfully in the celebration of the sacraments.

Options for Celebration of the Sacraments:

In accord with Diocesan policy, the child may receive each sacrament individually, with the family, or within a group. This reception must take place within the parish community.

Specifics: First Penance/First Eucharist

For children who are formally schooled at home, as for any other child, proximate preparation for the sacraments of Penance and Eucharist begin to intensify when children approach the age of reason. Parents who homeschool their children should make an initial contact with their pastor at the beginning of the school year in which the sacrament is to be received.

Parishes must provide the parents with a set of sacramental guidelines for their child at this time. Those guidelines must be derived from catechetical policies established or promulgated by the Diocese of Covington.

Parents and pastors have responsibility for preparing children being educated at home for the reception of First Penance and First Eucharist in accord with the provisions of Canon 914.

Specifics: Confirmation

Specific preparation of the candidates for confirmation is to occur during the year preceding the celebration of the rite. In the Diocese of Covington, the latter usually occurs in the 8th grade year, depending upon the parish.

The homeschooling parents should make initial contact with the pastor in the beginning of the 7th grade year, or the time of proximate preparation.

Parishes must provide the parents with a set of sacramental guidelines for their child at this time. Those guidelines must be derived from catechetical policies established or promulgated by the Diocese of Covington.

Parents and pastors have responsibility for preparing children being educated at home for the reception of Confirmation in accord with the provisions of Canon 890.

Certification

In the section of Canon Law entitled Obligations and Rights of the Lay Christian Faithful it states: *Because they have given life to their children, parents have a most serious obligation and enjoy the right to educate them; therefore, Christian parents are especially to care for the Christian education of their children according to the teaching handed on by the Church.* (Can.226, Section 2)

Therefore, it can be seen from this and other texts, that while the bishops and the pastors are responsible to provide for the Christian education of all the faithful, it is parents who specifically have

the obligation to educate their own children provided they do it in accordance with the teaching handed on by the Church.

This brings an important point to the forefront. Policy Edu 23 (#72) of the Synod Document states, "Only those who have been certified as having received the appropriate level of training shall be permitted to engage in catechetical ministry in a parish". *Parents are, in the education of their children, "primary", "original", first" and "above others." It follows that parents who choose to homeschool should be concerned with their own catechetical formation in order that they can properly pass the faith on to their children. Homeschooling parents have a responsibility to engage in ongoing adult faith formation and are obliged to participate in the diocesan catechist certification program.*

Homeschooling parents are not required to be compliant with diocesan child protection/safe environment policies unless they work with children in other capacities in the diocese or parish or they make use of diocesan/parish property for homeschooling activities.

Resources

In addition, The Diocesan Teachers of Religion Courses are available and open to all parents. Those parents wishing to take these courses should contact our office.

While parents are the primary educators, their interpretation of doctrine can never supersede the legitimate teaching authority set over them in the Church. The Church has wisely provided a way that the faithful may know which resources are acceptable for religious education. According to canon law, it is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop to ensure all materials used in Catholic education are in full conformity with the teachings of the Church (with the Catechism of the Catholic Church). The Church rightfully insists that this is be done: "Books which treat questions of Sacred Scripture, theology, canon law, church history or which deal with religious or moral disciplines cannot be employed as the textbooks on which instruction is based in elementary, middle, or higher schools unless they were published with the approval of the competent ecclesiastical authority or subsequently approved by it" (Canon 827.2). For this reason, the diocesan bishop makes the final determination as to which textbook(s) must be used for religious education in his jurisdiction. *If necessary, parents may employ supplementary materials to accommodate for a child's individual needs. All supplemental materials must bear the Imprimatur, assuring that the work is in conformity with ecclesiastical standards of the Catholic Church. Farther more, all supplemental materials must be approved by the bishop's office before their use in Catholic Schools, Parish Religious Education Programs or in Home-based Programs.*

Parents who homeschool should contact the Department of Catechesis and Formation at 859-392-1500 ext. 1533 or catechesis@covdio.org for information about approved resources as well as the Diocesan Adult Faith Formation and Catechist Certification Program. The office is happy to assist parents as they teach the Catholic faith in its totality to their children.

If you need assistance with this policy, please don't hesitate to reach out to Isaak Abraham Isaak, Director, Office of Catechesis & Evangelization, at 859-392-1529, or email him, at iisaak@covdio.org!