



Diocese of Erie



**HOMESCHOOL
POLICIES**

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HOMESCHOOLING IN THE DIOCESE OF ERIE

A. INTRODUCTION

1. With the attention given to the various roles of the laity at the Vatican II Council has come a renewed awareness by parents concerning their role in the Christian education and formation of their children. This education in the faith is most often referred to in Church doctrine as catechesis (Cong. for Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, August 15, 1997, nn. 80-87). Many parents have put that awareness into action by becoming actively involved in Catholic schools, in parish faith formation programs, in sacramental preparation programs for children, and in youth ministry activities. In recent years some parents have chosen to educate their children in the faith in what has come to be known as homeschooling.
2. The education of children at home, rather than within institutions of learning, is in accord with the right and duty of parents to teach their children. The Church recognizes that parents are primarily and principally responsible for the education of their children and they are encouraged to take an active role (Vatican II, *Declaration on Christian Education, Gravissimum educationis*, October 28, 1965, n. 3; *The Code of Canon Law*, c. 226, §2; *General Directory for Catechesis*, nn. 226-227, 255). In this regard, parents have the right and duty to provide for the faith formation of their children on two distinct levels.
3. First, there is family catechesis that is best described as a witnessing of the faith by living each day according to the Gospel and by parents taking the time to explain at home the Christian or religious content of various family and personal events. Parents reinforce or may even repeat the truths about the main questions of faith and Christian living which are experienced in various circumstances of life and taught in a systematic or intentional way in parishes and schools (John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, October 16, 1979, n. 68; *National Directory for Catechesis*, 2005, n. 29, D, pp.100-101). This family catechesis “is indeed a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more ongoing and daily than structured into periods” (*General Directory for Catechesis*, n. 255). Family catechesis precedes, accompanies and enriches all forms of catechesis (*Catechesi Tradendae*, n. 68).
4. Second, there is the catechesis which parents provide for their children when they become the primary catechists apart from Catholic schools or parish religious education programs or when the parish religious education program is home-centered. In this role, the parents are responsible for providing authentic catechesis in the name of the Church (*Catechesi Tradendae*, n. 68; National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *National Directory for Catechesis*, 2005, n. 61, A-3, p.259). In some places where religious education in schools and parishes is

impossible because of widespread unbelief or secularism, parents become the only ones who can provide authentic education in the faith (*Catechesi Tradendae*, n. 68; *General Directory for Catechesis*, n. 227). It may also occur in places where Catholic schools or parish faith formation programs are available that parents wish to assume this role of catechist through the systematic educational process known as *homeschooling*. Also, due to parish needs, a pastor may decide that a home-centered approach to faith formation will best serve the children and youth in the parish. This policy on **HOMESCHOOLING IN THE DIOCESE OF ERIE** is especially intended to address the issues of catechesis as it is provided in these formats.

5. The typical methods by which the Church exercises its responsibility for catechesis are catechetical programs in parishes and Catholic schools. Catholics are aware that the Church teaches and exhorts parents to value and to utilize parish catechetical programs and Catholic schools (*Gravissimum educationis*, nn. 4-9; *Catechesi Tradendae*, nn. 67-69; *National Directory for Catechesis*: 2005, n. 61, A-4, p.260; *The Code of Canon Law*, cc. 796, §1; 798). However, the option of homeschooling is not in opposition to these other ways of providing catechesis. The Church allows parents the opportunity of personally educating their own children in the faith even when Catholic schools and parish faith formation programs are available.
6. More important, the Church exhorts all parents to take an active role in teaching their children the faith regardless of what form of catechesis they choose for their children (*National Directory for Catechesis*, 2005, n. 61, A-3 4, pp.259-260). Even when they entrust the education of their children to others, nothing can substitute for the role which all parents have in forming and educating their children in the faith (*Gravissimum educationis*, n. 3).
7. All of these forms of catechesis, whatever they may be, are subject to the teaching authority (magisterium) of the Church which is entrusted by Christ the Lord with the right and duty to safeguard the content of authentic catechesis (Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen gentium*, November 21, 1964, n. 12; Vatican II, Decree on the Pastoral Office of Bishops, *Christus Dominus*, October 28, 1965, n. 14; *Catechesi Tradendae*, n. 14; *The Code of Canon Law*, c. 774, §1; *General Directory for Catechesis*, 1997, n. 44). An important concern in regard to the role of parents as the primary catechists is that they receive the necessary training and support from the Church to undertake that task. "There cannot be too great an effort on the part of Christian parents to prepare for this ministry of being their own children's catechists and to carry it out with tireless zeal" (*Catechesi Tradendae*, n. 68). The Church has the responsibility of helping parents who assume this role of catechist. This is to be done by means of personal contact, meetings, courses, and adult catechesis directed toward parents (*General Directory for Catechesis*, n. 227; *The Code of Canon Law*, c. 780; *National Directory for Catechesis*, n. 61, A-3, pp.259-260). Also in order to foster and coordinate catechetical endeavors, including those undertaken by parents who

assume their proper role as the primary catechists for their children, the diocesan bishop is responsible for issuing norms for catechetics within the diocese (*The Code of Canon Law*. c. 775, §1; *General Directory for Catechesis*, n. 76). It is for these reasons that this policy is issued for **HOMESCHOOLING IN THE DIOCESE OF ERIE**.

8. The purpose of this policy is not to obstruct parents from carrying out their catechetical role in the circumstance of *homeschooling*, but to clarify the proper roles of all concerned and the basic requirements which must be met so that children may receive authentic catechesis. Whether in Catholic schools, parish religious education programs, or *homeschooling*, it is essential that catechesis foster discipleship, strong Catholic identity, love for personal and communal prayer, regular participation in the liturgy and sacraments, especially the Eucharist, and service to others (*General Catechetical Directory*, nn. 39-69; *General Directory for Catechesis*, nn. 77-87). This concern for catechesis pertains to all members of the Church under the supervision of legitimate ecclesiastical authority and in proportion to each one's role (*General Catechetical Directory*, nn. 9, 17; *Catechesi Tradendae*, nn. 16, 63-70; *The Code of Canon Law*. c. 774, §1). This legitimate authority is the bishop who assumes the overall direction of catechesis in the diocese (*Catechesi Tradendae*, n. 63; *General Directory for Catechesis*, n. 223; *The Code of Canon Law*. c. 756, §2).
9. Norms for catechesis as determined by the diocesan bishop, especially those regarding sacramental preparation of children, should be kept to a minimum and focus only on external and not internal criteria (*General Catechetical Directory*, n. 106). Therefore, pastors, those engaged as catechists in Catholic schools, parish faith formation programs, and parents are advised that what is stated in this policy on **HOMESCHOOLING IN THE DIOCESE OF ERIE** should be studied in light of the universal norms and criteria as put forth by the Apostolic See and those established by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. The general catechetical guidelines issued by the Catholic Schools Office and the Office of Faith Formation, as well as the diocesan guidelines concerning preparation for the sacraments of Penance, first Eucharist, and Confirmation, also apply.
10. The National Conference of Catholic Bishops of the United States has recommended that parents be consulted in preparing guidelines (*Sharing the Light of Faith*, n. 212). Parents who are already engaged in the *homeschooling* of their children have been consulted in the preparation of this policy. Pastors have also been consulted since they have a duty to provide for catechetical formation of all the faithful entrusted to their care (*The Code of Canon Law*. cc. 528, §1; 773). Pastors are likewise to promote and foster the role of parents in family catechesis (*The Code of Canon Law*. c. 776). Since pastors and those appointed in the diocesan Catholic Schools Office, Office of Faith Formation, and Office for Divine Worship share in the teaching function of the diocesan bishop, they are responsible for responding to issues which arise in regard to *homeschooling*. Recourse may be made to the diocesan bishop regarding those matters which

have been decided on a lower level.

B. HOMESCHOOLING - GENERAL NORMS

All parents who choose *homeschooling* for their children are reminded of their most serious responsibilities for providing academic and faith formation according to norms established by state law and church law. In particular they are advised of the following:

1. Parents who choose *homeschooling* for their children are required by the laws of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania to contact the public school district in which they reside. The local public school district is responsible for monitoring and receiving assessments of the children's educational progress.
2. When parents choose to withdraw their children from a Catholic school in order to provide *homeschooling*, they must contact the Catholic school in order to complete the necessary forms. The Catholic school will then forward the children's records to the local public school district in which the children reside.
3. When parents choose to withdraw their children from a Catholic school in order to provide academic *homeschooling*, they also must contact the pastor of their parish to register their children in the parish faith formation program or to declare their option for faith formation *homeschooling* as specified below.
4. Catholic school administrations are encouraged to work in partnership with home schooling parents as much as is feasibly possible.
5. Homeschoolers may not be refused the opportunity to rent school facilities for extracurricular activities if it is the policy of the school/parish to rent those facilities to groups who are not related to that school/parish.

C. FAITH FORMATION AND ACADEMIC HOMESCHOOLING COMBINED FOR CHILDREN IN GRADES K-12

In certain cases parents will choose to provide for the total education of their children at home, rather than a Catholic or public school. In such cases, it is understood that parents will also provide for their children's education in the faith as part of their *homeschooling*. In these cases, the following are to be observed:

1. Parents will declare their option for *homeschooling* to their proper pastor, either in writing or in person.¹
2. Before the *homeschooling* program for faith formation begins, the parents will meet with the pastor or his representative (e.g., the parochial vicar, principal, or faith

formation leader) to discuss the catechetical methods and aids that are to be used.

3. It is the expectation of the bishop that all catechists including those in *homeschooling* are certified or actively working toward certification according to diocesan policy. Information concerning certification is available from the Diocesan Office of Faith Formation.
4. The parents will be provided with a copy of the Catechetical Guidelines from the Catholic Schools Office of the Diocese of Erie for the grade level(s) at which the children will be homeschooled for that year. The parents also will be provided with a copy of the appropriate grade level textbook(s) that is being used in the parish school. Should parents wish to use another textbook, they must use a text from the Bishop's list of approved textbooks.²
5. At the beginning of the school year, the pastor or his representative and the parents shall determine when they will meet to review the progress of the children being homeschooled in the faith.

D. FAITH FORMATION HOMESCHOOLING APART FROM ACADEMIC HOMESCHOOLING FOR CHILDREN IN GRADES K-12

1. INITIATED BY THE PARENT(S)

In certain cases the only schools available for the academic education of children are those which are operated by the public school district. In other cases parents will choose to provide for the academic education of their children in a public school. In such cases the faith formation of their children would normally be provided for in the parish faith formation program. However, some parents may choose to provide for their children's education in the faith through *homeschooling*. In these cases, the following are to be observed:

- a. Parents will declare their option for faith formation *homeschooling* to their proper pastor, either in writing or in person.³
- b. Before the *homeschooling* program for faith formation begins, the parents will meet with the pastor or his representative (e.g., the parochial vicar, principal, or faith formation leader) to discuss the catechetical methods and aids that are to be used.
- c. It is the expectation of the bishop that all catechists including those in *homeschooling* are certified or actively working toward certification according to diocesan policy.⁴

- d. Parents will be provided with a copy of the Catechetical Guidelines from the Office of Faith Formation of the Diocese of Erie for the grade level(s) at which the children will be homeschooled for that year. The parents also will be provided with a copy of the appropriate grade level textbook(s) being used in the parish faith formation program, along with a Family Guide or Catechist Guide. Should parents wish to use a different textbook series they must choose one from the approved USCCB Conformity List
<https://www.usccb.org/resources/current-conformity-list>
- e. At the beginning of the school year, the pastor or his representative and the parents shall set up a schedule of meetings to review the progress of the children being homeschooled in the faith. In order to provide both parents and children with support, encouragement and direction at regular intervals, it is recommended that a minimum of four meetings a year will be scheduled. These meetings between the pastor's representative and the child will review expected progress.
- f. All parents have an obligation to involve their children in the life and mission of the Church. Since their children are being initiated into the life of the Church, which is fundamentally realized in the local parish, parents who provide catechesis for their children in their homes should participate fully in the life of the local parish (*National Directory for Catechesis*, n. 61, A-3, p.259).

2. INITIATED BY THE PARISH

This option has been rescinded by Policy 420.00. Issued on August 8, 2014 by Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, J.C.L.

E. HOMESCHOOLING PREPARATION FOR THE SACRAMENTS OF INITIATION AND PENANCE FOR CHILDREN IN GRADES K-12

The preparation of children for the Sacraments of Initiation (Baptism, Confirmation, Holy Eucharist) and Penance is a very important function of catechesis which deserves special attention (*General Catechetical Directory*, Appendix). "On the one hand, the catechesis that prepares for the sacraments is an eminent kind, and every form of catechesis necessarily leads to the sacraments of faith. On the other hand, authentic practice of the sacraments is bound to have a catechetical aspect. In other words, sacramental life is impoverished and very soon turns into hollow ritualism if it is not based on serious knowledge of the meaning of the sacraments, and catechesis becomes intellectualized if it fails to come alive in sacramental practice" (*Catechesi Tradendae*, n. 23).

In those cases when parents choose to prepare their children for the Sacraments of

Initiation and Penance by *homeschooling*, the following are to be observed:

1. The celebration of the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance is to take place in the proper parish of the children who will celebrate them.
2. The first celebration of the Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist by children is to be preceded by sacramental confession (Penance) in accord with the universal law of the church (*The Code of Canon Law*, c. 914).
3. In order that they may receive additional information to impart sacramental preparation to their own children through *homeschooling*, parents should attend those parish meetings or seminars for all parents whose children are preparing for the reception of sacraments at that age level.
4. In most cases, a child will have been baptized as an infant. However, when Baptism has been postponed until a later age, parents will inform their pastor as soon as they wish to seek to have the child baptized. The parents then will meet with the pastor to declare their intention to prepare the child for this sacrament through *homeschooling*. Likewise, parents who wish to prepare their children for the Sacraments of Confirmation, Holy Eucharist, and Penance by *homeschooling* are to declare their intention to the pastor prior to beginning that sacramental catechesis.
5. The pastor will provide the parents with the norms for both the Christian Initiation of Children in the Diocese of Erie and the Policies and Guidelines for Preparation for each of the Sacraments in the Diocese of Erie. The pastor or his representative will provide the parents with a textbook for the preparation of children for these sacraments, along with a Family Guide or Catechist Guide.⁵
6. Since it pertains to both the parents and the pastor to determine when such a child is prepared to celebrate the sacrament, the parents and the pastor or his representative shall meet at the beginning of the school year to set up a schedule of meetings to review the progress made by the child (*The Code of Canon Law*, cc. 843, §2; 867, §1; 890; 914). In order to provide both parents and children with support, encouragement and direction at regular intervals, it is recommended that a minimum of four meetings will be scheduled during the period of sacrament preparation.
7. Pastors and all ordained ministers are reminded that they cannot refuse the sacraments to those who ask for them at appropriate times, are properly disposed and are not prohibited from receiving them (*The Code of Canon Law*, c. 843, §1). Parents are reminded of their duties to see to it that their children are prepared for the celebration of the sacraments, taking into account the norms published in this policy for **HOMESCHOOLING IN THE DIOCESE OF ERIE**. The guidelines should

be interpreted in light of existing Diocesan guidelines for reception of sacraments, cf. Introduction paragraph 9.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The rationale for this is to inform the pastor that his obligation to provide for religious education of their children within the parish school or religious education program is instead being fulfilled by the parents. This in turn provides the pastor the opportunity to promote and foster the role of parents in accord with his canonically prescribed duty (*The Code of Canon Law*, cc. 776; 774, §2).
- ² The rationale for this exchange of information and materials is to properly coordinate these catechetical activities and to make certain that authentic catechesis is being provided as is the Church's fundamental responsibility. The parents must ensure that the Christian education of their children is in accord with the teaching of the Church (*The Code of Canon Law*, c. 226, §2).
- ³ The rationale for this is to inform the pastor that his obligation to provide for religious education of their children within the parish school or religious education program is instead being fulfilled by the parents. This in turn provides the pastor the opportunity to promote and foster the role of parents in accord with his canonically prescribed duty (*The Code of Canon Law*, cc. 776; 774, §2).
- ⁴ In this case, diocesan certification policy applies to parents choosing homeschooling on a long term basis not those who find it necessary as a short term solution to a particular problem.
- ⁵ The rationale for this exchange of information and materials is to properly coordinate these catechetical activities and to make certain that authentic catechesis is being provided as is the Church's fundamental responsibility. The parents must ensure that the Christian education of their children is in accord with the teaching of the Church (*The Code of Canon Law*, c. 226, §2).

Reaffirmed with amendments:

July 25, 2013

Feast of St. James, Apostle

The Most Reverend Lawrence T. Persico, J.C.L.

Promulgated: February 11, 1999

Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes

Most Rev. Donald W. Trautman, STD, SSL