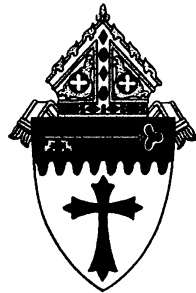


HOMESCHOOLING

DIOCESE OF ERIE



GUIDELINES

February 11, 1999
Feast of Our Lady of Lourdes

My dear people,

It is with great joy that I approve and promulgate this policy on Homeschooling in the Diocese of Erie. Since the Second Vatican Council there has been a new awakening of parental responsibility for the education of their children. This has taken various forms from greater involvement in schools and religious education programs to direct teaching of students within their own homes. How these various forms of education and formation connect with the offerings of parish ministry is the constant subject of our attention; for the parish is the extension of the Diocesan mission— to teach and sanctify.

Documents abound to direct the local Church. The papal encyclicals, exhortations, various congregational decrees, national Bishops' conferences and indeed specific Dioceses have determined the need to recognize and connect with the various educational arms of the family in the Church. These policies are set in place to recognize the specific rights and responsibilities of those most responsible for the local level of formation. As government schools abound, there is a concern for the spiritual dimension of education being given its due attention. Though the Church offers a variety of educational programs through her ministries, parents too may see fit to directly develop their children's formation. We welcome the Homeschoolers and seek a partnership in the Catholic Education of our children.

Fraternally in Christ,

Most Rev. Donald W. Trautman, STD, SSL

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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 (cf. S.Cong. for Clergy, *General Catechetical Directory*, April 11, 1971, nn. 17-35; Cong. for Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, August 15, 1997, n. 30). Many parents have put that awareness into action by becoming actively involved in Catholic schools, in parish religious education programs, in sacramental preparation programs for children, and in youth ministry activities including retreats and social service experiences. 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 inalienable 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 religious education 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, *Apostolic Exhortation on Catechesis in Our Time, Catechesi tradendae*, October 16, 1979, n. 68). 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. 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, *Sharing the Light of Faith: National Catechetical Directory for Catholics of the United States*. Washington, DC: USCC, 1979, n. 212). 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 religious education programs are available that parents wish to assume this role of catechist through the systematic educational process known as *homeschooling*. This policy on HOMESCHOOLING IN THE DIOCESE OF ERIE is especially intended to address the issues of catechesis as it is provided in this form.

5. *Homeschooling* is one of various ways in which catechesis may be provided for the Christian faithful. Other ways include 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; *General Catechetical Directory for Catechesis*, n. 44, *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 religious education 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 (*Catechesi Tradendae*, #68). 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*, #14; *General Catechetical Directory*, #38; *Sharing the Light of Faith*, # 212; *The Code of Canon Law*, c. 774, §1; *General Directory for Catechesis*, # 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*, #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*, #227; *The Code of Canon Law*, c. 780). 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*, #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*, # 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*, #106). Therefore, pastors, those engaged as catechists in Catholic schools, parish religious education 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 Religious Education Office, 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*, # 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, Religious Education Office, and Worship Office 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 religious education 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 religious education program or to declare their option for religious education *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. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION 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 religious education begins, the parents will meet with the pastor or his representative (e.g., the parochial vicar, principal, or religious education 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 Department of Religious Education.
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 the parents wish to use another textbook, they should provide a copy for review by the pastor or his representative. 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.

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).

D. RELIGIOUS EDUCATION HOMESCHOOLING APART FROM ACADEMIC HOMESCHOOLING FOR CHILDREN IN GRADES K-12

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 religious education of their children would normally be provided for in the parish religious education 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:

1. Parents will declare their option for religious education *homeschooling* to their proper pastor, either in writing or in person.³
2. Before the *homeschooling* program for religious education begins, the parents will meet with the pastor or his representative (e.g., the parochial vicar, principal, or religious education 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. ⁴
4. The parents will be provided with a copy of the Catechetical Guidelines from the Religious Education 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 religious education program. Should the parents wish to use another textbook, they should provide a copy for review by the pastor or his representatives.
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.

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. ⁵The 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).

**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 reception of the Sacraments of Initiation and Penance is to take place in the proper parish of the children who will receive them.
2. The first reception 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 received Baptism as an infant. However, when Baptism has been neglected 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 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. Should the parents wish to use another textbook, they should provide a copy for review by the pastor or his representative.⁶
6. Since it pertains to both the parents and the pastor to determine when such a child is prepared to receive the sacrament, the parents and the pastor or his representative shall meet at the beginning of the school year to determine when to review the progress made by the child (*The Code of Canon Law*, cc. 843, §2; 867, §1; 890; 914).
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 reception 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.

⁶ 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).

The Diocese of Erie Homeschooling Study Group

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Mr. & Mrs. Wayne Hepler
Homeschooling Parents

Reverend John Herbein
Pastor

Reverend Scott Katren
Parochial Vicar

Mr. & Mrs. Paul Lorei
Homeschooling Parents

Very Reverend Jeffrey Noble
Pastor

Mr. & Mrs. Mark Wagner
Homeschooling Parents

Diocesan Staff:

Reverend Mark Bartchak
Judicial Vicar

Reverend Msgr. Andrew Karg
Vicar for Education

Mr. Joseph Streett
Director of Religious Education

Sr. Mary Arnold Tann, S.S.J.
Superintendent of Schools

Mrs. Janice Whiteman
Schools Director of Curriculum