

Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth

Homeschool Catechetical Guidelines for Parish Religious Education

Important Catechetical Documents

Key Catechetical documents of the Church appropriate for the ministry of Catechesis.

BT	Basic Teachings for Catholic Religious Education National Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCC, 1973.
CCC	Catechism of the Catholic Church Libreria Vaticana Editrice, 2000. (2nd Ed.)
CE	Declaration of Christian Education Vatican II, 1965.
CT	Catechesi Tradendae Pope John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, 1979.
DV	Dei Verbum (On Sacred Scripture) Vatican II, 1965
EN	On Evangelization In the Modern World Pope Paul VI, 1975.
EV	The Gospel of Life Pope John Paul II, 1995.
GCD	The General Catechetical Directory Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, 1971
GDC	The General Directory for Catechesis Sacred Congregation for the Clergy, 1997
GDCM	Guidelines for Doctrinally Sound Catechetical Materials USCC, Publication 419-8, November 21, 1990.
GMD	Go and Make Disciples: National Catechetical Directory National Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCC, 1979
NDC	National Directory for Catechesis: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2006
RCIA	Rites of Christian Initiation of Adults USCC, 1988
ST	The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor) Pope John Paul II, August 5, 1993
TJD	To Teach As Jesus Did National Conference of Catholic Bishops, USCC, 1972.
TCCC	The Catechism of the Catholic Church and the Craft of Catechesis, Morgan, Willey, Coinet, Ignatius Press, 2008

Introduction

Catechesis refers to “the whole of the efforts within the Church to make disciples, to help people to believe that Jesus is the Son of God, so that believing they might have life in his name, and to educate and instruct them in this life and thus build up the Body of Christ” (*On Catechesis in Our Time*, 1). Catechesis includes, but is not limited to, intentional instruction. It is “an education of children, young people, and adults in the faith which includes especially the teaching of Christian doctrine” (*CT*, 18).

“Catechesis is the responsibility of the entire Christian community” (Congregation for the Clergy *General, Directory for Catechesis*, 220). The environment and means for catechetical activity varies and is realized in many communities: family, parish, Catholic Schools, Christian associations and movements and small faith communities where faith is initiated and continued throughout a person’s lifetime. Catechesis “is a fundamental ecclesial service, indispensable for the growth of the Church. It is not an action which can be realized in the community on a private basis or by purely personal initiative. The ministry of catechesis acts in the name of the Church by its participating in the mission” (*GDC*, 219).

Foundational Catechetical Principles for Catholic Home Schooling

St. John Paul II has challenged us to a new evangelization in which the family becomes a sign of Christ in the world and a privileged place of His presence and action. As the *Catechism of the Catholic Church (1657)* reminds us, the home “is therefore the first school of Christian life and a ‘school for human enrichment.’ Here one learns endurance and the joy of work, fraternal love, generous - even repeated - forgiveness, and above all divine worship in prayer and the offering of one’s life.”

Parents are called to impart godly values and to educate their children at home. “Parents receive in the sacrament of Matrimony ‘the grace and the ministry of the Christian education of their children,’ to whom they transmit and bear witness to human and religious values. This educational activity which is both human and religious is a ‘true ministry’” (*GDC*, 227).

Many Catholic families are responding to this call of renewal by teaching their children at home.

Catechesis in the Home

The Church recognizes 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 disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues” (CCC, 2223). In his 1994 *Letter to Families*, Blessed 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).

“The family catechetical activity has a special character, which is in a sense irreplaceable.” This special character has been rightly stressed by the Church, particularly by the Second Vatican Council. “Family catechesis therefore precedes, accompanies and enriches all other forms of catechesis..; ‘the Church of the home’ remains the one place where children and young people can receive an authentic catechesis” (CT, 68).

The religious education of children by means of home schooling is a method of catechetical instruction and, while equal in content and goals, is different in structure from both Parish Religious Education and Catholic School Education. Parents who home school their children are able to gauge their lessons to each child’s strengths and weaknesses and are able to incorporate them throughout the day and “talk of them when (they) sit in (their) house(s), and when (they) walk by the way, and when (they) lie down, and when (they) rise” (Dt 6:6-7).

Among the variety of circumstances which might lead a family to choose home schooling in religious education are separation and divorce, families with two parents who work, rural situations and transportation difficulties.

Two Specific Distinctions of Homeschooling with respect to Religious Education

When one speaks of homeschooling within a parish religious education context it typically refers to models:

One: The first model refers to a traditional Homeschool family that involves child/children receiving direct academic and religious instruction (catechetical formation) by their parents at home or through the assistance of an academic cooperative. The parents in this situation choose to continue their child/children’s religious education formation at home instead of participating in the local parish religious education program.

Parents under this model would communicate with the Pastor and the parish Director of Religious Education about their desire to continue to teach the Catholic faith to their children at

home. In light of the religious education program offered by the parish parents would be required in good faith to provide a sample of their religious education curriculum to make sure it aligns with current Diocesan catechetical standards.

Two: The second model refers to a Homeschool family who typically sends their child/children to a public school and chooses to homeschool their child in religious education instead of participating in the parish religious education program.

Parents under this model would communicate with the Pastor and the Parish Director of Religious Education about their desire to teach the Catholic faith to their children. Parents would be required to explain and outline the reason(s) why they want to homeschool their child/children in religious education at home instead of participating in the religious education program.

Collaboration of Parents, the Church and the Parish

The USCCB in “To Teach as Jesus Did” (52) states, “While it was relatively easy in more stable times for parents to educate their children and transmit their values to them, the immense complexity of today’s society makes this a truly awesome task. Without forgetting, then, that parents are the first to communicate the faith to their children and to educate them, the Christian community must make a generous effort today to help them fulfill their duty.”

This point is made in light of the principle of subsidiarity, according to which “a community of a higher order should not interfere in the internal life of a community of a lower order, depriving the latter of its functions, but rather support it in case of need and help to co-ordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with a view to the common good” (*CCC, 1883*).

The Church is obliged to assist parents in their responsibility to ensure faith formation for their children which traditionally has taken place in Parish Schools of Religion or the Catholic Schools. The Church, at the Diocesan and parish levels, should do everything possible to assist parents in implementing their right to home school. The local church should assist parents in their responsibility to ensure faith formation for their children. Recognizing that the home is a worthy and viable place for the ministry of Catholic Education, the Diocesan and local church must affirm and support Catholic home schooling families. “Encouragement must also be given to the individuals or institutions that, through person-to-person contacts, through meetings, and through all kinds of pedagogical means, help parents to perform their task. The service they are doing to catechesis is beyond price” (*CT, 68*).

The Role of the Teaching Church

While parents are the primary educators of their children, they are not the sole educators. The Church is Mother and Teacher. The Bishop is the chief catechist in a Diocese and “it is the responsibility of the diocesan Bishop to issue norms concerning catechesis and to make provision that suitable instruments for catechesis are available” (*Canon 775, 1*). The Code of Canon Law continues to say that Pastors have the responsibility for sacramental preparation and all catechesis so that the faith of the faithful becomes living, explicit, and productive through formation in doctrine and the experience of Christian living (*Summation, Canons 843 2, 773; 777*).

The Church places a high priority on the formation of catechists for the service of catechesis. The General Directory for Catechesis states that “diocesan pastoral programs must give absolute priority to the formation of lay catechists” (234). Catechists need to be prepared and participate in continuing education (*Canon 780*). For these reasons, the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth invites parents to avail themselves of various programs and courses offered through the Diocesan Department of Catechesis, especially participation in the St. Francis De Sales Catechists Formation Program which addresses formation in Catechesis, Sacred Scripture, doctrine, liturgy, methods, content and curriculum, the Catechumenate etc.

General Diocesan Guidelines

The Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth has written the following guidelines for its partnership with families who choose to home school.

1. The Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth considers Home Schooling in religious education as a viable option along with the Catholic school and the Parish Religious Education Program.
2. Home school families must be registered members of their parish and make the Pastor aware of their intent to home school.
3. The full name, address, date of birth and current grade level of each child being home schooled must be submitted to the Parish Director of Religious Education in order to maintain appropriate and accurate records.
4. Each child from kindergarten through twelfth grade is to receive appropriate religious instruction of at least one hour per week if not more.
5. Parents may use any Catechetical textbook(s) on the approved Diocesan Department of

Catechesis Religious Education textbook list and or an approved resource under the USCCB Catechism Ad-Hoc Committee. Parents are encouraged to use those series adopted by the Parish Religious Education Program.

6. Parents may use supplemental texts as long as they have been reviewed by the Pastor or DRE to comply with the teachings of the Catholic Church i.e. the Catechism of the Catholic Church.
7. Parents home schooling their children are encouraged but not required to attend Parish Religious Education In-Service programs.
8. Parents home schooling their children are encouraged to seek assistance from the Parish D.R.E. or C.R.E. when particular questions or needs arise.
9. Children, along with their parents, are welcome and encouraged to participate in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass especially when special Masses for children are scheduled.
10. Each parish should provide home school families with a list of all catechetical, liturgical and pastoral activities available to them and their children.
11. A Catechetical assessment will be required of all and any child who is being homeschooled in religious education in order to gauge the students' catechetical development for the following catechetical year. This assessment typically involves use of Sacred Scripture, the Catechism of the Catholic Church and the current religious education text used within the parish catechetical process. **Note: examples of catechetical assessments can be obtained via the Department of Catechesis.**

Sacramental Preparation Guidelines

One of the most important duties of the Pastor is to ensure that children are properly prepared for the reception of the Sacraments of Penance, Holy Eucharist and Confirmation by means of catechetical formation given over an appropriate period of time (*Canon, 777*). The Pastor, Pastoral Administrator or DRE of a parish shall have the responsibility of ensuring that the sacramental preparation of children is both adequate and in conformity with the teachings of the Catholic Church (Magisterium) and shall determine, in consultation with the parents, a child's readiness for these Sacraments.

1. Children may not receive the sacraments of initiation (First Reconciliation, First Holy Communion) prior to the age of reason (7-8 years of age) unless given permission by the appropriate ecclesiastical authority after a careful catechetical assessment. They must also

fulfill all parish and diocesan requirements before being permitted to receive these sacraments.

2. Children may be confirmed prior to the age of 15 after a careful catechetical assessment and permission from the appropriate ecclesiastical authority. They must also fulfill all parish and diocesan requirements before being permitted to receive this sacrament.
3. The parents of children receiving sacraments of initiation (First Reconciliation, First Eucharist, or Confirmation) must fulfill all parish and diocesan requirements.

Spiritual Direction and Catechetical Guidance

1. All home school families should have the opportunity to receive Spiritual Direction and Catechetical guidance from their Pastor, Associate Pastor or parish Director of Religious Education.

Summary

“Since parents have given children their life, they are bound by the most serious obligation to educate their offspring and therefore must be recognized as the primary and principal educators. This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking. Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs. It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbor. Here, too, they find their first experience of a wholesome human society and of the Church. Finally, it is through the family that they are gradually led to a companionship with their fellowmen and with the people of God. Let parents, then, recognize the inestimable importance a truly Christian family has for the life and progress of God's own people.”

Declaration on Christian Education, 3