

Guidelines for Catholic Religious Education in the Home

Archdiocese of Atlanta Office of Religious Education

1. General Guidelines for Home Catechesis

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 responsibilities for the education of their children. Catholic school and parish religion education programs are offered in many forms and varieties which most parents find suitable for the faith growth and development of their children.

Parents are not always able to avail themselves of either Catholic schools or parish schools of religion, and thus need to provide religious instruction and sacramental preparation at home. Such instruction and preparation differs from secular subjects in that catechesis involves building the Kingdom of God on earth. Catholic home religion educators have a sacred obligation to guide their children in the light of the magisterial teachings of the Church.

Catechesis is an esteemed term in Christian tradition. Its purpose is to make a person’s faith become living, conscious, and active, through the light of instruction. While aiming to enrich the faith life of individuals at their particular stages of development, every form of catechesis is oriented in some way to the catechesis of adults, who are capable of a full response to God’s word. Catechesis is a lifelong process for the individual and a constant and concerted pastoral activity of the Christian community. *Sharing the Light of Faith*, (32).

Four fundamental principles are the heart of these Archdiocesan guidelines for Catholic education in the home:

1. The Right to Parents

Parents, who are the first to communicate the faith to their children through their example and through formal instruction, have the first responsibility for their children. (See *Catechesis of the Catholic Church*, 2223; the Second Vatican Council Declaration on Christian Education, and the Code of Canon Law 226, 796, and 1136).

2. The Parish-Church and Community

The Church is a universal community of believers. Through the Sacrament of Baptism each of us becomes an integral part of the wider Catholic Christian family of God. Deriving from this reality, participation in liturgical, catechetical, and sacramental activities of the parish is an expectation which flows naturally from the communal nature of the Catholic Church. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states, “The home is the natural environment for initiating a human being into solidarity and communal responsibilities” (CCC 2224). It states also, “The privileged place for the catechesis of children and parents” (CCC 2226).

3. Role of the Bishops and Pastor

It is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop to issue norms concerning catechesis and make provision that suitable instruments for catechesis are available...(CL 775).

By virtue of his office, the pastor is bound to provide for the catechetical formation of adults, young people and children...and is entrusted by the bishop to make provision for Sacramental preparation. This directive includes: suitable catechesis, proper preparation, formation over suitable time and through instruction enlighten faith and development (CL 776).

The Four Fundamental Principles:

- 1. The Right of Parents**
- 2. The Parish-Church as Community.**
- 3. Role of the Bishops and Pastor**
- 4. The Church as Magisterium**

4. The Church as Magisterium

Catechesis is the work of the whole Church. The teaching Church is the guarantor of the soundness of Christian doctrine. There is no authentically Catholic way to teach except in union with the pope and the local bishop through his pastors and designated assistants.

The Church commissions bishops and pastors to take seriously their obligation to ensure that the authenticity of the Gospel message is taught, and private interpretation of doctrine can never supersede the legitimate teaching authority of the Church.

Parents, Parish, Pastors

The *General Directory for Catechesis* is clear about the role of parents and parish in the catechesis of the young child. It affirms that parents are the primary educators in the faith of their children within their expression of family life:

"The family as the origin or "locus" of Catechesis has a unique privilege: Transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human Values" (GDC 255),

and emphasizes the importance and value of the parish.

"The Christian community is the origin, "locus", and goal of catechesis (GDC 253. The parish is, without a doubt, the most Important locus in which Christian Community is formed and expressed" (GDC 257),

Cannon Law is clear about the catechetical responsibility of pastors,

"to provide for the catechetical formation of adults, young people and children in their care" (CL 776), and for those involved in sacramental preparation, to provide suitable catechesis, proper preparation, and formation over a suitable time (CL 777).

All sacraments clarify the importance of good communication between bishops, pastors and their designee's, and parents, so that all can take responsibility and offer the quality of leadership need to carry out the catechetical mission of the Church.

"The family... has a unique privilege; transmitting the Gospel by rooting it in the context of profound human values" (GDC 255).

The Department of Catholic Education of the Archdiocese of Atlanta supports the mission of the Archbishop in his role as teacher and as the catechetical leader of the Archdiocese in heralding the Catholic faith in the Archdiocesan schools, in the parishes, and in the home. Such support extends to Pastors and their designees through the development of guidelines and policies, and assistance to schools and parishes in developing and updating authentic instructional programs in keeping with the multicultural and diverse ethnicity of the Archdiocesan population.

1. The Department of Religious Education is committed to the support of pastors and parents in fulfilling their catechetical home schooling responsibilities and to providing and fostering a sense of discipleship, as well as an awareness of belonging to and being connected with the larger Catholic Church community. The department also supports home religious education through the parishes by providing stated Archdiocesan policies and guidelines regarding preparation and reception of the sacraments and a list of texts and instructional resources which are sound in methodology, age-appropriate, and in conformity with published standards and teaching of the Church.

The texts and resources reviewed support a systematic approach to catechesis which assures that all aspects of faith and faith life are presented in such a way that the child and parent can engage in sharing the treasures of faith.

This resource is available to guide and assist parents in the choice of instructional material. The department recognizes that the instructional language used in the home shall be the choice of the parents.

Archdiocesan-wide training is provided to the classroom catechists, and home catechists are encouraged to avail themselves of these opportunities for their own faith and spiritual growth as well as to gain additional competency in catechizing their children.

In addition to a current Catholic study bible, it is recommended that Catholic home school libraries contain at least the following:

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| † | Documents of Vatican II |
| † | Sharing the Light of faith |
| † | General Directory for Catechesis |
| † | The Catechism of the Catholic Church |

and that the parents be familiar with the content of these Church documents.

Because each family situation is unique, parents are encouraged to meet with the pastor or his designee so that a suitable plan can be developed. The pastor or his designee should make the parents and the children aware of the activities and ministries available to all children in the parish (such as children's choir, altar servers and social events), and invite and encourage their active participation. In addition, the pastor or his designee should make available to parents appropriate catechetical materials. Parents need to follow the guidelines of the Archdiocese in regards to the preparation of sacraments.

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

2. Guidelines for Parish Implementation

The Parish will offer assistance to parents in selecting instructional materials which the parents may purchase from the parish. As appropriate, this will include presenting the syllabus and focus of the particular grade level that will be used in the parish school of religion. Where possible, the parish will endeavor to recommend or provide language-appropriate materials.

The parish may require the parents to register with the parish school or religion so that the home-schooled child will be included in all mailings and dissemination of information regarding parish activities. The parish may request some record keeping of the student's progress. (The Archdiocese requires a minimum of 30 hours of religious instruction per year in the parish school of religion.) When a family moves to another parish, the record will enable the parish to transfer official documentation on the student's progress and sacramental preparation and reception. The parish will provide information concerning religious education functions which involve all the children of the parish.

3. Sacramental Preparation Guidelines

Cannon Law 777 notes that 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 reception of the sacraments of Reconciliation. Eucharist and the Sacrament of Confirmation by means of a catechetical formation given over an appropriate time. (See 1994 Sacramental Guidelines).
3. That catechetical formation also be given to those handicapped in body or mind insofar as their confection permits.
4. That the faith of young people and adults be strengthened, enlightened and developed through various means and initiatives.

Children are given a richer and deeper catechetical formation after they have made their First Communion. In light of this directive, **parents need to make every effort to contact the pastor in a timely manner about the instruction of their children as any sacrament approaches and the parish needs to give families suitable notice regarding their particular guidelines for Sacramental Preparation. The Parish will inform** the family of the applicable sections of the Department of Catholic Education "Guidelines for the Sacraments of Initiation and the Sacrament of Penance" published June 8, 1994, especially the criteria for readiness for reception of the sacraments.

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| Recommended Resources for
Home-School Libraries: | |
| † | Catholic Study Bible |
| † | General Directory for Catechesis |
| † | Documents of Vatican II |
| † | The Catechism of the Catholic Church |
| † | Sharing the Light of Faith |
| † | Archdiocesan Curriculum Guidelines for Early
Childhood and Elementary Catechesis |

