



# FAITH EDUCATION IN THE HOME

*Catholic Homeschooling*

SECOND EDITION

Secretariat for Education • Diocese of Pittsburgh



# Contents

## I. The Teaching Home and the Teaching Church

|                                      |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| The Great Commission.....            | 4 |
| The Parent as Primary Educator.....  | 5 |
| The Role of the Teaching Church..... | 7 |
| Education and Communion.....         | 7 |
| Education as Blessing.....           | 9 |

## II. Homeschooling in the Church of Pittsburgh

|   |    |
|---|----|
| What's Homeschooling? Beauty in Diversity.....          | 10 |
| Where is Homeschooling? At the Heart of the Parish..... | 11 |
| Resources Available.....                                | 12 |
| A Powerful Witness.....                                 | 13 |
| Into the Future.....                                    | 13 |

## III. Catechesis and the Sacraments

|  |    |
|--|----|
| What are the Local Church's Policies Affecting<br>Home Catechesis?.....        | 14 |
| Diocesan Policy Related to Home Catechesis<br>and Sacramental Preparation..... | 15 |
| The Diocese of Pittsburgh Homeschool Study Group.....                          | 19 |



Dear Friend in Christ,

The Church has long recognized that parents have the primary responsibility for passing on the faith to their children. This task begins with the birth of each child. As children grow, however, and this task becomes more complex, the Church offers a variety of programs to support the parents' efforts.

Over the years, the Church has fostered a number of means for assisting parents: wonderful Catholic schools, religious education programs, family- or home-based catechetical programs, and a host of other diocesan religious education efforts. These programs have proven very effective in helping parents fulfill their right and duty of education.

A new phenomenon is found among parents who choose to provide their children with homeschooling. These parents vary in the extent to which they provide education at home. Some provide the full curriculum; others offer only catechesis. While these guidelines are applicable to a wide range of educational experiences, the primary focus is on those parents who have chosen to provide their children's catechesis in the home.

Because of its newness, Catholic homeschooling is an enigma to many people: pastors, catechetical leaders, and even the homeschooling families themselves as they begin on their way. Many people have called our offices about concerns regarding participation in parish events and reception of the sacraments.

We offer this booklet as a source for information on Catholic homeschooling in the Diocese of Pittsburgh -- and a guidebook for cooperation between parishes and families. Its purpose is to encourage, to assist, and to support the homeschooling effort within the local Church.

The booklet contains a clear understanding of the homeschooling ministry, sets forth diocesan policy with regard to sacramental reception, and indicates a variety of means for building an enriching partnership at every level of Church life.

Catholic homeschoolers are invited to form a marvelous partnership with all our Catholic educators in proclaiming the saving message of Christ in His Church. We look forward to a future of mutual support as the Church and her families enter a new millennium. The ministry of total Catholic Education can only be enhanced by the positive dynamism that Catholic homeschoolers bring to the Church.

With every prayer and best wish, I remain

Sincerely in Christ,

**Reverend Kris D. Stubna, S.T.D.**

*Secretary for Education*



## Part I: The Teaching Home and the Teaching Church

---

### Theological Foundations of Catholic Homeschooling

#### **I. The Great Commission**

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 were not learned men; they were, most of them, fishermen. Neither were the Apostles particularly strong in faith. Even as Jesus commissioned them to teach and baptize the entire world, we are told, "they doubted." The Apostles accepted the Great 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 catechesis. Catechesis is "the name . . . given to the totality of the Church's efforts to make disciples, to help men 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, thus building up the body of Christ" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 4). History shows that "periods of renewal in the Church are also intense moments of catechesis" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 8).

The work of catechesis continued in varied ways after the Apostles passed into glory. In the early centuries of the Church, many thousands of converts learned of salvation and were baptized through the Church's catechumenate. In the great era of the Church Fathers, bishops devoted an important part of their ministry to catechesis, writing treatises that remain models for us even today. In the middle ages, it was the Catholic Church that created the institution that came to be known as the university.

All of the Church's councils gave catechesis priority in their constitutions and decrees. In the last centuries, in this country, we saw the rise of the Catholic school system and religious education programs as well as a host of educational programs for adults, youth, and persons with disabilities.

As the American bishops wrote in their pastoral letter, *To Teach as Jesus Did*, catechesis "is a perennial task and joy for the Church of Jesus Christ . . . [Yet] rarely if ever has it been more pressing a need, more urgent a duty and more ennobling a vocation" (6).

Most recently, over the last decade, we have witnessed the emergence of a new -- yet traditional -- way of teaching the faith to the young: through Catholic home education.

## **II. The Parent as Primary Educator**

Catholic home education (or homeschooling) is the very generous way some parents are responding to a particular charge from the Church. Throughout the 20th century, the popes, with increasing urgency, have called parents to be the "primary educators" of their children.

"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 disinterested 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 its Declaration on Christian Education (5), also affirmed the "primary and inalienable right and duty" of parents to educate their children. In the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the council fathers go on to say: "[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 also 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 parents' 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). Elsewhere in the same letter, Pope John Paul II refers to the right and duty of parents to give education as "essential," "primary," "inalienable," and "incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others."

Catholic home educators have taken this teaching literally and taken it 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 community of faith finds order in 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 should 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" (*Catechism of the Catholic Church* 1883). The principle of subsidiarity dictates that parents receive proper assistance from the Church in this, their task of education. "For parents by themselves are not capable of satisfying every requirement of the whole process of raising children, especially in matters concerning their schooling ... Subsidiarity thus complements paternal and maternal love and confirms its fundamental nature, inasmuch as all other participants in the process of education are only able to carry out their responsibilities *in the name of the parents, with their consent* and, to a certain degree, *with their authorization*" (*Letter to Families* 16). 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. This duty of the Church was expressed by the U.S. bishops in *To Teach as Jesus*



*Did:* "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 Church must make a generous effort today to help them to fulfill their duty." Thus the generosity shown by homeschooling parents should inspire in pastors and educators an equal impulse to generous service.

### **III. The Role of the Teaching 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 catechists, 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.

Here, too, the principle of subsidiarity is at work, and the hierarchical Church serves families even as she rules them. Pope John Paul II urged bishops to "let the concern to foster active and effective catechesis yield to no other care whatever in any way" (*Catechesi Tradendae* 63). He directed them to take on the "chief management of catechesis, while at the same time surrounding yourself with competent and trustworthy assistants." A bishop serves all catechists, whether in the school, the parish, or the home, by offering them 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 (cf. *Catechesi Tradendae* 16). 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 one's bishop. "Because of their charge, pastors have, at differing levels, the chief responsibility for fostering, guiding, and coordinating catechesis" (*Catechesi Tradendae* 16).

### **IV. Education and Communion**

Despite its youth as a "movement," Catholic home education already displays a richness and diversity of styles, methods, goals, and philosophies. One of the

strengths of homeschooling is that each "school" is as unique as each family. And just as there are many types of good families, there are, apparently, many successful methods of homeschooling. Though all things human 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 catechesis.

In *Catechesi Tradendae*, Pope John Paul II wrote that "circumstances demand that catechesis should adopt widely differing methods for the attainment of its specific aim: education in the faith ... The variety in the methods used is a sign of life and a resource" (51). The rich diversity of Catholic homes naturally produces a variety of means of teaching doctrine. While respecting the diversity of methods, however, the Church has a serious obligation to ensure the authenticity of the Gospel message as it is taught.

The pastor, as father of the parish Church, should offer counsel as each family plans its catechesis. And a Catholic homeschooling family, which seeks communion with its local Church, should apprise its pastor of its catechetical plans. The official documents of the Church -- from Pius X's *Quam Singulari*, on children's reception of the first sacraments, to Vatican II's *Lumen Gentium* (37-38) -- speak of the need for close cooperation between pastors and parents, especially in the work of catechesis.

In the spirit of this tradition, the pastor or his delegates should make available to homeschooling families the diocesan Church's general guidelines for catechesis. These guidelines are based largely upon the Church's *General Catechetical Directory*, the U.S. *bishops' National Catechetical Directory*, and the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Parents, for their part, should consult the diocesan guidelines in preparing their lessons for the year. All of this sharing of information should be carried out in a spirit of mutual service and should not be subject to any formal monitoring. Both pastors and parents merit respect because of their charisms, and both deserve deference because of their graces of state.

The authority of parents and pastors has sometimes come into conflict because of the wide variety of readings of current diocesan policies for sacramental preparation. Homeschooling families should not be unduly burdened in sacramental years. In general, if they are providing their children regular and thorough catechesis, they should not be required to attend additional parish religious education classes. The pastor, however, has the responsibility to evaluate readiness for reception of a given sacrament (cf. *Quam Singulari*), and he should clearly state for all parish families how he will determine that readiness. Again, this process should not be burdensome to the family or traumatic to the children, and the requirements for home-catechized children should be neither more nor less demanding than they are for other children. When service projects or other works are required, the parents may be entrusted to oversee the works.

Here it must be acknowledged that not all homeschoolers who are Catholic

are providing adequate catechesis. The home-education movement is broad-based, and as it grows it takes in more Catholic adults who are not attending Sunday Mass and who may not be well-schooled themselves in Catholic doctrine. The children of such parents may not be dispensed from parish religious education programs simply because they are homeschooling. The pastor and his delegates are called upon to use discretion and prudence, so that the devout are not slighted because of the lax, and the lax are not further encouraged in their laxity. Furthermore, while parents are the primary educators, their interpretation of doctrine can never supercede the legitimate teaching authority set over them in the Church.

## **V. Education as Blessing**

Writing of catechesis in 1979, 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, a 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 home education is a blessing to which some families have responded generously.

No individual or family can remain faithful apart from communion with the Catholic 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. We hear Christ the Teacher in the bishop whom the pope has appointed to teach, sanctify, and guide our diocesan Church.

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. No educational program can succeed without the cooperation of families. Yet no family can succeed apart from communion with the Church. Communion is not an abstraction; it is not merely a contractual bond with a creed and a catechism. The work of education calls families and pastors to cooperate in authentic love and unity. 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 St. Thomas Aquinas, who is the patron of all teachers.



## Part II: Homeschooling in the Church of Pittsburgh

---

Home is where the school is for a growing number of families in the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Estimates vary, and growth continues at such a pace that it is impossible to say how many local parents have discerned the vocation to home education. In our six counties, several support groups meet regularly serving the specific needs of homeschooling Catholics.

The Diocese of Pittsburgh recognizes this movement as a gift to the Church. The popes of this century have called on parents to be primary educators of their children. Homeschooling parents have responded to this in a most comprehensive way, often making great sacrifices for the sake of their children's care. In doing this, they are exercising a right that comes from God; they are fulfilling a religious duty in a beautiful and sometimes heroic way. In their love for their children, their generosity, and their willingness to make great sacrifices for the sake of education, they offer an outstanding and exemplary witness in our parish communities.

### **What Is Homeschooling? Beauty in Diversity**

The details of homeschooling life vary from home to home. A study group established by the diocese in 1996 concluded that it was impossible to make general conclusions about Catholic home educators. The group, which was itself made up of homeschooling families and education leaders, spent several months studying issues of concern to local Catholic homeschoolers and trying to find the best ways the Church could affirm and assist homeschoolers in their life and work.

For the purposes of this discussion, we will use the terms "homeschooling" and "home education" to describe the work of parents who have undertaken, to any degree and for any length of time, the formal religious or academic formation of their children -- work which has been traditionally carried out in institutional classrooms.

A key issue for the diocesan study group's discussion was catechesis, the means and methods that Catholic families use to pass on the faith. They found that home-catechizing families fell into five general categories:

- Families who provide all academic and religious instruction at home, based on parental choice of material.
- Families who provide academic and religious instruction at home and also use parish religious education classes.
- Families who send their children to public school and use a parish-based or parish-supplied curriculum for religious education.
- Families who send their children to public school and provide religious instruction at home, based on parental choice of material.
- Families who send their children to public school and agree to provide religious education at home because of a scheduling conflict with parish religious education classes.

The first two groups listed make up the great majority of families who identify themselves as homeschoolers. Some of these Catholic home educators do not belong to a support group, Catholic or otherwise; and as a whole they reflect the Catholic population in general, varying in their practice of the faith.

## **Where Is Homeschooling? At the Heart of the Parish**

Because of the newness of the movement, homeschooling is often not well known or understood in a community. This is sometimes the case in our parishes, where some homeschooling families feel as if they don't "fit" into parish life -- they are neither typical Catholic school households nor typical parish religious education program households. As a result, some feel reluctant to approach their pastor or director for religious education about assistance in sacramental preparation.

Some pastors, on the other hand, are unaware of the homeschooling phenomenon or are subject to misconceptions about it. Some, perhaps, see homeschooling as a movement of "protest" against their own efforts, though, for most homeschooling families, that is not the case. Many parents who choose home education do so because they have discerned it as a calling from God, because they enjoy the company of their children, and because they want to be there for the multiplication tables, just as they were there when baby took her first steps.

Within parishes, pastors and homeschooling families should have clear lines of communication, particularly in areas that are essential to the children's growth in faith. Especially at times of sacramental preparation, homeschooling families should feel as much a part of the parish as other families do, even though their children are not required to attend the same classroom formation as other children. The Church is made one in the sacrament, not in the educational technique or textbook.

The parish should share the local Church's catechetical and sacramental guidelines with homeschooling families. These guidelines follow the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* as well as the Vatican's *General Catechetical Directory* and the U.S. bishops' *National Catechetical Directory*, setting some minimum expectations for catechesis at every grade level. The methods by which home educators meet these guidelines will vary greatly from home to home, and the Church respects this diversity. Some will follow packaged curricula; others will rely more on oral teaching, personal service, and primary texts such as the Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, *The Teaching of Christ*, and the lives of the saints. The care of the Church is that her doctrine be taught in its completeness -- comprehending the dimensions of worship, service, and community -- and that the methods and content of catechesis be age-appropriate and free from error in matters of faith and morals.

## **Resources Available**

For that reason, the Diocese of Pittsburgh invites homeschoolers to visit its Learning Media Center at St. Paul Seminary. There, parents and children can take advantage of books, audio and video tapes, computers with Internet access, and other materials useful for the teaching of the faith.

Also at the Media Center, parents can review the full range of catechetical materials available to them from various Catholic publishers. According to canon law, it is the responsibility of the diocesan bishop to ensure that all materials used in Catholic education are in full conformity with the teachings of the Church. Through the Secretariat for Education, catechetical textbooks and other resources are evaluated for use in catechetical programs. Now, copies of approved textbooks will be available in the Learning Media Center for perusal by homeschooling parents.

Now, any homeschooling parent who wants to be an informed consumer can visit the Learning Media Center. For parents who wish to teach with the Church, and teach with media, the local Church offers full assistance.

***For more information on the Learning Media Center,***  
call (412) 456-3120 or visit [www.diopitt.org/education/lmc.htm](http://www.diopitt.org/education/lmc.htm).  
***For more information on home catechesis or family catechesis,***  
***or to discuss any other issues in Catholic home education, contact:***  
the Department for Religious Education at (412) 456-3112.

Homeschooling parents are encouraged to enrich their knowledge of Catholic doctrine and catechetical methods by availing themselves of the various programs and courses offered through the Department for Religious Education. For further information, call (412) 456-3112.

## **A Powerful Witness**

Homeschooling families can offer a unique and powerful witness within a parish community. But because these families are usually outside the circles of "Catholic school" and families of parish religious education programs, they can feel isolated. So that their light can shine in the parish, and so that they can fully participate in the life of the community, homeschooling families can take advantage of (or start up) a wide range of activities. The Diocese of Pittsburgh's homeschooling study group offers just a few suggestions, from its members' own experience:

- Volunteer to help teach religious education or Vacation Bible School classes.
- Prepare your homeschooling "mission statement" and present it to your pastor.
- Volunteer your assistance and your children's assistance at devotions and liturgies (as readers, servers, etc.). Homeschoolers are especially helpful for serving funerals during typical school hours.
- Let your pastor know which saints were homeschoolers (e.g., St. Thomas More, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton), so that he might mark the feast day in some special way.
- Take on community service projects: pro-life activity, food banks, fund-raising or visits to shut-ins.
- Become a more active leader: Join Parish Council or your parish's Family Life Council.

## **Into the Future**

The diocesan study group will continue to meet in coming months and years, examining many issues that have been raised by families.

### **Among the possibilities:**

- The ability to enroll for selected classes in Catholic schools.
- Use of school and parish facilities for athletics or other activities.
- Participation in league and intramural sports.
- Programs for children with disabilities and other special needs.
- The use of diocesan facilities for gatherings of families.
- Assistance from Catholic school teachers as evaluators to fulfill state requirements.
- Creating more effective means of communication, in official diocesan media and through the parishes.

## Part III: Catechesis and the Sacraments

---

### Rights, Duties, and Responsibilities



*What are the local Church's policies affecting home catechesis? What is required of students? of parents? of pastors? The following passages are drawn from diocesan documents and adapted for homeschooling families and their pastors.*

Parents who wish to homeschool their children in religious education should schedule a meeting with a parish priest to discuss their plans for catechesis. Parishes, for their part, should make available to homeschooling parents any resources, such as textbooks and support materials, that the parish uses in religious education. Homeschooling families can elect to use these materials or other suitable materials of their own choosing. Though homeschooled children are expected to meet the same standards as other students (the published catechetical guidelines), they are not required to attend parish religious education or other classes. When service projects or other works are required, the parents may be entrusted to oversee the work.

In preparation for the sacraments, however, the children should attend rehearsals, and their parents should attend appropriate meetings for adults. All materials that parents choose for home catechesis should be sound in Catholic doctrine and in conformity with the published standards and teachings of the Church. Parents should review their educational materials with their pastor. It is the pastor whom the Church has called to work with parents to determine a child's readiness for reception of the sacraments. Both pastor and parents should be acquainted with the diocesan catechetical guidelines and the "Instrument for Evaluation of Catechetical Textbooks and Materials," promulgated to ensure texts' conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Assistance in this important work is available through the Department for Religious Education. Call (412) 456-3112.



## **Diocesan Policy Related to Home Catechesis and Sacramental Preparation**

*Parish Standards for Requesting Reception of the First Sacraments, from "The Sacraments of Initiation Policies for the Diocese of Pittsburgh"*

### **First Penance/Eucharist**

**127.1** *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, a knowledge and love of Jesus Christ and his teachings, and a practical relationship with the local Church.*

**127.2** *Through support and practical helps, parishes should assist parents fulfill this role in the first several years of a child's life.*

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 this time, if they have not already.

Parishes must provide the parents with a set of expectations for their child at this time. Those expectations must include conformity to the Sacraments of Initiation Policies of the Diocese of Pittsburgh, as well as all other catechetical policies established or promulgated by the Diocese of Pittsburgh.

As immediate preparation for the sacrament approaches, pastor and parents need to discuss:

#### *1. Options for Celebration of the Sacraments*

In accord with parish policy, the child may receive each sacrament individually, with the family, or within a group.

#### *2. Welcome at Parish Events*

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

Parish staff should include homeschooling families in any informational mailings from the parish dealing with the sacraments and surrounding events, as well as pertinent information about gathering the child's baptismal certificate, when necessary. Six months prior to the scheduled sacraments, parents will need to arrange an interview between the pastor (or his delegate) and their child to determine the child's readiness and to allow time to make adjustments in any further preparation, if necessary. Interviews are to be based upon the requirements noted in the Sacrament Policies and information stated in the Catechetical Curriculum Guidelines, Diocese of Pittsburgh.



**136.1** *All parents should be gathered and prepared in the year or so prior to the celebration of First Communion.*

**A.** *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 given an opportunity to receive practical information concerning preparations for the first eucharistic Communion of their children, and for the celebration of the sacrament of penance during the time of formation. In addition, they should have the opportunity for personal spiritual preparation for these celebrations.*

**B.** *Parents who for the first time are leading a child to eucharistic Communion are to be provided with catechesis to deepen their understanding and appreciation of the Eucharist in the life of the Church and in their own lives. They should also be helped to appreciate the relationship between such Communion and the call and dignity of baptism. Within this context, they are to be offered catechesis concerning the Church's ministry of reconciliation, celebrated in the sacrament of penance and fulfilled at the table of the Lord.*

**C.** *Parents who have previously participated in such programs are to be welcomed to take part again.*

**D.** *Parents and families with special needs (e.g., family crisis, alienation from Church) are to receive particular pastoral attention to enable them to participate fruitfully in the celebration of the sacrament.*

**136.2** *A candidate whose parents do not participate in special programs may not for this reason be deprived of the right to eucharistic Communion (Code of Canon Law 843; 912).*

### **Confirmation**

**100.1** *The time of formation is understood to include the whole period following baptism.*

**102.1** *Specific preparation of the candidates for confirmation is to occur during the year preceding the celebration of the rite. In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, the latter occurs in the 8th- or 9th-grade year, depending upon the parish.*

The homeschooling parents and student should make initial contact with the pastor in the beginning of the 7th-grade year, or the time of proximate preparation. Including the student in this initial interview will give the pastor a basic sense of the depth of the child's religious formation to this point.

Parishes are to provide the parents with a set of expectations for their child. Those expectations include conformity to the above named Sacrament Policies, as well as information from the Catechetical Curriculum Guidelines, Diocese of Pittsburgh.

Parishes encourage homeschooling parents and children to participate in parent meetings, retreat, service, social activities, and other practices connected with the sacrament of confirmation.

Parish staff should include homeschooling families in any informational mailings from the parish dealing with the sacraments and surrounding events, as well as pertinent information about gathering the child's baptismal certificate and sponsor certificates, when necessary. Six months following the initial meeting with the pastor, parents should arrange an additional interview between the pastor and their child to determine the child's readiness and to allow time to make adjustments in further preparation, if necessary. Interviews are to be based upon the requirements noted in the Sacrament Policies and information stated in the Catechetical Curriculum Guidelines, Diocese of Pittsburgh.

### **Parental Formation**

**105.1** *In the case of candidates who are children, their parents should be gathered and prepared in the year or so prior to the celebration of confirmation.*

**A.** *The parents of all candidates are to be reminded of their unique and God-given role in the Christian formation of their children. They should be given an opportunity to receive practical information concerning preparations for confirmation. In addition, they should have the opportunity for personal spiritual preparation for the sacramental preparation.*

**B.** *Parents who for the first time are leading a child to confirmation are to receive catechesis about the sacrament in order to deepen their understanding and appreciation of confirmation in the life of the Church and in their own lives.*

**C.** *Parents who have previously participated in such programs should be welcomed to take part again.*

**D.** *Parents and families with special needs (e.g., family crisis, alienation from the Church) are to receive particular pastoral attention to enable them to participate fruitfully in the celebration of the sacrament.*

**105.2** *A candidate whose parents do not participate in special programs may not for this reason be deprived of the right to confirmation (Code of Canon Law 843, 912).*

*Homeschooling parents who wish to read the Diocese of Pittsburgh's guidelines for catechesis or for sacramental preparation, or the instrument for evaluation of catechetical materials, may find copies at the Learning Media Center at St. Paul Seminary. Parents who wish to buy copies of these documents may do so by contacting the Secretariat for Education at (412) 456-3100.*

**The Diocese of Pittsburgh  
Homeschooling Study Group**

**Michael and Teresa Aquilina\***  
Homeschooling Parents

**Diana Baseman\***  
Founder, Pennsylvania Home Education Network  
Homeschooling Parent

**Jean DiDonato\***  
Parish Director for Religious Education

**Kimberly Hahn\***  
Author, Catholic Education Homeward Bound  
Homeschooling Parent

**Jeffrey Hirst**  
Director for Department for Educational Media

**Patricia Hoover\***  
Homeschooling Parent

**Regina Labriola\***

**Father Ronald Lawler, O.F.M. Cap\***

**Judy Kirk**  
Director for Department for Religious Education

**Dr. John and Carolyn McKeating\***  
Homeschooling Parents

**Kenneth Ogorek**  
Director for Catechesis

**Dr. Robert Paserba\***  
Superintendent for Catholic Schools

**Sister Mary Elizabeth Schrei\***

**Msgr. Raymond Schultz\***

**Father Kris D. Stubna, S.T.D.\***  
Secretary for Education

**Sharon Tyborowski\***  
Director for Catechetical Ministries

**Father Brian Welding\***  
Assistant Director, Department for Canon and Civil Law Services

*\* original homeschooling study group*





