

A beginner's guide to Catholic Home Education

(Courtesy of the Dayton Catholic Homeschool Network)

Why Catholic home education?

Our children are our most precious possessions. As parents it is our primary duty to raise our children in the truths of the Faith so that they might save their souls to one day be with us in heaven for all eternity. The home, under the loving direction of the parents, may be the best place to educate children in truth and virtue.

Through Catholic home education, parents are able to:

- *Evangelize their children in the Faith providing both catechesis in doctrine and the development of an active spiritual and moral life based upon the sacraments, prayer, and good works.

- *Provide their children with a challenging academic education in the liberal arts and sciences reflected in the light of Catholic teaching and perspective.

- *Individualize curriculum to meet the needs and goals of each child.

- *Personally direct and share in the intellectual, spiritual, moral and emotional growth and development of their children.

- *Provide a loving environment which affirms the individuality of each child who is made in the image and likeness of God and which promotes the practice of virtue on a daily basis.

- *Fulfill the role of the family as the domestic church and predominant socializing agent of children into an authentic Catholic living of the Faith.

- *Protect their children from harmful influences of a secular environment, bad companions, and immoral sex education programs.

Can I do it?

Most parents do not have teaching degrees and learn with their children. Parents often find that home education can be stimulating for them as well as their children. Motivated by love, parents are the natural educators of their children. If necessary, help in subjects such as math, science or languages can be found from curriculum providers, friends, relatives, other home educating families, or tutors. Some high school students have successfully taken classes at community or local colleges. Lastly, we must remember that because God has made the education of children a primary responsibility of parents, He gives parents the necessary graces through the sacrament of marriage.

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Does the Church approve of home education?

The Church has always affirmed the primary right and duty of parents to educate their children. The new Catechism of the Catholic Church (1994) makes the following statements:

*#2221 The right and the duty of parents to educate their children is primordial and inalienable.

*#2223 Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children.

*#2225 Through the sacrament of marriage, parents receive the responsibility and privilege of evangelizing their children.

*#2229 As those first responsible for the education of their children, parents have the right to choose a school for them which corresponds to their own convictions. This right is fundamental.

The Charter Rights of the Family issued by the Vatican in 1983 makes this statement: *“Since they have conferred life on their children, parents have the original, primary and inalienable right to educate them; hence, they must be acknowledged as the first and foremost educators of their children.”*

Pope John Paul II in his Letter to Families for the International Year of the Family in February 1994 makes this statement: ***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.***

Additional documentation of the Church's consistent support and recognition of parental rights with regard to the education of their children can be found in the documents of Vatican II and numerous encyclicals.

How does home education affect family life?

Because home education encourages parents to talk with their children about not only school subjects, but also the important issues of life, the parent-child bond is strengthened, which is especially important during teen years. By catechizing their children, parents usually find that their own faith is renewed and deepened. Parents often reflect that home schooling helps them to aspire more fervently in the acquisition of virtue since they cannot give to their children that which they themselves do not have. Patience, self discipline, etc. are suddenly practical necessities.

Children and parents also need to work together in managing household tasks which develops a spirit of cooperation. Children learn generosity from the self-giving example of their parents. We don't need to be perfect to give good example of striving for holiness and perseverance.

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What about socialization?

Home education provides the best means for socialization – the family. Parents and older brother and sisters are usually far better role models for children than the peer group. Children of the same age, when left to themselves, often cannot provide each other with the guidance and training necessary for the development of proper behavior. The family also knows and understands the needs and personality of each child, and is therefore, better able to guide the child in overcoming his weaknesses and developing his strengths.

Children taught at home are free to be who they are without being critiqued by an insecure peer group whose judgment most often rests upon such superficial matters as appearance or athletic ability. Because children in home educating families are not required to cater to the demands and tastes of the peer group in order to be accepted, they are frequently more self-confident and independent than children socialized predominately by peers.

Home-educated children also learn to related and appreciate people of all ages, which more closely reflects the society in which they will live. Home-educated children also have ample time to develop relationships outside the home in other activities such as sports, music, volunteer work, etc. Local Catholic support groups often plan field trips and other social activities or outings, such as picnics, plays and service projects.

Which curriculum should I choose?

Parents can choose from among complete curriculum programs, guided curriculum programs, unit studies approach or a self-designed program. The complete curriculum programs offer testing, lesson plans, tests, record keeping and more. The guided programs offer either a suggested curriculum or help in designing a curriculum, but no lesson plans or tests. Complete and guided programs offer parents some certainty that all essential material is being covered and continuity from year to year.

Parents need to be aware that even the complete programs may need to be modified and adapted to meet the needs and learning style of each individual child.

Unit studies cover successive topics from all aspects incorporating related history, literature, science, geography, etc.

A self-designed program allows the parent to put together his own curriculum by choosing materials for each child individually. Designing your own curriculum offers greater flexibility but may require a greater knowledge of resources and materials. While complete and guided curriculum programs usually require tuition payment or a service fee, a self-designed program too can be costly since inexperienced parents sometimes find themselves purchasing materials that are never used. Parents frequently choose one curriculum approach and change to another in the following years as needs change and as they begin to know themselves and their children's needs better.

It is good to find a mentor for the first year or two, but do not simply follow in their footsteps – your family is unique and what is perfect for your friend is not necessarily perfect for you. As you learn more about your children and yourself, you will too become an expert on your own family! Learn and grow together.

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Is it important to have a Catholic curriculum?

Yes, it is extremely important to have a Catholic curriculum in order to provide our children with a truly Catholic education that will prepare them not only for this life, but also for eternal life. Only Catholic catechisms and religion texts will teach our children in the Faith properly. Catholic readers and literature provide inspiration while a child is acquiring reading skills.

Only Catholic history texts incorporate the lives of the saints and give the unique Catholic perspective on such events as the life of Christ, the Protestant Revolution, contributions of Catholics in America. Even when a Catholic text is not available for a subject in a particular grade, one should always strive to incorporate Catholic materials and ideas. For example, one should incorporate the teachings of the Church on evolution when studying high school biology. Several Catholic homeschool curriculums are outlined later in this document.

With home education, you now have the flexibility to attend daily Mass and go to adoration as it fits your schedule. You will be surprised how many families and older ladies will be glad to sit with you and help manage crying babies or potty trips during Mass. Also, each day you can incorporate the “science of the saints” and study their lives. Remember heaven is our goal.

What about the Christian programs that are not Catholic?

Christian programs are designed to instruct according to Protestant traditions and teachings. Some programs, such as Abeka and Bob Jones, are at times decidedly anti-Catholic, openly attacking Catholic doctrine even in unexpected places.

Perhaps even more problematic, however, is the integration of Protestant belief into the curriculum which unfortunately is not always recognized by Catholics. Because parents frequently are not skilled in apologetics or have been poorly educated in the Faith themselves, they are often unable to recognize subtle Protestant errors. Parents themselves find that they need the guidance of orthodox Catholic materials. Protestant programs also omit or have a different understanding of many Catholic beliefs, such as the sacraments, the role of Mary and the saints, man's redemption, the Bible, Papal authority etc. Protestant history texts particularly distort and omit facts since the history of civilization is so closely intertwined with the history of the Catholic Church.

What about secular texts?

All texts present some point of view of man and his relationship to the world. Secular texts are basically from an atheistic or, at best, indifferent viewpoint with regard to the existence of God and His role in our lives. Modern secular texts, either as a result of omission, or by direct indoctrination, promote materialism and humanism. Catholic education should integrate a Catholic perspective throughout the curriculum. We would never knowingly teach incorrect math or science facts, so why should we knowingly distort reality for our children by omitting God from life? Using Catholic materials helps our children to see the Faith as part of daily life. Stories of great Catholic men and women and their accomplishments in various fields help to inspire our children and create a Catholic outlook with regard to all avenues of life. Most importantly, Catholic texts and programs help parents and older students learn to evaluate the classical, secular works of literature, history, etc., in the light of Catholic teaching. All of the content of our curriculum and daily life should be evaluated from a Catholic perspective.

Catholic Curriculums

Kolbe Academy: A classical, Ignatian program for all grade levels, providing placement testing and achievement testing. Both a day school and home school program, devoted to providing a philosophy and method of education that is thoroughly Catholic and academically challenging, says www.kolbe.org. Provides syllabi and weekly course plans, proctor assistance, quarterly inspection of work, transcripts and more.

Mother of Divine Grace: A Catholic Distance Education Program Dedicated to Helping Homeschoolers Design Their Own Classical Curriculum, is how it's site reads at www.motherofdivinegrace.org. Mother of Divine Grace School is a distance education program which helps parents implement a Catholic classical education in their home. It is designed in the light of the classical principle that the goal of education is to teach children how to think; to help them learn the art of learning. A complete curriculum for pre-K to 12th, with consultations, syllabi and more. More at 805-646-5818

Our Lady of the Rosary School: *"Our mission is to help parents teach their children the Catholic Faith in its entirety using sound Catholic educational materials, covering all subjects. We have been helping parents educate their children since 1983,"* according to www.olrs.com. The school provides: exams, teacher assistance, counseling, teacher correction of exams, report cards, diplomas, grade retention as well as transcripts of student grades for college. A complete curriculum program for pre-K through 12th grade. Catholic materials are used predominantly. More at 502-348-1338

Our Lady of Victory: Our Lady of Victory offers a traditional religion program and encourages only the latin Tridentine Mass. Offers a complete Catholic curriculum for K-12th grade. Offers full enrollment, satellite program or book purchase only. www.olvs.org.

Seton Home Study Program: *"We are here to assist parents with their educational duties. We help by providing counseling by phone, message boards, fax and e-mail. We also provide daily lesson plans, [testing services](#), books, software, videos, and other educational materials for Catholic homeschooling,"* according to www.setonhome.org. Seton provides placement testing, standardized achievement testing for all grades; Seton produces many of the Catholic materials itself. More at 866-280-1930.

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How do I design my own curriculum?

This approach offers the greatest flexibility, but also requires knowledge of curriculums and resources and possibly greater self-discipline. The decision to use a particular program or a self-designed approach does not necessarily have to be a permanent decision. Families periodically re-evaluate their curriculum choices and often make changes as needs or circumstances change.

If your children have already been in school, you might want to go with a “total package program” for a year. You may have peace of mind knowing that you covered all necessary bases and will give you another year to look at the options and decide if you want to create your curriculum. Doing this will also likely give you some confidence. You will then be spending this first important year, not creating, discovering or second-guessing individual subject and curriculum choices. You can “dive right in,” focus on home schooling itself and blending that with outside opportunities (including support group activities) with your child.

That being said, many homeschoolers opt to create their own curriculum for their child. It can be more work, but it is fun and can really make you feel good when you've fit something well with your child. For most programs, you can buy the books without purchasing the full service. This may be less expensive but you won't have the school's help and advice so you may want to enlist a veteran home school friend.

Homeschooling doesn't have to cost a fortune. Many purchase expensive counting and sorting manipulatives when sorting socks and laundry will do. Buy all the extras slowly as you teach your children and work out your schedule.

Do colleges accept home-educated children?

Of course. Check with the colleges you are considering before you begin high school. They will tell you what they require. Most colleges recognize home educated students as assets to their programs. Some colleges will require a diploma which is provided to a student enrolled in a complete and guided program.

They rely more on the student's scores on the ACT and SAT college entrance tests as an indicator of the student's ability to succeed in college. Again, check with the college; some prefer one test over another. Most home school students score very well on these exams. Colleges also look to see if students have taken academic subjects rather than a vocationally geared program.

Because students who are home educated usually have developed good study habits and are accustomed to working independently, they quickly adjust to and function well in the college setting.

Is home education legal?

Yes. An important first step for any home educator is to become familiar with their state's regulations related to home education. Visit the Home School Legal Defense Association website for information on legal issues related to homeschooling in your state. www.HSLDA.org or 540-338-5600

Home School Legal Defense Association is a Christian organization that offers experienced legal counsel and representation by qualified attorneys to every member family who is challenged by government officials in the area of home schooling. All attorney fees and costs are paid by HSLDA. The fee to join is about \$100 per year.

Recommended Readings

Catholic Education: Homeward Bound: A Useful Guide to Catholic Homeschooling by Kimberly Hahn and Mary Hasson

Catholic Home Schooling, a Handbook for Parents by Dr. Mary Kay Clark

Designing Your Own Classical Curriculum by Laura Berquist

Catholic Homeschool Companion by Maureen Wittman

Lifeline by James B. Stenson

Handbook for Parents by Fr. Paul Wickens

Real Learning: Education in the Heart of the Home by Elizabeth Foss

Booklists for Suggested Reading for Children

Designing Your Own Classical Curriculum by Laura Berquist

Honey for a Child's Heart by Gladys Hunt

In Review by Bethlehem Books

Let the Authors Speak by Carolyn Hatcher

Real Learning by Elizabeth Foss

Prayers from the Dayton Catholic Homeschool Association

Father of lights and of all true wisdom, I humbly recommend to you the success of my children in the pursuit of learning. Mercifully grant the measure of success that will be good for them to achieve. And thus may there be a genuine sense of fulfillment as a result of efforts made.

May all knowledge attained be tempered by humility. Grant that my child's endeavors may always be guided by a sense of solid values and help me to instill these values. And so may all their striving for knowledge be made, not with the aim of surpassing others or of making vain show of ability, but rather as a worthy return to you of the talents that you have bestowed.

And above all else, I ask that every degree of knowledge achieved may bring my children to a greater closeness to you and to a more abundant share of your love. Amen.

Heavenly Father, Let us rejoice in the precious gift of our children. In a world where children are seen as disposable, a burden and an inconvenience, give us the grace to joyfully embrace each minute we are gifted to spend with our children. Give us the grace to direct, discipline and inspire, by our words and actions, and never be a hindrance to the salvation of others, especially to our own children. Fill our homes with Your peace and joy, and model them after the happy home of the Holy Family. We thank you for the gift of children and ask Your protection of their tender souls. Amen.

May God bless you in your endeavors to educate your children!