

The following are the position statements of the Archdiocese on Homeschooling:

 When properly undertaken, homeschooling is a valid ministry in the Church and makes a positive contribution to the total Catholic Education.

 Pastors have the canonical responsibility to insure the orthodoxy and completeness of home catechetical instruction.

 Homeschooling parents are to meet with the parish's Director Of Religious Education to discuss their plans for catechesis, If they intend to include catechesis as part of their homeschooling efforts. Many parishes offer family catechesis programs that respects home catechesis while supporting the parents.

 According to the Archdiocesan regulations given in Signs of God's Love and Seal of the Spirit, the immediate catechesis for a sacrament is a freestanding program apart from any Catholic school or parish religious education program. This immediate catechesis involves the candidate, the candidate's parents and the parish community. Therefore, the homeschooling parents are to discuss with the Director of Religious Education how their children will be part of the parish's freestanding program for the immediate preparation and celebration of any sacrament.

 The Department of Catholic Education Ministries welcomes the participation of homeschooling parents to the annual Catholic Schools Convention and the Religious Education Institute. These opportunities will assist the parents in participating in workshops, as well as to explore educational materials that would be helpful in their overall ministry.

 The Archdiocesan Media Resource Center will provide educational materials both in print and video to homeschooling parents.

HOMESCHOOLING

A Gift to the Church

PARENT AS EDUCATOR

It has long been accepted in Catholic tradition that when a husband and wife accept the responsibility of parenthood, they have become partners with God in creation. Parenting includes not only the temporal well being of a child, but most especially it calls for the spiritual nurturing of the child.

The very act of parenting, both by association and execution, calls the parents to be the primary educators. The concept of parents as "primary educators" has been supported and advocated by the Church."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 the Rite of Baptism, parents are called the first educators of their children in the ways of faith. The prayer, spoken over the father, says, "You and your wife will be the first teachers of your child in the ways of faith. May you also be the best teachers bearing witness to the faith by what you say and do."

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)

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.

It should be noted, however, that while parents are the primary educators, their interpretation of doctrine could never supersede the legitimate teaching authority set over them in the Church

WHAT IS HOMESCHOOLING?

The details of homeschooling life vary from home to home. The uniqueness of family life will correspond to the experience of homeschooling. Homeschooling or home education can be described as the work of parents who have undertaken, to any degree and for any length of time, the formal religious or academic foundation of their children, work that has been traditionally carried out in institutional classrooms.

For the most part, parents who homeschool their children are not doing it as a "protest." Many parents who choose homeschooling do so because they have discerned it as a calling from God, and as part of their parenting ministry.

CATHOLIC HOMESCHOOLING AS VOCATION

Catholic homeschooling is virtually a new movement within the Church. The majority of parents who have accepted the responsibility to homeschool their children see this as the completeness of their vocation as parents. They are rooted in the belief that the Spirit drives their calling to homeschool.

Parents, who make the conscious decision to homeschool, accept the literal role of parent as primary educator. Such a decision is ordinarily based on the premise that Catholic homeschooling is a blessing to the Church. It enhances the diversity of Catholic education, while at the same time, affirms the position that homeschooling parents participate in the mission of the Church to teach in the name of Jesus.

DIVERSITY IN CATHOLIC EDUCATION

The Catholic Church has provided many alternatives to assist parents in the education of their children. The excellence of Catholic schools, the outreach of religious education programs and the support of family and home based catechetical programs is all part of the teaching mission of the Church. Included in this list of alternatives is the ever-increasing phenomenon of homeschooling.

Because of its newness, Catholic homeschooling is sometimes misunderstood and misrepresented. The majority of Catholic parents who homeschool their children do not want to be seen as separating themselves from the Church's teaching mission, but as an integral part of the apostolate of Catholic education. This added dimension provides the entire community of faith with a richness that strengthens the entire Church. It is in this diversity that the Church fulfills its belief that we are many parts, but all one Body.

Parents who have elected to homeschool their children have made a generous commitment of time, effort, and energy. They recognize the totality of such a commitment and have accepted the fullness of its responsibility.

THE ARCHDIOCESE'S POSITION ON HOMESCHOOLING

The Archdiocese of Baltimore recognizes that parents are the primary educators of their children. The Archdiocese also recognizes that parents make deliberate choices of how they want their children educated. Some parents elect to form a partnership with a Catholic or private school to assist them in the education of their children. Others opt to have their children attend public schools and be connected with the many excellent parish religious education programs. Also included in this list of deliberate choices are those parents who want to homeschool their children. All are legitimate options.

It has long been an accepted fact that the community of faith finds order in the principle of subsidiary, 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 function, but should rather support it in case of need and help to coordinate its activity with the activities of the rest of society, always with the view of the common good" Catechism of the Catholic Church (1883). The principle of subsidiary dictates that parents receive proper assistance from the Church in this, their task of education.

CONCLUSION

The fullness of Catholic Education is predicated on the Understanding that those who have been given the Responsibility to teach accept the full scope of the responsibility In all of its dimensions. In matters of faith, all teachers are witnesses to the gospel message and pass on the living faith. The Catechism of the Catholic Church is the resource that Guides our lessons and teachings.

It is understood that parents have options in how their Children will be educated. It is the intent of the Archdiocese of Baltimore to preserve the integrity of the parents' choice, as well as to nurture and establish open lines of communication. Whatever decision a parent renders in the education of a child is not a matter for outside judgment. Whether the environment is the Traditional formal structure of an organized school or the classroom of the home, the common denominator must be for the good of the child.