

## **Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana Guidelines for Catholic Homeschooling of Religion**

### **Preamble**

“Train the young in the way they should go; even when old, they will not swerve from it.” (*Proverbs 2:6*)

“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 principle educators. This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking.” (*GE 3*)

Homeschooling is a time-honored tradition, the oldest method of schooling and a customary way of handing on the faith to young people. Faith formation in the home has a lasting effect on both parents and children. Parents desire to raise and educate their children themselves and to share the richness and beauty of their Catholic faith with their children in a family setting. “In a certain sense nothing replaces family catechesis, especially for its positive and receptive environment, for the example of adults, and for its first explicit experience and practice of the faith.” (*GDC 178*)

### **Rationale**

In his office of teaching in the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana, the bishop, who is the chief catechist for our diocese, has the responsibility and duty to support parents as they form their children in the understanding of the Catholic faith. Diocesan parish religious education programs and Catholic schools have formation and educational programs in place to help with this sacred duty.

Parents may choose to homeschool their children in the Catholic faith. It is with great care that the local Church strives to keep a positive relationship between the Church and the families it serves. In this relationship, we must keep in mind the essential aspect of the importance of the Church community and our support of each other. “...the Christian community is the context in which individuals undertake their journey in faith toward conversion to Christ and discipleship in his name.” (*NDC 29, C*)

### **Norms**

#### **Bishop**

The *National Directory for Catechesis* details the roles of the bishop, the pastor, and the Christian community in the apostolic work of catechesis and evangelization. “All members of the community share the duty to bear witness to the faith. Catechesis is a collaborative effort within the diocese, under the direction of the local apostle, the bishop, who is specifically responsible for the transmission of the Faith in the particular Church entrusted to him.” (*NDC 54, A*)

The bishop is the chief catechist of the diocese, “responsible for the total catechetical mission of the local church. ... In addition to devoting himself personally to the proclamation of the Gospel and the ministry of catechesis, the bishop is also to supervise the catechetical mission in the diocese.” (NDC 54, A)

## **Pastor**

“Pastors are the bishop’s closest collaborators in ensuring that the goals of the diocesan catechetical mission are achieved.” (NDC 54, B, 1) The *Code of Canon Law* directs pastors “to have particular care for the Catholic education of children and youth.” (CIC 528 §1) In accordance with the directives of the bishop, it is the pastor’s responsibility to develop guidelines for catechesis in the parish.

## **Parish**

Typically, it is through participation in the Christian community, as experienced in the life of the parish, that Christians are formed and equipped for mission. “In the parish the members of the Christian community ‘become aware of being the people of God.’ In the parish the faithful are nurtured by the word of God and nourished by the sacraments, especially the Eucharist. From the parish the faithful are sent on their apostolic mission in the world.” (NDC 29, C) Parish catechetical leadership has the responsibility to offer catechesis.

“When children are baptized, parents accept the responsibility to bring up their children in the practice of the faith... At the same time, the Church promises to help parents foster their children’s faith and assists them in their role as catechists to their children, whether they assume complete responsibility themselves or look to the parish school or religious education program for help and support.” (NDC 54, C)

## **Parents**

“The Christian family is ordinarily the first experience of the Christian community and the primary environment for growth in faith. Because it is the ‘church of the home,’ the family provides a unique *locus* for catechesis. It is the place in which the word of God is received and from which it is extended.” (NDC 29, D)

“Parents are the most influential agents of catechesis for their children. They have a unique responsibility for the education of their children; they are the first educators, or catechists.” (NDC 54, C)

## **Rights and Responsibilities**

### **Pastor and Church**

The pastor, as the shepherd of his flock, has a moral obligation to ensure that those under his care are adequately prepared for the reception of the sacraments. Therefore the pastor has a right to ensure that proper sacramental preparation has occurred.

The Church has the responsibility to support those who choose to homeschool their children in the Faith. A homeschool should be given the same dignity and respect that is given to other Catholic educational options.

## **Parents and Families**

*Familiaris Consortio* states, “The right and duty of parents to give education is essential, since it is connected with the transmission of human life; it is original and primary with regard to the educational role of others, on account of the uniqueness of the loving relationship between parents and children; and it is irreplaceable and inalienable, and therefore incapable of being entirely delegated to others or usurped by others.” (FC, 36) Therefore parents have the right to educate their children in the manner they deem most appropriate.

Parents have the responsibility to adhere to and pass on to their children the fullness of our Catholic faith, including the teachings of the Magisterium, Sacred Scripture, and Sacred Tradition.

## **General Guidelines**

At the beginning of each academic year, homeschooling parents should notify their pastor or his representative of their intent to catechize their children through a religion program in the home and should feel welcome to look to him for encouragement and support.

The curriculum for a homeschool religion program should follow the Diocesan Religion Curriculum Guide. A homeschooling parent can refer to the list of Conforming Catechetical Texts and Series as found on the website of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops to ensure that content is in conformity with the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Parents may also discuss individual curriculum questions with their pastor or his representative.

Homeschooling families are expected to participate in the sacramental life of the Church through their involvement in regular weekend liturgies, the observance of holy days of obligation, and frequent reception of the sacraments. It is encouraged that this take place at their parish.

Homeschooling parents, with their children, are also encouraged to be active in their parish community through participation in social events, service projects and other ministries.

## **Sacramental Preparation**

“The right and the duty of parents to educate their children are primordial and inalienable.” (CCC 2221 and FC 36) Parents are to be the first educators of their children in the Catholic faith. This is a duty which they can neither give away nor can be taken from them.

Some parents make the choice to teach their children the Faith in the home environment known as a homeschool. These homeschools should be viewed and treated as independent schools. Religious education offered in the homeschool environment is a legitimate parental choice, which must be treated with the same dignity and respect as parish religious education and

Catholic schools. Children should not be required to attend parish religious education classes which repeat instruction already completed in the homeschool setting.

Requirements for the reception of a sacrament should be discussed with the pastor or his representative. The pastor has the obligation to confirm that the homeschooled child is prepared and ready to receive the sacrament (*CIC 777*). The pastor may require the child and the parents to participate in immediate sacramental preparation, which is different than religious education or Catholic schooling. Preparation may include parent meetings, retreats, rehearsals, etc., leading to the reception of the sacrament.

### **Specific Norms for Sacramental Preparation**

Specific guidelines for the reception of First Reconciliation and First Eucharist for validly baptized young people, who have reached the age of reason (7 years old) and for the reception of Confirmation for validly baptized young people of catechetical age outside the scope of *Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults* may be found on the website of the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana or by calling the Office of Catechesis. It should be noted that as primary catechists, parents are expected to be involved in the sacramental preparation process.

#### **First Reconciliation**

“In the Latin Church, children must receive the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation for the first time prior to their first reception of the Eucharist. Since the celebration of First Confession precedes First Communion catechesis for the Sacrament precedes First Communion and must be kept distinct by a clear and unhurried separation.” (*NDC 36, B, 2*)

#### **First Eucharist**

“Parents and the parish catechetical leader or catechist, together with the pastor, are responsible for determining when children have attained the age of reason and are ready to receive First Communion. Because reception of Eucharist, especially for the first time is integral to the child’s full incorporation into the ecclesial community the pastor has a responsibility in determining every child’s readiness to receive First Communion. Parents also have the right and the duty to be involved in preparing their children for First Communion.” (*NDC 36, A, 3, 3a*)

#### **Confirmation**

Immediate “preparation for Confirmation should aim at leading the Christian toward a more intimate union with Christ and a more lively familiarity with the Holy Spirit – his actions, his gifts, his biddings – in order to be more capable of assuming the apostolic responsibilities of Christian Life. To this end catechesis for Confirmation should strive to awaken a sense of belonging to the Church of Jesus Christ, the universal Church as well as the parish community.” (*CCC 1309*)

## **References Cited**

CCC – *Catechism of the Catholic Church*

CIC – *Code of Canon Law*

FC – *Familiaris Consortio (On the Role of the Family in the Modern World)*

GDC – *General Directory for Catechesis*

GE – *Gravissimum educationis (Decree on Christian Education)*

NABRE – *New American Bible, Revised Edition*

NDC – *National Directory for Catechesis*

Note: These guidelines fulfill Goals 3 and 5 of the *Uniting in Heart* pastoral plan for the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana.

Promulgated by Bishop Timothy Doherty on November 4, 2016 effective upon promulgation.