



CENTER FOR CATHOLIC EDUCATION

Note: The following quotations focus on the topic of *The Role of Parents* as it is contained in the documents of the Church which consider education. The following conditions and recommendations apply:

- ❖ The purpose of this selection is to give a sample of the topic. It is not intended to replace the reading of the entire document(s) cited.
- ❖ In-text citations are not included in this document. The document can be accessed in its entirety for this purpose. The paragraph numbers give the exact location of the quotation within the pertinent document.
- ❖ In a few instances spelling has been changed to reflect common usage and for the purpose of clarity. (“program” instead of “programme,” for example).
- ❖ The sections included are only examples and are not necessarily the only references on this topic contained in the document(s).

The Role and Responsibilities of Parents in Education

Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis), #3 **Vatican Council II, 1965.**

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 principal educators. This role in education is so important that only with difficulty can it be supplied where it is lacking. Parents are the ones who must create a family atmosphere animated by love and respect for God and man, in which the well-rounded personal and social education of children is fostered. Hence the family is the first school of the social virtues that every society needs. It is particularly in the Christian family, enriched by the grace and office of the sacrament of matrimony, that children should be taught from their early years to have a knowledge of God according to the faith received in Baptism, to worship Him, and to love their neighbor. Here, too, they find their first experience of a wholesome human society and of the Church. Finally, it is through the family that they are gradually led to a companionship with their fellowmen and with the people of God. Let parents, then, recognize the inestimable importance a truly Christian family has for the life and progress of God's own people.

Declaration on Christian Education (Gravissimum Educationis), #6 **Vatican Council II, 1965.**

Parents who have the primary and inalienable right and duty to educate their children must enjoy true liberty in their choice of schools. Consequently, the public power, which has the obligation to protect and defend the rights of citizens, must see to it, in its concern for distributive justice, that public subsidies are paid out in such a way that parents are truly free to choose according to their conscience the schools they want for their children.

The Catholic School, #73 **Sacred Congregation for Catholic Education, 1977.**

This is the framework which guarantees the distinctive Catholic character of the school. While the Bishop's authority is to watch over the orthodoxy of religious instruction and the observance of Christian morals in the Catholic schools, it is the task of the whole educative community to ensure that a distinctive Christian educational environment is maintained in practice. This responsibility applies chiefly to Christian parents who confide their children to the school. Having chosen it does not relieve them of a personal duty to give their children a Christian upbringing. They are bound to cooperate actively with the school - which means supporting the educational efforts of the school and utilizing the structures offered for parental involvement, in order to make certain that the school remains faithful to Christian principles of education. An equally important role belongs to the teachers in safeguarding and developing the distinctive mission of the Catholic school, particularly with regard to the Christian atmosphere which should characterize its life and teaching. Where difficulties and conflicts arise about the authentic Christian character of the Catholic school, hierarchical authority can and must intervene.

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, #12.
Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982.

While it is true that parents are the first and foremost educators of their children(14) and that the rights and duties that they have in this regard are "original and primary with respect to the educational role of others," it is also true that among the means which will assist and complement the exercise of the educational rights and duties of the family, the school has a value and an importance that are fundamental.

Lay Catholics in Schools: Witnesses to Faith, #34.
Congregation for Catholic Education, 1982.

The family is "the first and fundamental school of social living," therefore, there is a special duty to accept willingly and even to encourage opportunities for contact with the parents of students.

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal, #32.

Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988.

Everyone directly involved in the school is a part of the school community: teachers, directors, administrative and auxiliary staff. Parents are central figures, since they are the natural and irreplaceable agents in the education of their children. And the community also includes the students, since they must be active agents in their own education.

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal, #39.

Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988.

Achieving the educational aims of the school should be an equal priority for teachers, students and families alike, each one according to his or her own role, always in the Gospel spirit of freedom and love. Therefore channels of communication should be open among all those concerned with the school.

The Religious Dimension of Education in a Catholic School: Guidelines for Reflection and Renewal, #42.

Congregation for Catholic Education, 1988.

Partnership between a Catholic school and the families of the students must continue and be strengthened: not simply to be able to deal with academic problems that may arise, but rather so that the educational goals of the school can be achieved. Close cooperation with the family is especially important when treating sensitive issues such as religious, moral, or sexual education, orientation toward a profession, or a choice of one's vocation in life. It is not a question of convenience, but a partnership based on faith. Catholic tradition teaches that God has bestowed on the family its own specific and unique educational mission.

General Directory for Catechesis, #259
Congregation of the Clergy, 1997

The educational task of Catholic schools is bound to be developed along the basis of this concept proposed by the Second Vatican Council. It is accomplished in the school community, to which belong all of those who are directly involved in it: "teachers, management, administrative and auxiliary staff, parents—central in that they are the natural and irreplaceable educators of their own children—and pupils, who are participants and active subjects too of the educational process".

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, #18.

Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997.

Before concluding, we should like to dwell briefly on the climate and role of the educating community, which is constituted by the interaction and collaboration of its various components: students, parents, teachers, directors and non-teaching staff. Attention is rightly given to the importance of the relations existing between all those who make up the educating community. During childhood and adolescence a student needs to experience personal relations with outstanding educators, and what is taught has greater influence on the student's formation when placed in a context of personal involvement, genuine reciprocity, coherence of attitudes, life-styles and day to day behavior. While respecting individual roles, the community dimension should be fostered, since it is one of the most enriching developments for the contemporary school. It is also helpful to bear in mind, in harmony with the Second Vatican Council, that this community dimension in the Catholic school is not a merely sociological category; it has a theological foundation as well. The educating community, taken as a whole, is thus called to further the objective of a school as a place of complete formation through interpersonal relations.

The Catholic School on the Threshold of the Third Millennium, #20.

Congregation for Catholic Education, 1997.

Parents have a particularly important part to play in the educating community, since it is to them that primary and natural responsibility for their children's education belongs.

Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful, #12

Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007.

Because its aim is to make man more man, education can be carried out authentically only in a relational and community context. It is not by chance that the first and original educational environment is that of the natural community of the family.

Educating Together in Catholic Schools: A Shared Mission between Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful, #48.

Congregation for Catholic Education, 2007.

It is precisely because of this that the educational community identifies the decisive space for cooperation between school and family in the *educational project*, to be made known and implemented with a spirit of communion, through the contribution of everyone, discerning responsibilities, roles and competences. Parents in particular are required to enrich the communion around this project, making the family climate that must characterize the educating community more alive and explicit. For this reason, in willingly welcoming parents' cooperation, Catholic schools consider essential to their mission the service of *permanent formation offered to families*, to support them in their educating task and to develop an increasingly closer bond between the values proposed by the school and those proposed by the family.

Canon 792 §2.

Parents must cooperate closely with the teachers of the schools to which they entrust their children to be educated; moreover, teachers in fulfilling their duty are to collaborate very closely with parents, who are to be heard willingly and for whom associations or meetings are to be established and highly esteemed.

Canon 796 §1.

Among the means to foster education, the Christian faithful are to hold schools in esteem; schools are the principal assistance to parents in fulfilling the function of education.