



Seton Home



Study School

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“Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church”



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The Castle and the Cave

“Good news and great joy to all the world; Today is born our Savior, Christ the Lord” “Good news and great JOY...”

If the joy of Christ’s birth had depended on outward things such as wealth, delicious foods, delicate pastries, elegant gifts, fine furniture, warm fireplaces, splendid surroundings, bright lights, or festive decoration, there would not have been such great joy shared by St. Joseph and the Blessed Virgin Mary, nor by the shepherds, on that first Christmas night.

It was the night of a very difficult day. Mary and Joseph had journeyed long and hard along the road to that ancient town of Bethlehem. Due to Mary’s condition—with the birth of the Christ Child being imminent—they arrived by night, and found no room at the only inn in town. They were forced to seek shelter in a dark and uninviting stable, bleak and open to the winds and elements, overcrowded with the animals and beasts of burden of the caravan.

Joy would seem to be the least-expected experience for the weary Joseph and Mary—were it not for the birth of the Christ Child, on that cold, dismal and wintry night!

Yet, Mary and Joseph were indescribably joyous on that first Christmas night! Outwardly, their situation was miserable. Inwardly, they were so filled with joy that they would not have traded places with anybody on earth—not even with King Herod, who was nearby, reveling and dining and entertaining and lounging and pontificating at his magnificent fortress. His flattering guests and servants were hanging on his every word, laughing at his every joke, cringing

at his every rebuke, attentive to his every wish, jumping at his every command. Slavery with a smile!

Those guests at the castle were like slaves to Herod. And Herod was a slave to Satan! Despite their outward displays of mirth and merriment, there was no inner joy, no inner peace in Herod’s Castle—that night, or any night. At the same time, out in the pastures of Bethlehem, the humble shepherds were hearing and seeing the very choirs of the Angels of Heaven, singing in super-natural harmony: “Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth to men of good-will; to men on whom God’s favor rests.”

On that raw, bone-shivering night, the shepherds were being enthralled by Heavenly strains of Angel-song; overwhelmed by harmonious sounds they had never experienced in their lives, music intensely clear and profoundly sweet! The various choirs of Angels filled the Heavens with a supernatural melodic harmony never before heard by men.

And then the Christmas Angel proclaimed: “Behold! I bring you tidings of great joy! A Savior has been born to you...”

The shepherds rushed through the dark shadows of the night; and arriving at the stable, they saw the Infant-God lying in a manger. His tiny face lit up the faces of everyone and everything there!

What a contrast between the inner peacefulness and deep joy surrounding the makeshift crib of the Infant God and the outward frivolity and chaos exuding from the costly castle of a corrupt king. In the Christmas Cave: hardship, humility, holiness! In the Herod-palace:

power, pleasure and pride! But corrupt, sinful and worldly men cannot revel for long, not even in the midst of baubles, bangles, booze and beads! What good is it all without the favor of God? What joy is there for the soul enslaved to sin, sodden in sin?

The Grace of God has appeared in the stable of Bethlehem, offering salvation to all men. God’s Sanctifying Grace trains us to live moderately, modestly, uprightly, virtuously, devoutly, in this age as we await our blessed hope—the appearing of our great God and Savior.

The joy experienced by the Holy Family and by the shepherds reminds us that in the midst of trials and tribulations, we can still have joy in our hearts if we hold fast to Christ. When bad days come—and they will come—we must keep in front of us our goal, which is salvation for us and for our children. When the outside is crazy and seems to be falling apart, we can still experience the inner peacefulness that comes from an unshakeable trust in Divine Providence.

Holy Family, help us homeschooling families to keep your example ever before our eyes. Through our thoughts, words, and actions, let us show to the world the joy that comes from knowing and loving God.

- Rev. Frank E. Papa.
S.O.L.T., J.C.D.

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Questions We Are Asked

*by Dr. Mary Kay Clark
Director, Seton Home Study School*

After the Christmas break, it is difficult for the children, and for me, to get back into the swing of home schooling. Do you have any suggestions?

Perhaps the most important thing to remember is that your decision to home school was based on the best reasons. It strengthens your family life. The relationship among the children is stronger. Home schooling helps you and your husband to know and understand your children better as you work with them on things beyond the daily household chores or sports activities.

After the upbeat time of the Christmas holidays and visiting with family and friends, January and February can bring bursts of snow and cloudy weather and gloomy days. In some ways, it is the worst of times. But it is also the best of times because it is the best time of the year for your children to learn.

Don't quit. Don't give up now. We must not expect home schooling to be easy. Is anything valuable easy to obtain? And what we want to obtain for ourselves and members of our family is of the greatest value--Heaven Itself, Christ Himself, for all eternity.

We have so many idealistic goals at the beginning of the school year. We are going to be more organized. We are going to finish the assignments on time and what we don't finish during the week, we will finish Saturday morning. Dad is going to help on Friday evenings or Sunday afternoons. We are not going to attend so many outside activities.

If you have fallen away from these goals, now is the time to rededicate yourself to them. It is a new year, and that means we have another opportunity for a new start.

The three most important things to remember are discipline, organization,

and prayer. If so far in the school year you have not held to a fairly tight schedule, now is the time to get on the schedule. Children need to have a schedule and home schooling without a firm schedule is nearly impossible. If you do not have a firm schedule, then it is a chore every day to get the children to do the right work at the right time. And making up a new daily schedule as you go is such a time waster.

With a schedule, Johnny knows that at 10:00 am he is to be doing his math work. Mary knows that at 10:00 am she is to be doing her spelling. And Timmy knows that 10:00 until 10:30 is his turn to watch the baby. Without a schedule, Johnny, Timmy, and Mary are all wondering what subject they should do now (if any), and each says that he just took the last turn watching the baby so someone else should have to do it.

Scheduling does not just help the children; it helps the parents also. It allows you to decide how much time you have and what you can do in that time. Scheduling means that you don't have to be overwhelmed, because you don't have to feel all the time like things are falling through the cracks and not being done. Scheduling allows you to make the best use of your time, so you can get more done in less time. A schedule also allows you to prioritize because you can allow more time for what must be done, and less time for what you would like to accomplish if possible.

In almost every case, to be successful in home schooling, your family needs to have a firm schedule.

Your family also must become organized, if this has been a problem. If your children are constantly saying they can't find their books, or paper, or pens, or a notebook, then now is the time to organize these things. Perhaps you can

purchase large plastic bins and make sure all the materials for each child are put in the proper bin. Or you might purchase or construct shelving with large cubby holes to hold all the child's materials. All that time spent looking for books and paper is time wasted.

If your prayer life has fallen off throughout the year, now is the time to rededicate yourself in this area as well. Now is a good time to see if you can make a habit of daily Mass. If your parish has a perpetual adoration program, now may be a good time to sign up for an hour. If your family prayer has fallen off, now is a good time to improve.

“For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers; against rulers of the world of this darkness.”

Remember that we do not struggle against mere material obstacles. As St. Paul writes, “For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood; but against principalities and powers; against rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in high places. Therefore take unto you the armor of God, that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and to stand in all things perfect. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of justice, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace. In all things taking the shield of faith, wherewith you may be able to extinguish all the fiery darts of the most wicked one.”

Can you give me some tips to help my child in writing his book report?

This is one of the most frequently-asked questions to our counselors. The first step is to read the directions and the

instructions which are given in the lesson plans before reading the book. This seems like an obvious first step, but the counselors say that many students skip over the directions which are at the beginning of each quarter. When students reach the end of the quarter and start working on the book report, they forget to look back at the directions.

Secondly, the specific topic sentences which are given should be written out on the title page of the book or on a homemade bookmark. The student should constantly be referring to the topic sentences as he reads each chapter. Your child should be looking for examples showing the point of the topic sentences.

Sentences in the book which give examples to prove the topic sentences should be highlighted or underlined as the book is read.

Thirdly, the sentences in the book which give examples to prove the topic sentences should be highlighted or underlined as the book is read. An easy way would be to write the topic sentences in the front and number them. Then, as sentences are read in the book which prove the point of a topic, the sentences should be numbered as well. By the time the book is finished, there will be plenty of sentences highlighted and numbered, thus making it much easier for the student to write his report.

Fourthly, you should have a discussion with your student about the book, the topic sentences, and the points your child wants to make regarding his examples. That way, you as the parent can help your child decide which are the three strongest arguments to prove the points of the topic sentences.

My son in sixth grade would like to take the Saxon math tests online. Is that possible with the second edition?

At this time, it is not possible. We are in the process of writing new tests for the Second Edition of the Saxon books for Grades 5, 6, and 8; and for the Third Edition for Grade 7. They will be added test by test as soon as they are done. Hopefully, they will all be finished by sometime this summer. We will be producing new paper copies as well as online tests.

What tips do you have for keeping my children on schedule?

The biggest problem in home schooling has always been and always will be the battle to stay on schedule. This is true not only with home schooling but with getting the dinner ready and doing the laundry, getting enough sleep and getting enough exercise, and everything else in life.

I found the most difficult time with my children was when we had to move. We definitely fell behind in the work. But when we finally moved, I told my boys that it was important that we try to catch up or they would be doing their school work in the summer. I told them that I figured out if they would spend four hours on Saturday, they should be able to catch up and not need to have schoolwork during the summer months. I was surprised at how determined they were to do their work for four hours on Saturday rather than work in the summer.

Some parents give their children the schedule of work during the day, but anything not done must be "homework" after the normal home schooling hours.

One of the tricks the nuns used when I attended parochial school long ago was to assign certain tasks which were "homework" assignments that could be done during the regular class time if we finished up our regular work. For instance, if we were assigned a page of math, but finished five or ten minutes early, we could work on our spelling assignment. I found that I seldom had spelling for home work because I always finished the work during the day.

Some of the home schooling assignments your children could do on their own once you have established the routine of the daily work, are subjects like spelling and vocabulary, perhaps handwriting and phonics. You would need to determine which subjects your child could do independently at this point in the school year. But with this kind of incentive, some children are more efficient in moving more quickly with their normal assignments, so they can get to the independent assignments by themselves and not need to do them later during what they consider playtime.

The creative writing assignments, such as the book reports and paragraph writing are always the most challenging for the children. Try to encourage the children to write every day so it becomes more natural. In the schools, many teachers insist children write at least one paragraph in a journal each day. The importance of writing a journal is not in having a teacher critique it, but simply that the student is becoming more relaxed with the process of writing, is not frightened by the word *paragraph*, and is practicing the process of a topic sentence and then following it with at least three examples or three details or three reasons giving evidence for the topic sentence. Once your child finds a certain ease in the writing assignments, he will be more efficient and likely to stay on schedule.

I can remember rewarding my children with pennies or with M&M candy when they finished their work on time; this was usually for one subject with which they were struggling, or which they thought was "boring." My children were very anxious to receive the reward. Perhaps pennies would not bring the desired effect, but maybe 50 cents a day would work.

Some parents may feel that they should not reward their children for doing what they ought to do anyway. But if you are having trouble getting your children to do their work, and they will do it if you give them 50 cents a day, isn't that about the best 50 cents you'll ever spend? And besides, it is better to have the children get into a habit of realizing that they need to work for what they receive rather than expecting toys, money or a weekly allowance without working.

Obedience in the Home

by Father Frank Papa, S.O.L.T., J.C.D.

Editor's Note: This is based upon a speech given by Father Papa at the IHM Home Schooling Conference in June of 2005.

Why is obedience a critical factor in familial accord and holiness? What instructions has God provided for parents and children, and how should parents implement His commands? These important questions are among those discussed by Father Frank Papa in his lecture, "Obedience: The Bedrock for Harmony and Order in the Home." Father Papa explains the necessity of domestic obedience, and details the manner in which parents may structure and maintain a harmonious and distinctively Catholic homeschooling home.

The life of a Catholic is grounded in the imitation of Our Lord. "If we desire to follow Jesus, we must follow His example and obey." An obedient disposition is the happy result of grace and good will. "We must obey God's wisdom and will. We must obey God's commandments." This is mainly an act of the will. "If you are willing to be obedient, there will be a godly discipline in your life."

Disobedience is the rejection of God's commandments and His holy will. One sins when one is disobedient to God's revealed truths. The terms *sin* and *disobedience* are synonymous. St. Paul warns us that "The wages of sin is death."

How does one hone one's will and become obedient? In addressing this critical matter, two simple words come up: self control. "We must be willing to...control ourselves.... Self control promotes obedience."

Proper parental action is an absolute necessity in promoting self-control in the family. "In every home, parents are to act as God's representatives." Thus, children "must obey their parents." Further, "Parents must demand and expect obedience from their children."

In describing the traditional roles of both parent and child, there is a certain parental tendency to "act as though they are afraid of their children." But

considering the alternatives, "It's better to be too strict than to be too lenient. The consequences are far less devastating when you're too strict.... Remember that you are dealing with the possibility of the loss of the soul of [your child] if you do not demand and expect obedience from [him]." "Always demand what is right and good, and always reject what is wrong and evil—that is your role as parents."

But it is not only the children who need self control. "The key to successful homeschooling is a mother and father who are themselves obedient to the Lord." Parental authority is rooted in God's positive law: "The Fourth Commandment appoints you...as representatives of God." Parental authority is also rooted in a humble and honest understanding of reality. "See the truth of what's going on in your home." Faithful parents do not "hide [their] eyes from what is going on.... If something is wrong, *correct it*... Don't become an enabler."

The Scriptures clearly illustrate the importance of parental decisiveness and proper action. "Think of the prodigal son. The father let him go. The son had to go out and find out for himself what evil brought upon him before he repented and decided to return to his family." The story emphasizes the fact that the prodigal son "had to pay the consequences of his irresponsibility," In the Prodigal son story, even though the father loves his son, he does not go out to find his son, but lets his son suffer the results of his actions.

A parent must instill and uphold a climate of discipline even in the midst of "whining" and "gripping." "What's right is right, and what's wrong is wrong," and the job of a parent is to "call it as it is." Holy parents are able to discern and correct sin. "If the source of your child's suffering is sin...root out the sin." This can be a difficult process, and "parents have to have the discipline themselves to attack the sin that is causing the suffering."

How must a parent gird himself for the difficult duties of disciplinary action? "We must trust in God and pray, pray, pray for our children.... God hears the prayers of

a parent who prays for the souls of his children. In fact, that's why God gave you those children. He didn't give them to anybody else. He gave them to *you*. They are your children. They are your responsibility."

In addition to providing educational instruction, faithful Catholic homeschooling parents engender Catholic wisdom. "Education is more than just providing the tools needed by your child to be able to live his life in this world. Knowledge—yes—but we also need wisdom. Wisdom is Catholicism." Catholicism "sheds light on how we are to live."

Regarding methods of discipline, "the children need clear signals, clear answers, and clear expectations from both father and mother." And father and mother must be united in the area of discipline. "Children should get the same response from both parents." In order to show a united front to the children, "father and mother should pray together every day for guidance in keeping their children in line."

Regarding the proper atmosphere of a Catholic homeschooling home, "The home should be a place of peace and love in a chaotic world. When the children walk into your home, it should be like a breath of fresh air." In addition to providing structure, discipline, and correction, parents must "bring harmony into the home" and show appreciation for a child's efforts. Thus, "The father should delegate carefully measured amounts of responsibility to each child according to his age and circumstance." So that each family member can feel a sense of belonging, "Let everyone in the family labor at one or another task."

Ultimately, a parent's vocation is clear. "God is not going to ask how much money you made, how high you climbed in social society." God, in the particular judgment, will conduct a different type of inquiry. He will ask questions such as: "What type of a husband were you? What type of a father were you?"

God hears the pure, innocent prayers of a child. God hears the passionate petitions of mothers and fathers. So we pray, "Give us the grace to see what we have to do and the strength to do it."

Google Earth

If you have a child with any interest in geography (or a child you would like to become interested in geography), you might like to try the new Google Earth program. Google Earth is a free program that uses satellite imagery to show a view of all locations on earth. You can either type in the name of the location you want, such as "Seattle, Washington", or use your mouse to turn the globe and zoom in on what you want to see. The images are such high-resolution, that if you look at Seahawk Stadium in Seattle, you can see that the Seahawks were playing a football game on the day the satellite image was taken, and the Seahawks have the ball on their own two-yard line. (You can't tell who the other team is.)

The entire earth is covered by the images, but large cities have especially high-resolution. For some cities, such as Washington, DC, and New York City, the program even includes three-dimension building maps, so you see a

representation of the area in three dimensions (the image below is San Diego with buildings plotted). The program includes the ability to tilt and pan the images, so by viewing at an angle, it almost seems as if you can look down a street. This ability, combined with the three-dimensional buildings, yields a very interesting perspective.

And of course, it is always interesting to see a satellite view of one's own town, or even one's own house.

Google Earth also incorporates information from other sources, such as National Geographic, to give more information about the areas you are viewing. For example, if you are viewing Africa, National Geographic icons are shown for most countries. Clicking on the National Geographic icon will bring up articles and photos from the area that you are viewing.

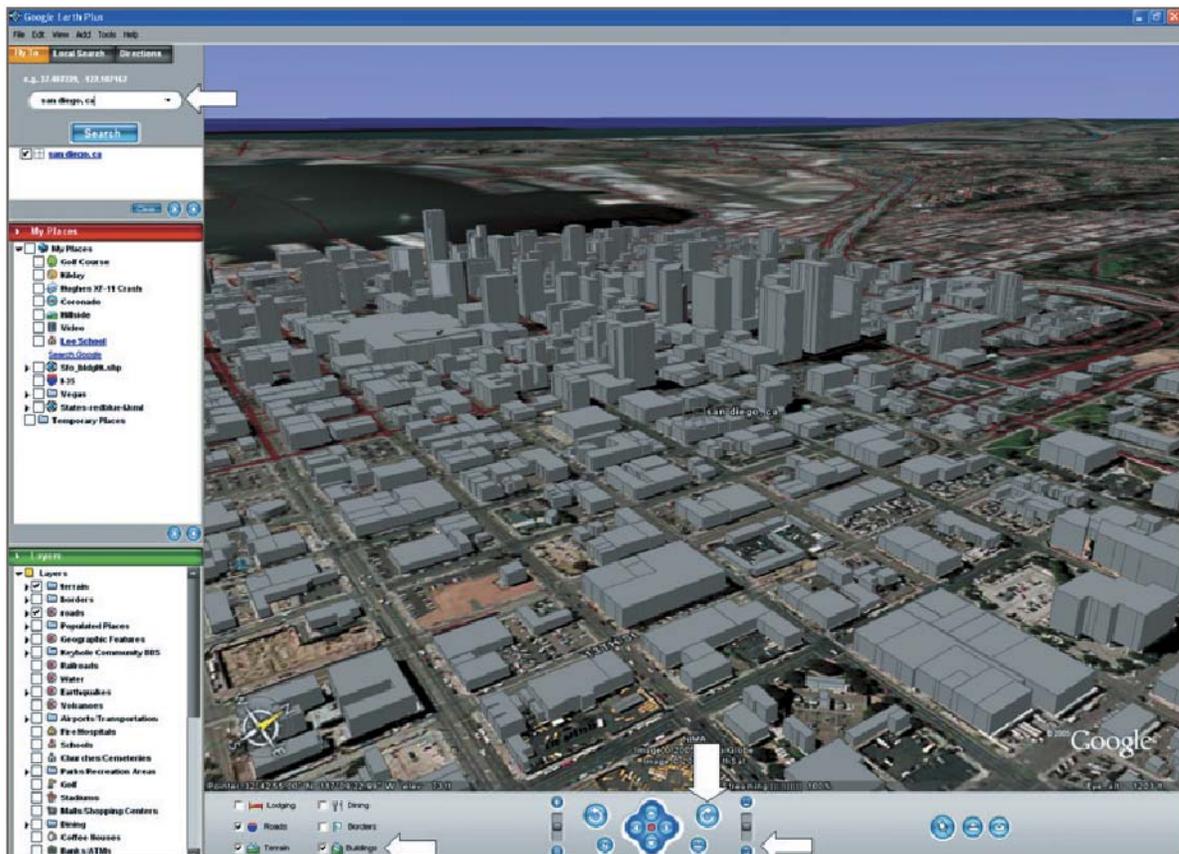
Catholics will find many areas of interest to view, such as Vatican City,

with all its ornate surroundings, or the Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC.

Much more information is available, such as listings of famous landmarks and road designations. You can even have the program show the locations of churches, golf courses, restaurants, parks, schools airports, and many others. Some areas even have special functions, such as the virtual fly-over of the Grand Canyon.

The whole thing is just so interesting that a student could literally spend hours learning geography without even realizing it. There is so much to see in the world, that there is always another place to jump to, another landmark to view, another natural wonder to behold.

Google Earth is a free service, but you will need high-speed Internet access to make it usable. There is so much data being downloaded that dial-up access would simply be too slow to be useful.



The Junior High Years

by Ginny Seuffert

In the earlier elementary grades, many parents feel free to substitute a visit to the zoo for a science lesson, or a Civil War project for a chapter in the history book. Some parents encourage their children to read books about a favorite topic in place of textbook assignments. This flexibility is one of the more attractive aspects of home education and often leads a child to develop a passion for a particular field of study or just a general love of learning itself. Many parents are loath to abandon this freedom and don't want to push little Junior's nose into the textbook grindstone. Just how necessary is it to closely follow the lesson plans during the junior high years, and where can parents safely take short cuts?

Balancing flexibility with high educational standards changes direction dramatically during this time.

What the Student Needs to Begin

In the years leading up to junior high, parents absolutely must not compromise on the basic building blocks of education. During the primary grades (K-3), parents may choose to de-emphasize subjects like history and science to ensure that basic skills are mastered for students who are struggling. During middle school (4-6), the balance becomes more individualized. Students who have clearly mastered the basics may move on to more "fact-based" studies, essay writing and assignments that require higher thinking skills. On the other hand, parents must continue to drill, drill, and drill when there is a gap in the educational foundation of reading, 'riting, 'rithmetic, and in our Catholic families, religion. Now, at the beginning of 7th grade, there is a major shift in emphasis from the basics to more sophisticated concepts.

One of the biggest benefits of home learning is the fact that parents do not just push students through the various grade levels without regard to true educational progress. Rather, our goal is to find our student's level and proceed from there. A student entering the 7th grade should be able to:

- Read any elementary school textbook as well as children's and young adult's literature with minimal help and good comprehension;
- Formulate ideas and write short essay answers or paragraph assignments using proper spelling, punctuation and grammar;
- Be competent at the four basic operations of arithmetic (addition, subtraction, multiplication and division) using whole numbers, fractions and decimals;
- Recite from memory basic prayers, and facts of our Faith, including the Ten Commandments, the seven sacraments, and answers to the questions in the Baltimore Catechism (even in the student's own words).

If your child has not mastered the basics by the end of middle school, call a Seton counselor for ideas.

So, what can Junior High students skip? What should be covered?

Math

Students, who have completed Saxon *Math 76* and mastered arithmetic, can consider skipping *Math 87* and moving into *Algebra 1/2*.

English

Students who know the basic rules of capitalization and punctuation may be assigned a limited number of problems on workbook pages related to those topics. If they complete the problems successfully, you may move on to something else. Use a similar strategy for workbook pages that review concepts that the children have been studying for years, for example singular/plural nouns or simple verb tenses. Spend more time on pages that cover more advanced topics like *case* or *compound tenses*.

Parents of junior high students need to get tough grading written compositions. Make sure that students are following an outline that makes sense. Offer correction when compositions are written in more than

one verb tense, or contain overused words. At this level, students should need little help from Mom to add descriptive adjectives or precise language. Encourage your pupils to use strong action verbs and write in the active voice. The lesson plans give you criteria to judge compositions and, if you have any questions, call or email a Seton counselor for guidance *before* bad habits are formed.

Vocabulary and Spelling

These are enrichment courses at this level, as students should have a broad vocabulary and spell correctly *before* they enter junior high. Allow good spellers to orally "test out" of lessons they find easy. Students should be able to complete more than one exercise daily in the vocabulary book, and might be allowed to skip exercises that review words already in their vocabulary. They can probably take the weekly vocabulary quiz orally as well, but insist on *precise* definitions. *Do not skip* the weekly exercise that builds new words from roots with different prefixes and suffixes.

Reading

At this level, students should already be reading fluently, so the emphasis is on understanding and analyzing what they read, especially in light of the Catholic Faith. Assign written or oral coursework that forces students to think about what they have read, and express their ideas clearly.

To build vocabulary, comprehension, literary analysis, and a host of other important language skills, there is simply no substitute for *good* recreational reading. Shut off the tube and confiscate the I-Pod. Provide a quiet, comfy place, and insist that your Junior High pupils spend some serious time with books. The Seton "Supplemental Reading List," found in the reading section of the lesson plans, or on the website, is a good place to locate books that we actually want our children to read.

History and Science

These subjects become very important during junior high, and a good basic knowledge of American and world history, as well as physical and life science is absolutely crucial for success

in high school. Many students will balk at the amount of written work the courses require at this level, so you can take some shortcuts, but be careful that you are not compromising a thorough understanding of the material.

Often the written assignments in the texts take the place of what would be classroom interaction, by calling the student's attention to the most important facts in the chapter. Get the children in the habit of looking over the written questions/assignments *before* reading the text. One shortcut is to allow the student to highlight answers, instead of writing them out in a notebook. Another might be to encourage the student to outline the information in a notebook or on the computer in place of other assigned work. You may always pick and choose among the written assignments and have the child complete those you feel would be of most benefit to him or her.

Religion

Because my own children are enrolled with Seton from kindergarten, they find it pretty easy to memorize the catechism questions and answers by junior high. I find, the best way to memorize these is oral drill. I do not assign any written work in 7th grade Bible history, just the reading.

I do stress the 8th grade history of the Catholic Church. Although enrolled Seton students have been studying the saints and traditions of the Church in reading, English, spelling and other

subjects for years, the 8th grade Church History text provides an overall outline for the students so they can mentally file this knowledge.

A Few Final Thoughts

If you have not already done so, consider purchasing a computer for your family. Any written assignment may be completed on a word processor and filed in folders on the hard drive. Most tests at the junior high level can be taken online.

Keep the computer in a public area of the house so you are aware of what is being done. Buy a good anti-porn filter, and then encourage your students to do research on the Internet. I haven't used a dictionary in years! It's just so much easier to go on *dictionary.com*.

Through the years, I have spoken to many, many parents who told me that they love designing their own curriculum in grammar school, but they plan to enroll their children in Seton's high school program. Many feel intimidated at the very notion of home school high school, and they want Seton's lesson plans, teachers, and counselors, as well as the security of an accredited high school transcript. In my opinion, this is not the best plan to follow.

Seton's high school is a challenging program, and it is unfair to throw children into this level of work if they have not been prepared for it in elementary school. College admissions

officers do not care what grade a student earned in 8th grade English, but they will look at the entire high school transcript.

If you want a Seton diploma for your children, I suggest you enroll them *no later* than junior high school, preferably 7th grade but certainly no later than 8th grade. Seton is producing two new junior high workbooks which should be ready for the students for September of 2006. These two Reading-Writing Skills workbooks present analytical thinking assignments for the study of characterization, plot and conflict, and theme. These skills are important for the Book Analyses required for the English high school courses.

Parents of junior high school children know only too well the special challenges these young adolescents present within the home. As their bodies change, sometimes actions and emotions go a bit haywire. This is a time to encourage a stronger prayer life, more frequent reception of the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist, and to discuss proper Catholic values.

If your children have not already been confirmed by junior high school, please arrange for the reception of the sacrament at the earliest possible opportunity. With the graces and gifts of the Holy Spirit, working under the guidance of loving parents, your children are ready to prepare themselves for the challenges of high school.

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Message for the World Day of Peace 2006

Peace is an irrepressible yearning present in the heart of each person, regardless of his or her particular cultural identity. Consequently, everyone should feel committed to service of this great good, and should strive to prevent any form of untruth from poisoning relationships. All people are members of one and the same family. An extreme exaltation of differences clashes with this fundamental truth. We need to regain an awareness that we share a common destiny which is ultimately transcendent, so as to maximize our historical and cultural differences, not in opposition to, but in cooperation with, people belonging to other cultures. These simple truths are what make peace possible; they are easily understood whenever we listen to our own hearts with pure intentions. Peace thus comes to be seen in a new light: not as the mere absence of war, but as a harmonious coexistence of individual citizens within a society governed by justice, one in which the good is also achieved, to the extent possible, for each of them. The truth of peace calls upon everyone to cultivate productive and sincere relationships; it encourages them to seek out and to follow the paths of forgiveness and reconciliation, to be transparent in their dealings with others, and to be faithful to their word. In a particular way, the followers of Christ, recognizing the insidious presence of evil and the need for that liberation brought by the divine Master, look to him with confidence, in the knowledge that "he committed no sin; no guile was found on his lips" (*1 Pet 2:22*; cf. *Is 53:9*). Jesus defined himself as the Truth in person, and, in addressing the

seer of the Book of Revelation, he states his complete aversion to "every one who loves and practices falsehood" (*Rev 22:15*). He has disclosed the full truth about humanity and about human history. The power of his grace makes it possible to live "in" and "by" truth, since he alone is completely true and faithful. Jesus is the truth which gives us peace.

In view of the risks which humanity is facing in our time, all Catholics in every part of the world have a duty to proclaim and embody ever more fully the "Gospel of Peace", and to show that acknowledgment of the full truth of God is the first, indispensable condition for consolidating the truth of peace. God is Love which saves, a loving Father who wants to see his children look upon one another as brothers and sisters, working responsibly to place their various talents at the service of the common good of the human family. God is the unfailing source of the hope which gives meaning to personal and community life. God, and God alone, brings to fulfilment every work of good and of peace. History has amply demonstrated that declaring war on God in order to eradicate him from human hearts only leads a fearful and impoverished humanity toward decisions which are ultimately futile. This realization must impel believers in Christ to become convincing witnesses of the God who is inseparably truth and love, placing themselves at the service of peace in broad cooperation with other Christians, the followers of other religions and with all men and women of good will.

From the Vatican, 8 December 2005

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