



Seton Home



Study School

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◆ *“Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church”* ◆

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Assumption of Mary

On August 15th, we celebrate the Feast of the Assumption of Mary into Heaven. The dogma of the Assumption was officially defined by Pope Pius XII in 1950: “By the authority of Our Lord Jesus Christ, of the Blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and by our own authority, we pronounce, declare, and define it to be a divinely revealed dogma: that the Immaculate Mother of God, the ever Virgin Mary, having completed the course of her earthly life, was assumed body and soul into heavenly glory.” It should not surprise us that Jesus wanted His mother, who bore the Son of God in her body, to achieve her heavenly reward immediately upon her death.

In the book *Mystical City of God*, Blessed Mary of Agreda writes concerning the end of the Blessed Mother’s life on earth: “...When the angels began their music, the most blessed Mary reclined back upon her couch or bed. Her tunic was folded about her sacred body, her hands joined and her eyes fixed upon her divine Son, and she was entirely inflamed with the fire of divine love. And as the angels intoned those verses of the Canticles: ‘Arise, haste, my beloved, my dove, my beautiful one, and come, the winter has passed,’ She pronounced those words of her Son on the Cross: ‘Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.’”

As we meditate on the glorious death of the Blessed Mother, we can draw many inspirations regarding our home schooling. She obviously was in deep meditation as her hands were joined in prayer and her eyes were fixed upon her Divine Son. As we home schooling parents face our daily sacrifices, our daily gift of ourselves to our children for the sake of their eternal salvation, we should follow the Blessed Mother in having our hands joined in prayer and fixing our eyes on the Cross. And we need to be sure that our children are with us in prayer and have their eyes fixed on the crucifix as well. In His crucifixion, Jesus gave the gift of His death on the Cross, and gave us, His children, eternal life. In a similar way, the crucifixion of our own desires and pleasures for the sake of our children will gain eternal salvation for our family.

The Blessed Mother was “entirely inflamed with the fire of divine love,” which we can barely understand. But we do have some understanding of the love of a mother for her child. We experience this special motherly love before our child is born, and we certainly cannot express the love we have as we hold our newborn baby. Sometimes as our child grows older, we don’t feel as “inflamed” with love, but the Blessed Mother should inspire us to keep that flame burning in such a steady way, that we remain consistent

in our efforts to give our children the desire to have Jesus Christ in their hearts. He is the essence of Love, and with Him in their hearts, they will follow Him obediently and share their love with others.

Mary’s last words were those very same words that Jesus spoke as He died on the Cross: “Into your hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit.” These words are a total acceptance of God as the Master of our lives. We need to think about these words and live by them. It is total trust in God to live by them. “Into Your hands, O Lord, I totally give over my intellect and will for You to use for Your greater honor and glory.” With this kind of trust and Faith, we need to teach our children not only their academics and catechism, but how to live each day in a Christ-like way by being obedient and serving others, by fulfilling our daily duties and responsibilities to Him and to others.

Mary of Agreda continues, “Great wonders and prodigies happened at the precious death of the Queen; for

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Questions We Are Asked

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

My son seems advanced, is learning quickly and moving ahead in his books. Could he skip 3rd grade?

We don't usually recommend skipping a grade. We think it is best if a student goes through the grade level he is scheduled to take, but perhaps move through it quickly. For instance, if there are two phonics pages, assign only one. If he has a perfect score, don't assign the second page. For spelling, let him look over the words and then give him the test. He does not need to do the activities if he can spell the words without doing them. Be sure to give him the reading assignments and the book reports; these are important for him to do. Make sure he knows the religion lessons. Some subjects provide a good review, while some concepts might be new, especially in math and English.

Once you are satisfied that he does know what is required for the 3rd grade, he can move on to 4th grade. That might be in November or December, but since we are not bound by a calendar, he can move right into 4th grade when you know he is ready.

Do keep in mind that students can take different subjects at different grade levels. You might find that he is moving ahead more quickly in math, and you might move him into 4th grade math earlier than you would move him in the other subjects.

If you need to give a standardized test for your school district, be sure to give the test they expect, the one for 3rd grade and not for 4th, even if you move him into 4th in January. The reason for this is because your son will not have had a full year of 4th grade work. Also, in future grades, he might actually need to take two years to go through one grade, such as in 7th or 8th. This does happen, as

sometimes a student's maturity level does not match his academic level. We notice this especially in the reading course, when a student may be capable of reading at a higher level, but does not have the analytical skills for the book report assignments.

My high school son seems to be getting depressed because it is taking him so long to finish up a grade level. What do you suggest?

When a high school student gets into a situation where he is behind and it is affecting him to the point of frustration and depression, we definitely recommend that he focuses on only one subject at a time. He can work six hours a day on only one subject. He can read the assignments, answer the questions, and take the tests for one subject perhaps in much less time than it takes if he is stopping to work on the other courses each day. When he is able to obtain a final grade and a high school credit in a short time, it will give him the incentive to go on and do another course the same way. If there is a course that he has barely begun or has not completed any assignments, consider having him continue the subject in the next grade level.

Some parents have a student do a whole course over the summer, either before the school year begins, or after the school year ends. Usually these are science or history courses. The daily focus on one course over the summer encourages the student, and results in one fewer course over the months of the normal school year.

Sometimes a child cannot finish a course because of real learning problems. If you believe your child has a learning problem, please call one of our counselors. We do have a Special

Services department for students who may need to take one or two courses geared for students with special needs. You can read about this department on our web site at www.setonhome.org. Click on Curriculum, then click on Special Services.

If there is a not a learning problem, then try to isolate the reason why the student is not able to finish. Does the student not understand the material, or is he having trouble with one particular assignment? Are too many outside activities cutting into school time? Once you isolate the problem, you can take steps to deal with it. If you are not sure what to do, talk to a Seton counselor.

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My daughter fell in with a bad crowd in high school, is now home schooling with you, but has a difficult time focusing on the work. She wants to get a GED. Do you think that is a good idea?

We do not recommend a GED if it can be avoided. The GED is the alternative for high school dropouts, and it can send a negative message to future employers and to colleges. The message is that this student could not do the academic work, or could not stick with the school program for some reason. In addition, most employers and colleges realize that the GED is not really a substitute for a high school education and diploma.

If your daughter truly wants to pull herself together and get her life on track, she should continue with her schooling. She can do one course at a time, focusing on just one subject at a time. You may need to help her to get serious about being self-disciplined. She may need to

go to the library for two or three hours a day to get her work done, and perhaps finish each course in a couple of months. She needs to be successful quickly so she has hope she can get her high school diploma. She needs to set goals, have a plan to achieve those goals, and internalize a belief that the goals can be accomplished.

Help her to grow spiritually. Say the Rosary with her every day. Encourage her to attend daily Mass and go to Confession at least once a month. Read and discuss a short passage from a spiritual yet practical book every day with your daughter. The little book *Imitation of Christ* is a very popular daily guide. Once she realizes God's plan for her life, she should become more focused on a daily basis to attain the long-term goals.

Talks at conferences help give parents the insight and encouragement they need to continue home schooling and to improve their home schooling experience.

Since I am enrolled with Seton and receive all my home schooling materials from Seton, I am not sure why I should attend a Catholic home schooling conference. Are there advantages I am not aware of?

In the past, parents would attend the conferences to see and purchase the books. Now many people have seen the books which their friends have, or they can see and buy materials online. Even so, a home schooling conference is valuable for the inspiration and the personal contacts made. When we have tables at the conferences, we can speak with mothers and fathers, children, and friends. Families meet other families.

Parents can discuss their particular situations with us and with other families. We like to meet parents who are using our program and find out what has worked for them in their home schooling or what problems they may have encountered. It helps us to improve our program.

When I talk with parents at the conferences, they often tell me how much they appreciate the speakers. They say that hearing the talks re-energizes them and gets them ready to tackle another year of home schooling. Since the talks balance between practical and spiritual advice, parents are given the insight and encouragement they need to continue home schooling and to improve their home schooling experience.

If you cannot attend a conference in person, most conferences offer tapes or CD's of the talks. The tapes of the talks from the IHM Conference in Washington, D.C. can be ordered by going to www.ihmconference.org. Some of the speakers at this year's IHM Conference included Father Paul Scalia, Father Thomas Euteneuer, Father Joseph Mary Brown, Dr. Mitchell Kalpakgian, Father Constantine Belisarius, Mr. John Clark, Father Frank Papa, Father James Buckley, Father Robert Levis, Mrs. Laura Berquist, Mrs. Ginny Seuffert, and Father Pablo Straub.

I would like to put my 3rd and 4th grader together. Do you think they are too young to try this?

Each child is different, so you need to think carefully about whether they can work together on some or all subjects. However, we do think that in many cases, particularly as the children get older, they can work together on several subjects. This is important not only to help the children as they learn to study together and to help each other, but also because it makes the teaching easier for the parents.

The courses which are easiest for the children to do together are religion, history, and science. Other subjects which you should consider combining are spelling and vocabulary. Sometimes

a student needs some solid review in math and would benefit by going back a grade level with a younger sibling. Sometimes a younger student is moving ahead so quickly in math, it would be a welcome challenge for him to work ahead with an older sibling. Some parents have found that if they teach a course to a younger child over the summer, the younger child can move up with an older child in the fall. Many children like working together, and they can help keep each other on schedule.

At the same time, you need to be cautious that you are not putting too much challenge on the shoulders of a young one, and that you don't foster resentments in older children. At this young age, try combining only one or two courses to begin with. If it works well, consider combining a course or two more the next year.

Have I been too much of a perfectionist in wanting my children to do all the work assigned?

We certainly don't want to discourage you from doing all the assignments in the lesson plans. Obviously, we believe that the assignments in the lesson plans are beneficial, or we would not have included them. Conversely, you should not feel that just because an assignment is listed in the lesson plans that it must be done. The standard is always to do what is best for the child.

We sometimes hear from parents who say that one of the children is a perfectionist, and the student takes a very long time to finish as he insists that the final result be perfect. This may be occasionally frustrating, but wanting to do excellent work is not a bad goal. With home schooling, our focus must be on the children learning at the rate that is best for them. Children with special needs obviously need to take more time. Why rush a student who may be gifted or who has the gift of wanting his work to be perfect? The important point is not how quickly or slowly the student works, but whether the student is really trying and is making reasonable progress.

Defend the Family

by Edouard Cardinal Gagnon

Editor's Note: Some time ago, Cardinal Gagnon, then-president of the Pontifical Council for the Family, gave a speech in Washington, D.C. at a Catholic home school conference. The following is a slightly edited version of his speech.

You who are gathered here today must defend the family in spite of the realities of modern social life. I encourage all of you to keep working according to the plans you are following, and to continue expanding your system of home schooling, for home schooling is a benefit not only to families but to society. You should proceed with a desire to share its benefits with others.

The reason for the existence of the home school is in the first plan that God had for the family; the family existed long before schools existed. We learn about God's plan from Jesus Christ, Our Lord, in the name of God His Father, Who created us. As Pope Pius XI says in his encyclical *Casti Connubii* [*On Christian Marriage*], God gives parents the duty and the privilege to bring new persons into the world. Pope Pius XI says that parents must never forget their mission, for their vocation is not only to prepare their children to be happy in this world, but to be citizens in heaven.

So it is the family which has the first duty and the right to impart the Faith to their children, along with all the cultural and intellectual values which sustain the Faith and which are incomplete without the Faith.

For this reason, Pope John Paul's letter to mothers and fathers is an act of faith in the family. The *Charter of the Rights of the Family* emphasizes the importance of the family, with important directives to help them. No family should be without this letter.

This is what the Holy Father says: "The parents are the first and principal educators of their children. In that field, they have a fundamental competence. They are educators because they are parents." It is not something added to their situation. It is not a new trade, a new function that comes from outside, from society. It comes from the fact of bearing children. The Pope says they share a responsibility with others, such as the Church and others that help the family. But parents must insure that the help they receive is in conformity with their own convictions and desires. It is legitimate, of course, for parents to receive help in order to be able to accomplish their work. In one field, however, the Holy Father says the family cannot be substituted. That is in religious education. For the family grows up as the domestic church.

To accomplish this, the parents choose for their children the model of education, moral and religious, which is in conformity with their own convictions. Even when parents have recourse to other institutions, they have this duty to control everything being taught to their children. So the responsibility you have generously taken, to care directly for the education of your children, is in conformity with the plan of God the Creator, and with the profound desires of the Church. You have rightly assumed the education of your children in the home and, in collaboration with other families, you should be attentive not to present it as only a matter of not being satisfied with the schools. Your role (as educators) is not a subsidiary role.

While it is true that many things do not go well in the school systems, it is not for this reason that the institution of home schooling is justified. I was a theologian at Vatican

II. After reflection, the Council concluded that lay people are called to be apostles, to share in the three functions of the Church: one, to teach the Faith; two, to pray; and three, to sanctify, and by this to bring the world to Christ.

I repeat to you the words of the first Pope, St. Peter: "through Baptism, we are all priests" in the wide sense of the word. We represent the world to God, and we represent God to the world. We cannot truly pray if we pray only for ourselves or for those close to us. As Christians, we have the means of sanctifying the world. This is done by prayer and by helping others get to the sacraments, preparing them for the sacraments so they may profit by them. This is the function of all lay persons.

But parents also have a sacrament of their own which gives them a more precise responsibility for the mission of the Church in the world. This is the Sacrament of Matrimony. Marriage gives parents the duty and the right to be apostles themselves. Home schooling is based on that principle. It is the fundamental duty and right of parents to be apostles in the true sense of the word, first toward their own children, and then also in society by the influence they can have on others.

Both the Second Vatican Council and Pope John Paul II, in his exhortation on the family, *Familiaris Consortio*, say that the family should be apostles. The family can do this first by witnessing, by showing others its Faith, by making the Faith known to others, by asking for respect for one's convictions in one's Faith and one's religious practices. The family can do this by making the Faith attractive to others, showing them that in our Faith and in our religious practices, we find happiness.

We should all be especially aware when we receive a privilege, like the one you have in being able to be the teachers of your own children, and

in having the help of the system of assistance that you have developed. When you have a responsibility like that, it creates the duty of doing it in a perfect way. As St. Paul said to the first Christians, not only must you be Christians, but you must do so in a way that impresses others. In the first century, looking at the disciples, the people said, "See how they love one another." They were converted because of that. You are doing that. I see more smiles in this convention than in most places where I go. This is one of the characteristics which the home schoolers should preserve. Transmit the Faith with the confidence of transmitting other positive values, and transmitting the key to happiness, serenity, and peace.

The Holy Father in *Familiaris Consortio* goes on to say that in the end, we will be judged on our love. When the Last Judgment and when the Particular Judgment comes on every one of us, it is on love that we will be judged.

But precisely what is love? Love is a gift of self. This can be learned only in the family, or for those who are deprived of the family, in places which try to reproduce what is lived in the family. It is transmitted by the family because family means the parents who give oneself to the other, each at the service of the other, and together they give themselves to the child they welcome, the child they want to grow as a spiritual, private human being according to the plan of God. The family is the place where the civilization of love is to begin.

Love of others must begin with understanding between the different members of the family. It has to begin with teaching

the children that in everything they do, there must be that dimension of thinking about the other, of looking for the good of the other before looking for their own personal advantage. Having your children at home, teaching them the different disciplines of instruction, and teaching them at the same time the devout cultural values that you have inherited, you are teaching them a sense of love.

Each child is different. You respect their differences. You expect the children to respect others and not dominate one over the other, not to become egotistic and selfish. It is from the family that love will come to the whole world. The reason why God did not create us as adults, why He made us to be born so weak, in such need of being helped and nourished, is because He wanted us to be born of the love of a man and woman.

That is how God wants to reveal to us His love, the intimacy of His

love for us. This is why not only giving life but working together to give perfection to life, you are giving your children their education, working together without delegating your authority to others. This is an immense proof of love for each other, for the children, and for the Church. You possess the signs of the love of God for us.

Also, you are giving certainty about things. We know very well that during all these years of confusion, when the society is teaching that nothing is certain, actually society is being destroyed. You make Jesus Christ known to His children as the Word of His Father, the One Who tells us what is the Will of the Father over us. You give your children a sense of security in life. You teach the truth with confidence and certainty to the children you love.

So we must have confidence. The family has always had dire challenges. Times today are different, but if we study history, we see that there were other challenges in other times. What we have to look for are positive signs of change for the good, such as home schooling.

What is the future of the family? In a poll recently, people answered that the thing they trusted most is the family. What they care most for is for the love of their parents and for the direction of their parents. There is a need for what you do. And there is a need to make it known to others.

Let us ask Our Blessed Mother to help you continue giving that witness to the Church, and to find in that witness the happiness you deserve.



Jumping Back In

by Ginny Seuffert

Is summer almost over? Where did it go? This time of year, Seton Moms and Dads remember that the new school year is almost upon us. After 17 years of home schooling, I still have mixed feelings. On one hand, I hate to see summer vacation end. There is always some other job I planned to do around my home, and more trips I want to take with my children. On the other hand, a return to a more organized daily routine is welcome, and the children get excited when the new boxes of books arrive. Before we jump into a new school year, it is a good idea to take stock of the previous year to see what worked well and what needs to be changed to make our home schooling go more smoothly.

If the children seemed to dawdle in the morning before getting down to schoolwork, lower the boom!

- Insist that they start schoolwork at the same time every morning. No excuses accepted!
- If start time is often delayed because Junior can't seem to find his notebook, pencil, or lesson plan, have him put school materials in place at night before he goes to sleep.
- Sometimes moms get distracted when the phone rings or a diaper needs changing, and Janey is slow to start in the morning because she waits for you to tell her what to do first. Don't give Janey an excuse for delay. Make sure that each of your children can start without you by assigning a first-of-the-morning task that can be done independently. Even a

kindergarten child can practice printing letters!

Do the children lack energy and seem unmotivated?

- Grammar school children need at least 10 hours of sleep each night. Make sure that you are enforcing bed times.
- High school students need a minimum of 8 hours sleep each night. Do your best to make sure that electronic distractions are not keeping them from sleep.
- Try to limit junk food. Provide 3 healthy meals each day, and allow snacks midmorning and after the school day is over.
- Children need fresh air and exercise. Allow mid-morning recess and a couple of hours of outside play after school.
- Restrict TV and video games, or better yet, eliminate them entirely from your home.

Do you feel like your house is never in order?

- Spend five minutes mid-morning, and again before lunch, to tidy up toys, and school materials. You will be surprised at what you can do in so short a time if everyone pitches in.
- Have a 30-minute clean up break at the end of the school day, before snack and play time.
- At night, insist that dirty laundry is put in the hamper and clean laundry is stowed in the closets and drawers, before the children go to bed.

- Teach each child at least one household task, like sweeping the kitchen floor or vacuuming the living room, and make it a daily and permanent assignment.

- Every family member who is old enough to lift a dust cloth has to reserve Saturday morning for house cleaning or yard work. Outside activities have to wait until after the house and yard are in order.

Did home schooling seem like a never-ending task last year?

- Just like school must begin at a set time, it should also end at a set time, no later than 2:30 or 3:00. Any work not completed by that time will have to wait until evening or the next day.
- Students who refuse to put their noses to the grindstone will not be motivated by threats that, "You are going to sit with those books until the assignment is completed!" They will dig in their heels, and the mind shuts down after a while anyway, so the whole experience will just add to Mom's frustration.
- Close the books at dismissal time. If a particular student has been uncooperative, he or she can do chores today in place of playtime. Just make sure that the chores involve physical exercise, like sweeping the front walk or raking the lawn.
- Are you being over-scrupulous in following the lesson plans? Words in the lesson plans like, "as time allows," or "as needed," mean just that! Your children are getting a first class education with the Seton program. It is okay to skip a few assignments here and there.

- “Pretest” the children in Vocabulary and Spelling. You may find that they already know some or even all of the words. Reward them by allowing them to study and take an oral quiz for those lessons.
- Substitute flash cards or computer drills for written work while learning math facts.
- Encourage children to do written compositions on a word processor.
- Call a Seton counselor for help if you find yourself falling seriously behind, or the school day is lasting until suppertime.

Are there too many distractions during the school day?

- Let the machine answer the phone during school hours.
- Let friends and family know that you cannot take calls or receive visitors until after school hours.
- Plan a safe play place for the youngest children with toys that will occupy them, at least for a time, while the older children do schoolwork.

- Enforce naptimes so the little ones are safely silent for an hour or so every afternoon.
- Do not allow support group activities to take too much time away from your schooling.

Have you lost track of why you started to home school in the first place?

- The main goal of our home schooling, and of our lives as parents, is to raise saints. Let's not allow the small stuff to distract us or discourage us.
- Never forget that, on your most unorganized unproductive days, you still kept your children in a safe and wholesome Catholic environment.
- When daily Mass is just not possible, make a spiritual communion, and encourage your children to do the same.
- Plan a schedule of daily devotions with the children including Grace before meals, the Angelus, and the Rosary.
- Set aside some quiet time, perhaps before the children wake up, for personal prayer.

There are two important points for you to ponder as you pray. First, God's grace is always sufficient for our needs, and is available for the asking. Second, our vocation of educating our children at home is so vital to the Catholic Church that no sacrifice, no aggravation, no contradiction, no mess, and no exhaustion is so great that we should despair.

In his first letter, St. Peter tells us, “Your opponent the Devil is prowling around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

But St. Peter gives us hope. “Resist him, steadfast in faith, knowing that your brothers and sisters throughout the world undergo the same sufferings. The God of all grace who called you to His eternal glory through Christ Jesus will Himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.”

But then St. Peter adds, “After you have suffered a little.”

Accept this suffering for the kingdom of God. He will bless you for it and send you every grace, and your children will praise you before the throne of God for eternity.

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the sun was eclipsed and its light was hidden in sorrow for some hours. Many birds of different kinds gathered around the Cenacle [where she died], and by their sorrowful clamors and groans for a while caused the bystanders themselves to weep. All Jerusalem was in commotion, and many of the inhabitants collected in astonished crowds, confessing loudly the power of God and the greatness of his works. Others were astounded and as if beside themselves. The Apostles and disciples with others of the faithful broke forth in tears and sighs. Many sick persons came who all were cured. The souls in purgatory were released.”

As we meditate on the Assumption, we can see that nature itself, created and controlled by God, gave recognition of the life, the work, and the holiness of the Blessed Mother. The sun did not shine for hours, and the birds themselves sang in sorrow. These events should remind us and our children that God is in control of everything in this world, and that whatever happens in nature is for a reason, often as a sign of the glory and power of God. God is giving us all in this world the opportunity to turn to Him as the Creator and not to deny Him obedience to His laws.

The people in Jerusalem recognized that the laws of nature were controlled by God. Those who rejected Him were “in commotion,” but those who realized His power and greatness, “confessed” their faith and trust “loudly.” Those who followed Christ, His Apostles and disciples, cried and sighed at the wonderful signs of God’s control over nature.

All the sick people who came to the Apostles were cured in His Holy Name. As after the Resurrection of Jesus, many saw the dead walking the streets, so after the Assumption of the Blessed Mother, many saw those souls of the Blessed who had died since the Resurrection. We cannot be surprised since the Blessed Mother has always had a special devotion to the souls in Purgatory, as she often talked about in her various apparitions.

Blessed Mother, help us home schooling parents to trust that you will give us the strength, the will, and the perseverance to fulfill our duties and responsibilities to raise our children in God’s Commandments to give them eternal life. In the Name of your Divine Son Jesus, keep us from being weary. Mary, Our Lady of the Assumption, pray for us. Queen assumed into heaven, pray for us. Holy Virgin assumed by thy Son into heaven, pray for us.

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