

Mater Dei Education

An Introduction for Homeschoolers

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A Catholic Irish Classical Curriculum



A Catholic Education

Homeschooling with Mater Dei Education is more than following a curriculum and a schedule. Mater Dei Education wants to help you and your family on the path to heaven. The programme weaves faith and learning together. It looks to nurture the mind, the heart and the soul. The ambition of Mater Dei Education is to give the best education to Irish children for the glory of God. Each child needs to use the gifts and abilities that the Lord has given them in order to serve Him, love Him and attract more people to His love.

An Irish Education

Today Irish culture and Irish history are being little by little forgotten and less and less taught. In most schools, it is relatively easy to be exempted from Irish language classes. Students may even be admitted to third level education without any interaction with the Irish language. Why should you then teach your children using an Irish home education provider? What is the point of learning the language and history of our ancestors?

Learning Irish history and language helps in the Faith development of both parents and children. In general, history enlightens our understanding of the present situation of a country. It is also taught to avoid the mistakes of the past. It enables learned people to take a step back in every situation and discern the future by looking back at the past. In Ireland, the study of history has an added benefit in that it describes how the Faith grew on our Island and how people lost their lives for it.

Families are grateful to their forefathers for having defended the Faith, sometimes at the cost of their lives. Our history encourages families in the virtue of fortitude in today's world which is often adversarial to Catholic Faith and

teaching. The Lord is not calling us to “go with the flow”. As the Atlantic salmon which swims upstream against the current to give rise to new life, we are also asked to navigate the ideological tides and follow the path of our forefathers with the faith we have received through their perseverance and courage. As G.K. Chesterton noted, “only dead fish go with the flow.” Mater Dei Education supports families in this journey through history to understand that our future is in God’s hands.

The Irish language captures the essence of the Catholic Faith, and defines the historical identity of the Irish people. The Irish are not an Anglo/American amalgam with an inferiority complex. We, Irish, need to be proud of our language, which is richly interwoven with our Faith, our culture and our history. The patriots who won Irish freedom did so through virtues of fortitude and their great love for our Faith and our country. Why would you want to deprive your children of this heritage? The time has finally come to learn and teach our history and language in its fullness to the future generations. Our children do not deserve mediocrity. Let us ask our great Irish Saints for their intercession in this historic moment, in order to pass on the true history and language of this culture to our children.

A Classical Education

Mater Dei Education provides a classical education. Classical education is not simply an understanding of Greek and Roman history. In the vision of St. John Henry Newman, it is a formation wholly ordered towards the Truth, which is Jesus Christ, one where “real cultivation of mind” enables “the intellect... properly trained and formed to have a connected view or grasp of things.” Classical education follows this path in search of the Truth, the path which God made us to learn and to thus become virtuous. *You will know the Truth and the Truth will set you free (Jn 8:32)*. It is suitable for gifted children as well as for those who struggle with learning. Mater Dei Education encourages children towards mastery by teaching them to think well, write well and speak well. It emphasises the joy of learning and teaching for both parents and children. Mater Dei Education follows the classical Trivium of grammar, logic and rhetoric. For more information on what a classical education can offer to your child please watch the interview with Elisabeth Sullivan, Executive Director of the Institute of Catholic Liberal Education, which you can view on our Youtube channel.

Homeschooling: A Path to Heaven

IT should be clear to yourself and your child that God is the centre of your homeschool and hopefully of your life in general. By your baptism, the Most Holy Trinity lives in you and you have a share in the divine life of God. This



means that homeschooling should be regarded as a joy and a path to personal freedom, not as a chore. When my husband and I discerned that God was calling us to homeschool our children, I was happy to do His will but a bit scared...will I grow tired of it after a few months? What if it did not work out? But I soon realised that not entering into God's will was also going to be an impediment for God to work in my soul and in the lives of my children. *Not every one who says to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven (Mt 7:21)*. Like Mary, I needed to say 'Yes' and submit to our Father's will. Every morning when we wake up, we have the choice between doing God's will and feeling at peace about growing closer to Christ, or rejecting sufferings and hardships and becoming like the people in the world who do not understand the meaning of suffering. By uniting our sufferings and tiredness to the Lord, we can save our own souls, the souls of our children, thousands of souls in purgatory and we win graces for people who might not know the love of our Father in heaven.

The Primary and Natural Educators

THE Catholic Church and the Irish Constitution¹ recognise the parents as the primary educators of their children. Paragraph 2223 of the Catechism of the Catholic Church states, "Parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule. The home is well suited for education in the virtues. This requires

¹ Article 42 of the Constitution of Ireland reads; "The State acknowledges that the primary and natural educator of the child is the Family and guarantees to respect the inalienable right and duty of parents to provide, according to their means, for the religious and moral, intellectual, physical and social education of their children. Parents shall be free to provide this education in their homes or in private schools or in schools recognised or established by the State."

an apprenticeship in self-denial, sound judgment, and self-mastery - the preconditions of all true freedom. Parents should teach their children to subordinate the material and instinctual dimensions to interior and spiritual ones.” Parents have a grave responsibility to give good example to their children. By knowing how to acknowledge their own failings to their children, parents will be better able to guide and correct them; *Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will give delight to your heart (Pr 29:17); Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord (Eph 6:4)*

The School of the Virtues

Homeschooling is well-suited for the education of the virtues. The human virtues are rooted in the three theological virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity. These virtues relate directly to God and dispose Christians to live in a relationship with the Holy Trinity (CCC 1812). By developing these virtues in our children and ourselves, we induce a living relationship with the most Holy Trinity who lives in us.

Concretely, by seeing their parents’ **Faith** and trust in the Lord, the children learn to abandon themselves to their loving Father in heaven. Our children should see us spend time in prayer throughout the day. They understand that it is vital for us. By seeing our trust in the Lord in different situations such as difficult financial or family situations, they themselves grow in faith and trust in the Lord. God, who is Love, has entrusted the parents with this mission of homeschooling and the parents trust that they will have a personal encounter with the Lord through this mission. They trust that they are working for the growth of the Kingdom of God in their hearts and in the world. The Lord tells us that the Kingdom of God is within us and that the kingdom of God is like a mustard seed. The love within each family member in your family can change the world. Your family life will touch the lives of the people they meet and will somehow lead those people to God and to His love. For example, the presence of our family at daily mass gives hope to the older people of our village. They realise that God is still at work and is calling young people to his vineyard.

The parents put their **Hope** in the Lord. The parents desire the Kingdom of Heaven and eternal life for their family. They desire a living relationship with the Lord for their children and themselves. The parents know that the Lord has entrusted them with this beautiful gift of homeschooling in order to lead their family to heaven. They hope and trust that the Holy Spirit will help them provide an education to their children despite all their shortcomings. The shortcomings can be intellectual, spiritual or physical. For example, the parents might not understand algebra or lack the ability to teach Irish. They might not know their catechism or have a good knowledge of the Word of God. In my case, I was uncertain of how I was going to be able to handle the tiredness of homeschooling while expecting my eighth child. For His glory, the Lord in His goodness and

gentleness fills all those shortcomings and concretely helps us when we ask him with humility. *My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth (Ps 120).*

It is out of **Charity** for their children that Christian parents homeschool their children. I remember thinking before starting homeschooling that when I start homeschooling I would not be able to spend as much time in prayers. But Saint James says in his letter *“Faith apart from works is dead” (Jm 2:26)*. Charity, which is the nature of God, means following Our Lord’s example of losing our life so that we may gain life. By homeschooling our children, we may lose our careers, time and respect from our neighbours and family. But we gain the Kingdom of God already here on earth and we do God’s will. *For, you must know, the Kingdom of God is among you (Lk 17:21)*. We also gain the peace of doing God’s will and true freedom. Our children receive life because we have given up our lives. The parents give good example to their children, who in turn learn self-denial; *Unless a wheat grain falls on the ground and dies, it remains only a single grain; but if it dies, it yields a rich harvest. Anyone who loves his life will lose it; anyone who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life (Jn 12:24-25).*

A Life Anchored in the Lord

The Domestic Church

According to *Lumen Gentium*², the family is the domestic church where God is honoured and Jesus grows. As with any religious community, prayer life and discipline are the keys to inviting Our Lord into our family life. Discipline of life can often be challenging; such as waking up at the same time on school days, going to bed early, going through the same prayers which may sometimes seem monotonous, etc. But discipline brings true freedom as it leaves the necessary time for prayer and rest, two essential aspects of Christian homeschooling. The children learn discipline from their parents. If the children see that the parents wake up 30 minutes earlier every day to spend time with the Lord or are willing to interrupt the homeschooling day to go to daily mass, they learn discipline and the necessity to put the Lord first in their lives. The homeschooling family’s life requires a routine and a schedule which sets children at ease so that they know what is coming next and provides the time for prayer and rest for the homeschooling parent.

² See article 11 at http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19641121_lumen-gentium_en.html

The Holy Sacrifice of the Mass

AN important aspect to the homeschooling day should be, when possible, the daily attendance at mass. Pope John Paul II described the mass as “Heaven on Earth”, explaining that what “we celebrate on Earth is a mysterious participation in the heavenly liturgy.” During mass, we are nourished by the Word of God and the body of Christ, which both sustain us on our Christian journey to heaven. Before communion, we ask Our Lady to prepare our hearts to receive her Son, Jesus Christ with the same love with which she received Him at the moment of the Annunciation. After communion, we have time to personally thank each person of the most Blessed Trinity for this awesome gift we just received. We beg the Holy Spirit to increase in us charity towards the other members of our family; to give us love towards our spouse and towards our children during this new homeschooling day. We look at Jesus Christ in the little host, giving himself freely to all out of love for all and we can ask him to become like him; to give our all for all, and to forget about ourselves!

Going everyday to mass as a family increases in us love for the most Blessed Trinity, and unity and love within the family. *“Grant that we, who are nourished by the Body and Blood of your Son and filled with his Holy Spirit, may become one body, one spirit in Christ (Eucharistic Prayer III)”*. Mass is also an important act of public worship. We live in a small village in rural Ireland where everyone knows everyone’s business. Most of our neighbours know that my children homeschool and that we go to mass everyday. This could seem embarrassing. But God, in His goodness, will reward this simple act of witnessing to the Truth. *Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven (Mt 10:32)*. After receiving the most Blessed Sacrament, you are a living tabernacle and give hope to the people who meet you.

The Divine Office

Homeschooling can be tiring at times but following St Paul’s advice helps in the daily struggles: *Be happy at all times; pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God because this is what God expects you to do in Jesus Christ (1 Th 5:16-18)*. An easy way for the parents to keep their eyes fixed on the Lord during the day and to follow the Apostle’s advice is to pray the Divine Office. The Divine Office is the pattern of daily prayer which provides a rhythm to the days of countless monks, priests, nuns and lay people around the world. One can buy the Divine Office books or read the psalms from websites/apps such as Universalis³. Praying the Divine Office three times a day is a concrete support for the homeschooling parents. In the morning, the parents could pray the Morning Prayer (Lauds) along with the two readings of the Office of Readings and have some time for silent prayers. Once school is over in mid-afternoon, one could pray None (Afternoon Prayer) and before going to bed, one could pray the

³ <https://universalis.com/n-liturgy-structure.htm>

Night Prayer. Since Vatican II, the Church is encouraging this form of prayer. Sacrosanctum Concilium⁴ states the following in Chapter IV:

“Christ Jesus, high priest of the new and eternal covenant, taking human nature, introduced into this earthly exile that hymn which is sung throughout all ages in the halls of heaven. He joins the entire community of mankind to Himself, associating it with His own singing of this canticle of divine praise.

For he continues His priestly work through the agency of His Church, which is ceaselessly engaged in praising the Lord and interceding for the salvation of the whole world. She does this, not only by celebrating the Eucharist, but also in other ways, especially by praying the Divine Office.

By tradition going back to early Christian times, the Divine Office is devised so that the whole course of the day and night is made holy by the praises of God. Therefore, when this wonderful song of praise is rightly performed by priests and others who are deputed for this purpose by the Church’s ordinance, or by the faithful praying together with the priest in the approved form, then it is truly the voice of the bride addressed to her bridegroom; It is the very prayer which Christ Himself, together with His body, addresses to the Father.

Hence all who render this service are not only fulfilling a duty of the Church, but also are sharing in the greatest honor of Christ’s spouse, for by offering these praises to God they are standing before God’s throne in the name of the Church their Mother.”



⁴ See Chapter 4 at https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_const_19631204_sacrosanctum-concilium_en.html

The Rosary and Devotion to Our Lady

The prayer of the rosary was asked by Our Lady at each of the six apparitions to the three little shepherd children of Fatima. This prayer brings peace to the world and protects the family from all evils. Father Patrick Peyton used to say that “The family that prays together stays together.” Today the family is the first target of the devil and needs the help of Our Lady to crush the head of the serpent. Our Lady is our advocate in front of Our Lord and leads us gently to holiness. By praying the daily rosary, we contemplate the lives of Jesus and Mary here on earth and Jesus Christ is little by little being born in us. Consequently, the virtues of self-denial and discipline are easily obtained. During the mystery of the ‘Annunciation’, we pray that we may say ‘yes’ to God with the help of Our Lady to whatever event or plan He has in mind for us. When we pray the ‘Visitation’, we contemplate how our gift of faith needs to be shared with others like Mary bringing the Good News to her cousin Elizabeth. At the ‘Nativity’, we pray that Jesus Christ may be born in us and that he may intercede so that we can receive the Holy Spirit and act in His likeness.

During the prayer of the rosary, the celestial courts of heaven and earth are united. It is called the ‘evening mass’ by the Order of Preachers. In his *True Devotion to the Most Blessed Virgin Mary*, Saint Louis Marie Grignon de Montfort explains how holiness and unity with Christ is obtained more easily through devotion to Our Lady. He gives as an example of the bible story of the two brothers, Esau and Jacob. Esau was the eldest son and Jacob, the second born. Jacob was very close to his mother Rebecca, and liked to stay at home. Esau preferred to hunting. When their father Isaac approached death, he summoned his first born, Esau, to go hunting and bring him something to eat before giving him his first-born’s blessing. But through a stratagem, Rebecca dressed Jacob as Esau, and Isaac who was blind, gave Jacob the blessing destined for Esau. Likewise, if we have a true love and devotion to Our Lady, she clothes us in the first born’s garments, namely Jesus Christ’s. And our Father in heaven partakes with joy in what Our Lady has prepared, recognising in us the merits of Jesus Christ despite our sinful nature. Our Father in heaven, consequently, blesses us with spiritual and earthly blessings.

The Morning Prayer

Before breakfast, it is important to pray as a family. Living our lives in God’s will is, in itself, a sacrifice that we offer to God out of love for Him, for people around us, for souls in purgatory and souls who do not yet know Him. In our family, we all sit down around the kitchen table at 7.40 am. We start with the sign of the cross, my husband reads the Gospel of the Day, after which ourselves and each child can make a personal prayer. We finish with an Our Father, a Hail Mary and a Glory Be, followed by singing Grace before Meals.

Other practices

Regular confession and weekly Eucharistic adoration anchor our lives in the Lord and are crucial to help us live united to Christ. Our intention in this introduction is to summarise the daily prayer life which supports the home-schooling family.

Living Liturgically

It is important to live liturgically. Each afternoon, during the time for religious instruction, the life of the saint of the day is read. We discuss it. Once a week, we read from the Faith and Life catechism series and/or the St. Joseph First Communion Catechism. It is very important for the children to memorise answers of the catechism questions. Other days in the week, we read a passage from the bible. Over a period of a few weeks, we read from different figures or stories in the Bible. For example, over a three-week period, we read the first chapters of Genesis: the creation and the fall. After that, we would read the whole story of Abraham. Children will enjoy reading the stories of Queen Esther or of Tobit. During the season of Advent, it is appropriate to read the gospels of Saint Luke regarding the Annunciation, the Visitation and the birth of Jesus. During the season of Lent, the family can read the story of Moses in the book of Exodus. This is the time you pass on the Faith to the children through the reading of the scriptures. It is important to read directly from the Bible, which is the Word of God. If we were reading these stories just as a read-aloud, a children's bible would be enough but the Word of God is more than just reading an interesting story with a nice moral. Reading the Word of God means having an encounter with the person of Jesus Christ. *"And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us."* (Jn 1: 14) The Word of God guides our steps towards heavens. *"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path"* (Ps 119). Scriptures talks of the Word of God as a two-edged sword. This means that on one side, it helps us understand our sinful nature and the need for God's love and mercy, but the other side of the sword comes to heal us so that we may not despair in this journey towards heaven. *For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart* (He 4:12).

It is important to properly mark Sunday which is the day of the Lord and the day of rest. In our family, the day of the Lord starts on Saturday evening. On that evening, we dress up in our good Sunday clothes and we sing vespers after the family rosary. At that time, my husband reads the gospel of Sunday gospel and explains it to the children. He asks each child how their week was. He asks how their relationship with God and the rest of the family was. We end with a treat and a cup of tea. On Sunday morning, we sing lauds before mass. On Sundays, we keep chores to a minimum and enjoy time with each other. We often invite people for our Sunday dinner to share the love of God and the joy of the Resurrection. In the summer, we go on hikes admiring God's creation.

Family Organisation

Schoolwork

IT is advisable to keep all the books and material of each child in a separate big wooden box marked with the child's name. There is often so much time wasted if school materials have not been tidied properly. Each child should have their own pencil case in their own box.

It is necessary to use a table and a chair. The kitchen table and chairs are completely appropriate. It is better to always use the same place in the home for schoolwork.

The school day should start everyday at the same time after morning prayer. Children thrive on routine so it is important that the days and weeks be predictable for the child. For example, school starts every morning at 8 am, from Monday to Thursday. We always work at the dining room table. When everything is set and predictable for the child, there is less room for argument and negotiation.



Chores

Chores are an essential part of family life. Children learn self-denial, service and important life skills through chores. Children can start helping around the house from four years old. At that age, they are able to unload a dishwasher, put shoes in a box, feed hens, etc. The easiest way is to have the schedule of chores on the fridge in the kitchen. If it is written down, it is non negotiable. To make a chore schedule, start by listing all the chores needed in the house that your children would be able for. For example: lay the table, clear the table, empty the dishwasher, clean the chicken coop, feed the hens, tidy up the living-room, sort the laundry, tidy-up the schoolroom, etc. Then divide them in between your children. Each child is responsible for two to three chores each day. Rotate the work each week. You can draw a table with the names of each children at the top of each column and the week number on the first column. Here is a simple chore table showing chores over 4 weeks for four children with the same ability. If you have more children, add columns with their names and give younger children easier chores which can be repeated every week.

	Philip	Matthew	Thomas	Julie-Rose
Week 1	Clean chicken-coop, Empty the dishwasher before lunch	Lay the table for lunch, Tidy living-room, Sweep the floor after dinner	Sort-out the laundry, Tidy the school-room	Lay the table for breakfast, Tidy-up after lunch
Week 2	Lay the table for breakfast, Tidy-up after lunch	Clean chicken-coop, Empty the dishwasher before lunch	Lay the table for lunch, Tidy living-room, Sweep the floor after dinner	Sort-out the laundry, Tidy the school-room
Week 3	Sort-out the laundry, Tidy the school-room	Lay the table for breakfast, Tidy-up after lunch	Clean chicken-coop, Empty the dishwasher before lunch	Lay the table for lunch, Tidy living-room, Sweep the floor after dinner
Week 4	Lay the table for lunch, Tidy living-room, Sweep the floor after dinner	Sort-out the laundry, Tidy the school-room	Lay the table for breakfast, Tidy-up after lunch	Clean chicken-coop, Empty the dishwasher before lunch

Daily Schedule

For four of the seven days, the organisation and rhythm of the day is maintained by prayer, schoolwork, chores and rest time. Quiet time is placed

after dinner to allow mum to say her afternoon prayers and to lie down while the children are reading their books in their beds or sleeping. Religion takes place ideally before the baby wakes up so that the mother can concentrate on the faith formation of her older children. Each period of the day leads the parents and children to virtues, helping in our journey towards heaven.

Here is the schedule in our family for those four days:

6:15am	Mum and Dad wake-up
6:25am	Mum and Dad pray the Divine Office
7:00am	Younger children wake-up, make their beds and get dressed
7:05am	Younger children do Irish with Dad before breakfast
7:05am	Mum takes her shower, puts clothes washed during the night in the dryer and prepares breakfast
7:30am	Older children wake-up, make their beds and get dressed
7:40am	Morning prayer and breakfast
8:00am	Homeschooling starts
9:15am	Get ready for mass and drive to church
9:30am	Mass
10:10am	Homeschooling and mum prepares dinner while homeschooling
1:30pm	End of homeschooling and dinner time
2:15pm	Afternoon prayer for mum during quiet time
3:00pm	Religion
3:30pm	Tidy-up chores
3:50pm	Children play outside
6:00pm	Rosary
6:30pm	Supper
7:15pm	Story time for younger children
7:40pm	Bed time
8:00pm/8:30pm	Lights out for younger/older children
10:00pm	Night prayer for Mum and Dad and lights out

Day off

Aside from the weekend, one day a week is left without schoolwork on the Mater Dei lesson plan. That day is still rhythmmed by prayers and chores. Each parent can use this day as he or she wishes. It is a day when field trips or a trip to the swimming pool can be organised. It is also an important day for the mother to catch-up on housework and to avoid burn-out. In our family, we get up a bit later on that day and usually go swimming. It is also the day we schedule our medical appointments. It is a day that can be changed from one week to the next as long as all the children know and can look forward to the day off.

