



Part I.

Introduction

IN A NUTSHELL

Principle:

Parents are the prime educators of their children. Teachers assist them in this task.

Goal:

Teachers to teach parents practical steps for communicating with their child about their Catholic faith.

Method:

Introduce R.E. homework sheets that offer parents practical steps for prayer and faith-sharing in the home.

Style:

Being Catholic is essentially a joy, not a chore! Whilst calling for a commitment, this method seeks to delight and nourish families rather than present yet another 'must do' pressure.

Introducing *Walking Together in Faith*

Vision. What is it?

Walking Together in Faith offers a practical way for teachers to support parents in their responsibility to impart their Catholic faith to their children. It piggybacks on an already-established vehicle of communication between school and home: homework!

But this is homework-with-a-difference. Its purpose is to foster the faith-relationship between parent and child. The focus is not on academic performance but rather encouraging families to:

- pray together,
- talk about their Catholic faith, and to
- ritualise their faith in the home in simple ways.

Even in families where the faith commitment is strong, the busyness of life can take over and important faith sharing opportunities (e.g. saying grace around the meal table) slip by. In such cases these homework sheets are a gentle way of calling families to stop, pause and spend a sacred moment with their child.

By helping parents and children to establish such patterns in a structured manner, that is, through R.E. 'homework' which is enjoyable and nourishing to their family spirit, the hope is that families will gradually incorporate similar faith rituals and traditions in the home as a natural part of their lifestyle.

Walking Together in Faith does not attempt to be a comprehensive catechetical program; it is one contribution to a much larger canvass of strategies for creating a Catholic ethos or 'culture' in the home and at school.

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The homework sheets vary in their content and encourage flexibility, however a typical sheet would include the following elements:

- Prayer
- Sharing question
- A home activity

The home activity is usually connected with a season or celebration of the liturgical year.

Strategy. How does it work?

At regular intervals during the year (as determined by the school) the teacher sends home with the child a R.E. homework sheet to be completed by the child and parent.

• The content of the homework may vary, but a typical sheet would include the following elements:

A prayer / ritual

e.g. Light a candle, make the sign of the cross, then read the prayer provided on the homework sheet.

A sharing question

A question that allows parent and child to share something of their faith experience.

e.g. Ask your Mum/Dad to tell you about how they celebrated Lent when they were growing up.

Or:

Ask your Mum/Dad to tell you the story of your baptism.

A simple activity

e.g. Together, create a 'sacred space' in your home for Lent.

Or:

Together, look at some photos and other mementos of your baptism.

The homework sheet should be seen as a tool (and not an end in itself) for immersing the child in the community of faith - its people, its stories, its rituals - beginning with his/her own family. This is where we meet Jesus Christ 'enfleshed' in his people.

The homework sheet is also a tool for teaching parents some basic facts about Catholic practices and for demonstrating ways to impart these practices to their child in the home setting.

Flexibility is important, taking into account the many pressures on family life. Issues like these are addressed in Part II (Tips for teachers).

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Walking Together in Faith was developed as:

- an initiative of Sue Bull;
- under the auspices of Catholic Schools Office, Broken Bay Diocese;
- piloted by five primary schools in Broken Bay Diocese during 2003/2004;
- with the assistance of government funding (AGQTP);
- drawing upon resources by Teresa Pirola / The Story Source.

History. Where does it come from?

Walking Together in Faith is the brainchild of Sue Bull, parent liaison officer for the Catholic Schools Office, Diocese of Broken Bay.

As a parent, teacher and CSO staff member, Sue has long been aware of the need to foster better communication between parents and children in the home and how this has a critical impact when it comes to sharing Catholic faith and values.

In 2003 Sue secured government funding through the Australian Government Quality Teacher Program (AGQTP) to develop a project titled 'Building Relationships between Teachers and Parents as Joint Leaders in Learning'. It involved trialing a new style of R.E. homework in five Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Broken Bay:

St Kevin's School, Dee Why	Principal: Mary Anne Marles
St John's School, Harbord	Principal: Meredith Tomkins
Sacred Heart School, Mona Vale	Principal: Diann Hynes
St John's School, Narraweena	Principal: Anne Duncan
Corpus Christi School, St Ives	Principal: Julian Tobin

Sue ran a series of staff and parent workshops to introduce the project. Along with the teachers, a number of parent advisors made valuable contributions to the process.

Teresa Pirola (The Story Source), who was contracted as a consultant in this project, contributed a core set of resource materials for the teachers to work with.

During Advent 2003, Lent and Easter 2004 the five schools mentioned (which includes their teachers, students and their families) implemented a series of homework sheets with some wonderful results, experiences, learning curves and insights.

A follow-up seminar was held in March 2004. Margaret Gilbert (Catholic Schools Office) and Gail Gill (Broken Bay Institute) gave input to the process.

The pilot project was formally completed by April 2004. From here on it was agreed that The Story Source would produce a resource package that would make the homework strategy readily available to other schools. This is the *Walking Together in Faith* package which you have in your hands.

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1. Get used to the idea.

Familiarise yourself with this package. Talk it over, ask questions, take it to prayer.

2. Break it down into manageable steps.

3. Set dates and go for it!
Draw up a simple timeline for preparation and implementation.

4. Follow-up.

Review your efforts: what worked well? What could be done better next time?

Remember:

This is more than a 'project'; it is about helping families to 'tune in' to the grace and beauty of their Catholic tradition, in the milieu of their own homes.

Call upon the guidance of the Holy Spirit as you proceed. Salt all your efforts with prayer.

Application. How do we get started?

- The following notes are directed towards the Principal or the person responsible for coordinating *Walking Together in Faith* in a primary school.

(Whilst it is envisaged that this project would be undertaken by a whole school, it could also be implemented by one teacher in a single classroom.)

- Together with the REC, become acquainted with the material in this package. Talk it over with others: e.g. teachers, parents, CSO personnel, etc.
- Don't be daunted by the commitment; start with small steps. For instance, you might decide to trial the homework sheets on two occasions. Or trial them in one or two classrooms. As confidence and experience are gained, the strategy can be extended.
- Choose a period to implement the package. (The five pilot schools sent home a homework sheet during Advent, Lent and Easter.) Allow for a preparatory phase and a follow-up phase. The three phases might look something like this:

Preparation

- Familiarisation with this package. Informal discussion.
- Staff meeting and parent meeting.
See suggested meeting format in Part I.
Or incorporate the meetings into an existing framework.
- Prepare the homework sheets.
Note: Preparation of the homework sheets can be as simple as choosing from the selection in this folder (Part III). Or create your own. The five pilot schools did some of both.
- Announce project commencement in school newsletter and send home a letter.
See samples in Part I.

Implementation

- Send home the R.E. homework sheets with students.
- Continue to communicate with parents via newsletter, etc.
- Monitor feedback from parents, children, teachers.

Follow up

- Staff meeting and parent meeting. Share insights, success stories, drawbacks.
See suggested meeting format in Part I.
- Modifications for 'next time'.
- Plan a new period for implementation.

For more detailed 'How To' notes, see Part II: Tips for teachers.

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Introduce the R.E. homework sheets in a letter to parents.

Tailor your letter to your unique community of families.

Some points might include:

- Affirmation of their role as faith educators;
- Affirmation of the home-school partnership;
- A brief, clear description of the R.E. homework strategy’
- A sample of a homework sheet;
- Reassurance for parents who may be anxious for one reason or another;
- Your own conviction that this is a worthwhile venture.

Application. How to get started.

Sample letter to parents

A letter introducing the homework strategy to parents could look something like this:

Dear Parents,

As a school we are always looking for ways to strengthen the home-school partnership in the faith development of our students. The more we can support you as parents in your role of passing on the Catholic faith to your child, the more effective we can be as faith educators in the classroom.

During Lent and Easter this year our school will be trialing a new R.E. homework strategy called Walking Together in Faith. Your child will bring home R.E. ‘homework sheets’ designed to encourage both parent and child to enter together into a moment of faith communication: e.g. a sharing question, a prayer, a task.

Please note that this is homework-with-a-difference:

- First of all, it won’t be marked! The exercise is between you and your child. Although we may discuss the exercise in general terms in the classroom, the discussion will not pry into the spirituality and relationships that are unique to your family.
- Secondly, the tasks are lifegiving and enjoyable! They are not meant to be a chore but an opportunity for you and your child to share a sacred moment together. We encourage you to approach it in this spirit.
- Finally, the tasks are flexible. You are welcome, indeed encouraged, to adapt them to your family situation. For example, if you have three children all bringing home R.E. homework sheets, one option might be to choose a single task to be enjoyed as a family unit rather than trying to do three separate tasks.

Enclosed you will find a sample homework sheet which you are encouraged to try as a family for Shrove Tuesday which is the day before Ash Wednesday, the start of Lent.

We will continue to communicate with you as this new strategy unfolds. In the meantime, don’t hesitate to speak with your child’s teacher or myself if you have any questions or comments.

Yours faithfully,

.....
(Principal / REC)

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Explain the process to parents simply, clearly. Then keep reinforcing 'what we are doing, and why'.

Application. How to get started.

Newsletter samples

After an initial explanation of Walking Together in Faith, these newsletter items are designed to 'keep the vision on the burner' and to motivate parents as the homework strategy proceeds.



Walking together in Faith:

a new way of doing R.E. homework

As you are aware, during Lent and Easter we will be sending home R.E. homework sheets designed to encourage the children to talk with their parents about an aspect of their faith and to spend some 'special time' together. Please don't see this as chore – the activities are quite delightful

and simple and we trust you will find them a valuable opportunity to share a sacred moment with your child. This is homework to be enjoyed, not marked!



Walking together in Faith:

Sharing faith with your child at Lent

As we celebrate the season of Lent, your child will be bringing home a special Lenten activity to share with you and/or other family members. Please take time to share this activity with your child. Use it as a trigger point to share some thoughts about life, love, God and what it means to

belong to a Catholic faith family. (If you are wondering what to 'do' for Lent, this could be just the thing!)



Walking together in Faith:

Homework to be enjoyed – not corrected!

By now your child will have brought home a special homework task to share with you during Lent. This is a wonderful opportunity to have a 'faith' conversation with your child and to share your love and enthusiasm for him/her – which, after all, is the way your child comes to know the love of Jesus and

his Church. The tasks are simple and practical and you are welcome to adapt them to your family setting. Oh – and don't worry – this is homework to be enjoyed, not corrected!



Walking together in Faith:

Your feedback welcome

As we conclude this introductory phase of the new R.E. homework sheets, we would welcome any comments, insights, positive experiences or difficulties you'd like to share with your child's teacher. As a school we are keen to do all we can to assist you and your children in your faith journey together as a family.

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Set a positive tone for the meeting:

- Celebrate 'success' (even the 'trying' is a success story);
- Learn from negative experiences;
- Strengthen your base of knowledge and experience from which to step out on the next phase of the journey;
- Affirm people, exude hope, stay focused on the transforming power of God's love.

Application.

How to get started.

Suggested format for follow-up meeting

A format for a follow-up meeting with staff or parents might look something like this:

- Welcome
- Prayer
- Recap of *Walking Together in Faith* (vision / strategy)
- Sharing of experiences, insights, stories
 - What worked well?
 - Teacher testimony
 - Parent testimony
 - Open to the floor
 - What could we have done better?
 - Teacher testimony
 - Parent testimony
 - Open to the floor
- General discussion/comments/questions
- Where to from here? Decisions to be taken / tasks to be assigned
- Prayer
- Close
- Celebratory supper (coffee & cake or beer & pretzels, wine & cheese)