

# Seton MAGAZINE



Under the Magisterium of the Catholic Church

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*Cover photo:*

The Cairnie Family



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## Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers:

"I'm so glad I live in a world where there are Octobers." Those words uttered by the delightful Anne of Green Gables to the crusty Marilla resonate so deeply with me. Being pretty crusty myself, I always feel at my best in October, the coziest month. Living in the northeast, we are treated to spectacular evidence of God's love in the glorious show he delivers in nature, and I delight in every golden moment.

Being such a cozy type of month, it is easier to fall into habits that are more to do with comfort than sacrifice which is why Cheryl Hernandez's article resonated so deeply with me. That first moment of the day is so very difficult to do well and so very important. I encourage you to not only read the article but share it with your older children so that they, too, can make that heroic minute a habit.

October is made even more beautiful by being dedicated to The Most Holy Rosary. Praying the Rosary together as a family as well as with friends, has been extraordinarily fruitful for us and, as Dr. Clark points out has, in many ways, changed history. I have made it a habit to read G.K. Chesterton's magnificent poem "Lepanto" to my children each October 7th to celebrate Our Lady of Victory's feast and commemorate the great naval battle which saved Europe. The boys, in particular, love it.

I hope that you enjoy this issue of the magazine as much as we've enjoyed bringing it to you and that you are settling into a good school rhythm. I urge you all to make some room in your days for pumpkins, leaf rubbing and apple pies because God's generous gift of October is a package to open and share with joy.

Blessings,

Mary Ellen

*PS - While we bask in the glory that is October, I would like to ask you all to remember in your prayers those people and in particular those homeschoolers, who were affected by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma. We have set up a disaster relief fund at the website (<https://www.setonhome.org/natural-disaster-assistance/>) and if it is within your means, please consider donating to help them replace their lost books.*



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# Our Lady of the Rosary

BY DR. MARY KAY CLARK

October 7 is the feast of Our Lady of the Rosary. The entire month of October is dedicated to the Mother of God under this title. Let us keep Our Lady's Rosary in heart and hand this month and always.

The Rosary has been a sign of faith and hope which Catholic Moms and Dads and children have regarded with love and devotion in prayer.

The Rosary is the story of a family—the Holy Family, beginning with an angelic birth announcement and culminating in the mother being crowned Queen of Heaven. The Joyful Mysteries of the Rosary specifically reflect the life of the Holy Family. While the Rosary primarily focuses on the Blessed Mother Mary, the Holy Father of Jesus, St. Joseph, also finds a place in the mysteries. Joseph was not only instrumental in the Finding of Jesus in the Temple, but he was also the Protector of the Holy Family from the criminal governing authority during the Holy Family's flight to Egypt.

Saint Joseph was not merely present and a leader in times of distress; he was loving and caring in times of peace as well. In Christian art, Joseph is often depicted with Jesus working at his side. For home schooling parents, the pictures of Jesus with His Father Joseph in the workshop give encouragement to parents about the responsibility to be the key teachers of their children. The pictures of the Holy Family, both Mary and Jesus in Joseph's workshop, emphasize to our children the perfect model of family life, the family working and learning together.

Catholic school children in the past joined their voices together and said the Rosary in school. For our part, we home schooling families should encourage each other to say the Rosary daily for our family and others in need. We home schooling families should incorporate the Rosary

into our daily schedule, even praying one or two decades throughout the day.

We should keep in mind, along with our children, how important the Blessed Virgin Mary considers the Rosary. The Blessed Mother has appeared numerous times with the rosary, encouraging people to say a daily Rosary. At Lourdes, when the Blessed Mother visited St. Bernadette, the Blessed Mother wore a rosary on her sleeve. When Mary visited the three children at Fatima, she carried the rosary and showed the children how to pray the Rosary properly.

## Our Lady of the Rosary, pray for us.

The EWTN channel might be one way to help develop the habit of praying the Rosary. EWTN offers the recitation of the Rosary before daily Mass and presents a group of children saying the Rosary every afternoon. On Sunday mornings, a priest leads the Rosary live at the Shrine of Our Lady of Lourdes, where we can contemplate the view of Our Lady standing in the grotto behind the priest. For the Sunday afternoon Rosary, there are also beautiful paintings and music to accompany the mysteries.

Any examination of the benefits of the Rosary is bound to be woefully incomplete. Just a fraction of the success stories surrounding the Rosary could fill huge volumes; in fact, many such volumes exist. Primarily referring to the Rosary, Father Patrick Peyton's slogan "The family that prays together, stays together" is not only a pithy adage, but also a historically defensible truth.

Some years ago, a bishop of Russia spoke at one of the annual Rosary Conferences sponsored by Father Robert Fox, the



"Fatima priest." The Russian bishop reported that the families of communist Russia, living in areas where churches had been destroyed, clung to the Blessed Mother's promise to help those in desperate need and prayed the Rosary daily. The priests and bishops in Russia believe that the Russian people survived and kept the Faith because of these daily prayers at home.

These historical accounts should inspire us with confidence in Mary. We home schooling moms can look to our patron home schooling mother, Mary, the Blessed Mother, the Mother of Mothers. Mary reminds us that she is always available to help us teach our children and to help our children learn. The Blessed Mother reminds us continually that our children must grow up learning and practicing the Catholic Faith at home before they enter the secular society.

The rosary in our hand or in our pocket keeps us close to Mary and her Son. The Rosary prayers remind us of events from the life of Mary and Jesus. While these events remind us of the difficulties and sufferings of life, they also remind us of the eternal happiness yet to come for our family.



Dr. Mary Kay Clark has been the Director of Seton Home Study School for more than 30 years. She writes columns for the *Seton Magazine* and is the author of *Catholic Homeschooling: A Handbook for Parents*.

# your Questions ANSWERED

BY DR. MARY KAY CLARK

## May I switch my daughter to enroll in the new Seton Grade 5 math text-workbook?

Absolutely. The text-workbook was printed just recently, so we could not advertise it sooner. This text-workbook was produced because many parents of 5th graders said their children did not like rewriting the problems from the textbook. Consequently, our math teachers and counselors worked together to produce this book. If you would like a copy, please call our Customer Service Department and change your enrollment to the Grade 5 text-workbook. However, the 5th Grade Saxon textbook is still available, and will be for years to come. Seton-produced 5th grade math tests are available for both books.

## Will you have a Grade 6 math text-workbook? What about 7th and 8th grades?

We are working on a 6th grade Seton math text-workbook, although it is not currently close to completion. Due to

various circumstances, we do not plan on producing Seton text-workbooks for Grades 7 and 8. In 6th Grade, we will continue to support the Saxon texts, even after our text-workbook is completed. We will continue to use the Saxon 76 for 7th Grade, and the Saxon Algebra  $\frac{1}{2}$  or Saxon 87 for 8th Grade.

Although we will not produce text-workbooks for 7th and 8th Grade, we are developing Math Practice Workbooks for 7th and 8th Grade. These Practice Workbooks do not teach math concepts, but are for students who need practice in working out math problems. Every page is a practice page. If you want to know more about the 7th Grade Practice Workbook and its availability, contact [counselors@setonhome.org](mailto:counselors@setonhome.org).

## My daughter is in 7th grade. Is she required to take all the courses you have listed for 7th grade?

Seton offers all the courses which are usually required in the state public schools, as well as religion. You need these state-required courses on your daughter's report card if your daughter ever transfers to another school. If your daughter plans to attend college, the college will expect certain courses in high school as well.

That being said, Seton provides the courses but does not compel what you teach. At a certain grade level, you may decide to focus on some core subjects, such as math and reading, and cut back on other subjects. For example, in the elementary grades, music, art, and physical education could be assigned only once or twice a month.

However, we suggest that the academic courses should be taught, even if briefly, several days a week. The basic reason to teach a subject several times a week is that in order for many children to learn and to remember what they have learned, they must review frequently. Textbooks usually have reviews of concepts interspersed

throughout the textbooks; this is especially true in math, English, spelling, and reading or comprehension skills.

## My son did not do well this year with his studies. May he redo his 6th grade for next year?

The point of education is learning, rather than simply being carried along on a current until one is old enough to stop. So, it is reasonable for any student who has not done well to repeat the grade or the particular courses for which he has not learned the material. The student who is pushed along and feels inadequate suffers more than poor grades.

Give your son a second chance, but do so selectively. Don't have him retake any courses in which he did well, nor do you need to take a whole year if he can be successful in less time. He might actually do better in all subjects if he could advance a grade level in some of his favorite subjects. Students are not required to take all the courses at the same grade level. The beauty of home schooling is that the student can take each subject according to his own ability.

## I put my son in a school, but after one week, my son complained about the books being "strange."

In the best case, schools act as extensions of the family ("in loco parentis") and do what the parents would do if they were able. In the best case, parents and schools have a common goal and work together toward that goal.

Unfortunately, American public schools often do not act as extensions of parents. They act as extensions of the federal and state governments, which are increasingly hostile to Christian beliefs. Even when they are not overtly hostile to Christian teaching, public schools give students the clear message that religion and morality do not



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matter. Teachers in the schools are not allowed to teach anything except from a secular point of view, which at best ignores eternal truths.

The Church is clear in its teachings: Catholic schools are to have a Catholic curriculum and Catholic teachers. Schools taking state public funds may use it for only secular books. If you decide to bring your son back home, he will learn what you want him to learn, not what others think is best for the secular society.

**What does Seton provide to help students with the high school English Book Analyses? I am not sure what I should be doing to help my son.**

Seton provides helpful material in the lesson plans to help students with their Book Analyses. Be sure your son looks not only in the day-to-day assignments, but also at the guidelines in the Handbook at the back of the course manual. Be sure your son looks at the videos Seton has produced for the various book analyses for the high school English courses and for the Literature courses. These lectures are excellent. Also available are notes and sample essays in the online

Course Resources. In addition, High school English counselors are available by phone.

**I am struggling to find the time to help with the children's home schooling.**

There are several ideas that some home schooling moms have discovered. One is to put the children together in courses whenever possible. For instance, a bright girl in Grade 3 who always scores a 100 on her spelling tests could possibly move up to Grade 4 spelling with her older brother. They can quiz each other and compare notes while you work with your other children. Think about how the children can help each other. Some moms pay their high school student or college student to tutor a younger sibling in one subject. Some of our parents ask a retired English teacher or a relative to help with courses. We hear from parents that grandparents and sometimes retired uncles and aunts are happy to help with home schooling.

Subjects for which it is rather easy to move a bright child up or a slower child down with a sibling include religion, math, science, handwriting, history, vocabulary, art, music, and physical education. Classes which are more demanding in original writing and inductive thinking are the English and Reading courses. Your children need to be enrolled in the appropriate grade for these two courses to learn more basics.

**How much should I expect my husband to be involved with the home schooling?**

As much as possible! In surveys we have conducted, involvement of the father is very important toward successful homeschooling.

Start with your husband taking charge of only one or two classes. If your husband is reluctant, just go slowly. Pick out a class he would really enjoy explaining, such as history or science. Don't try to give him too much direction, but let him "be the boss" for the class. Most dads eventually find it interesting and fun, and develop a special relationship with their children. Many children learn more than reading, writing, and arithmetic from their dads, such as working on projects around the house and in the yard. God means for children to learn from their dads as well as from their moms!



**Dr. Mary Kay Clark** has been the Director of Seton Home Study School for more than 30 years. She writes columns for the *Seton Magazine* and is the author of *Catholic Homeschooling: A Handbook for Parents*.



The Seton College Partner Program is a way to encourage students to continue their Catholic education by attending solidly Catholic Colleges after high school.



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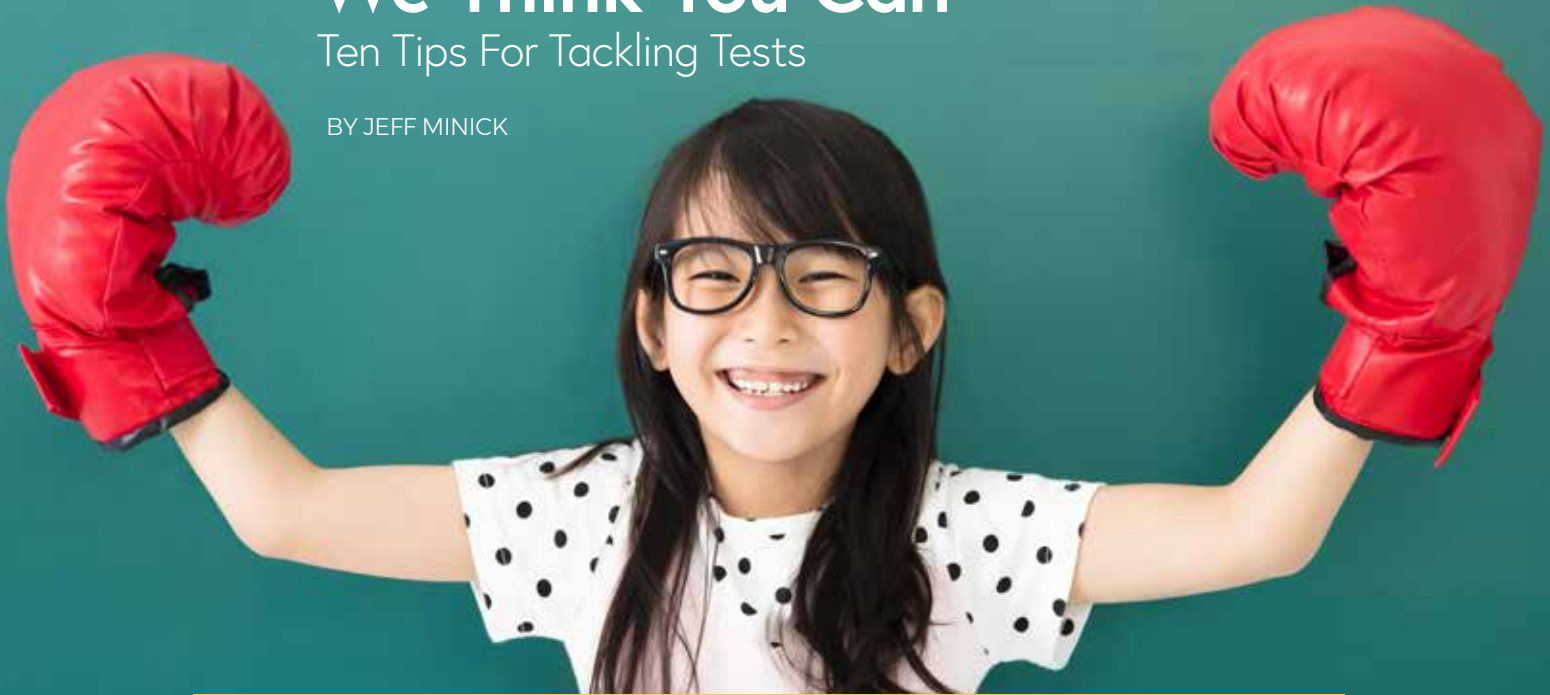
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# We Think You Can

## Ten Tips For Tackling Tests

BY JEFF MINICK



“There are known knowns; there are things we know we know. We also know there are known unknowns; we know there are things we do not know. But there are also unknown unknowns — the ones we don't know we don't know.”

Though Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary of State under President George Bush, delivered the above remarks regarding statecraft and diplomacy, students often feel the same way about tests and examinations. They know what they know, and they may know what they don't know, but what most terrifies many students about tests are the unknown unknowns—somehow, they may not even know what they are supposed to know.

Tests bring anxiety, stress, and fear. Many students approach a test like a dancer or singer on stage for the first time, muscles tight, nerves jangling, stomach in knots. But as a boxing coach told me long ago, “You get into shape, you spar, and you mentally prepare. And yes, you'll feel nervous as a cat getting into that ring. But then that other guy throws a punch, the jitters disappear, and you focus on the fight.”

You students can do the same thing with tests. You prepare, you practice, you step into the ring or onto the stage, and you soon realize all your hard work has paid off.

Here are ten tips to help you win your next bout.

### Be physically ready for the test

Get plenty of sleep. Eat but not large portions: overindulgence will make you sleepy and will slow your thinking. Keep some gum or hard candy available during the test if you need a burst of energy. If possible, avoid taking a test when ill.

### Find an environment conducive to concentration

Many of you enrolled in Seton Home Study School have younger siblings who can, within seconds, turn your home into Bedlam. If you can't find a quiet room for your studies and test taking, consider donning a pair of earphones and listening to non-intrusive music or to recordings from nature. Another suggestion: schedule and take your tests in tandem with a trip to the public library.

### Prepare, prepare, prepare

Some teachers and curricula take a broad approach to the subject matter and tests. Others teach to the test. Both approaches complement each other. Let's say you are enrolled in Seton's Latin I program. You are about to take Test 27. As directed by the lesson plan, you study the material on

pages 246-266 of Henle Latin, knowing the test will focus on this material. But you don't stop there. You review what you have already learned. You go over what you have missed on previous tests. You select exercises from the text and do them again, this time without the help of the grammar book. *Semper Paratus—Always Prepared—* is the motto of the US Coast Guard. Make that motto your own when taking tests.

### Pray

It's test time. You're sitting at a desk with the test in front of you, pencils and pens at the ready. Take a moment for prayer. Ask Our Lord to be in your corner, to give you strength and knowledge. Besides lifting our hearts and minds to God, prayer tells us it is time to turn from other diversions and focus our attention on the subject at hand. Prayer will diminish your anxiety and allow you to center your thoughts on the test.

### Read

Carefully read the instructions on the test. Carefully read each question. If taking a multiple-choice test, read each possible selection before choosing the one you

think is correct. Watch for nuance as you read. In my teaching days and as a grader for Seton, I have come across students who have misread directions, who answer, for example, Latin questions in English when the directions state to write the answers in Latin. Follow the directions.

### Answer all the questions

Don't leave blanks on a test. An unanswered question, whether it is on a fill-in-the-blank test or a test where you are asked to write a short answer in two or three sentences, is automatically wrong. Always, always, always take a stab at the question. You have more information than you can dream of rattling around in your cranium. Give it a shot. Are you guessing? Sure. But if you have prepared, if you have studied the material, yours is an educated guess.

### Go with your gut

This axiom particularly applies to multiple-choice tests. You select an answer. Eventually, you come back to the question and change your answer. Stop right there. Ask yourself, why you are changing the answer. Do you really have a good reason? Or are you changing the answer because you have already marked four "B" answers in a row and just can't believe "B" will again be the answer? Your "gut" answer is often correct. Before you change your first answer, know exactly why you are doing so.

### Review the test

Go back through the test when you have finished. Check to see you have completed all the sections of the test. Often, I have graded tests in which students failed to go back over their answers a final time. In "matching tests," for example, students often match the same letter to two or three numbers. (Some simply gamble that one of the answers will be correct). Occasionally, entire sections of a test are left unanswered, indicating the student had skipped that section, intended to return to it, and had then forgotten to do so. Always review the test. Fight for every correct answer.

### Watch the watch

Many of you, particularly high school students, will take various tests this year: the PSAT, the SAT, the ACT, AP tests, and other examinations. When taking these tests, follow the same practices advocated above, but let me add one more injunction: **KEEP TRACK OF YOUR TIME.** Write

down your starting time at the top of the test. Pace yourself. Be aware if and when you are running out of time. Once a student of mine, one of the brightest in class, inexplicably copied the answers to his National Latin Exam onto a sheet of blank notebook paper and was transferring them to the test's answer sheet when the monitor called time. Always keep an eye on the clock during a timed test.

### Never give up

You take a test in chemistry, submit it for grading, and receive a 78 for your work. You feel beaten down and discouraged. Just remember who you are. You are not a test grade. Your life is not a failure because of a test grade. You are a human being loved by Jesus Christ. Dump the anger and regret. Instead, turn back to the books, dig out where you went wrong, and start learning again. When you take this approach, not only are you learning the subject, but you are also building your character. We all fall down. What counts is whether we get back up again. In 1941, Winston Churchill made the following remarks: *"Never give in, never give in, never, never, never—in nothing, great or small, large or petty—never give in except to convictions of honour and good sense."* Churchill wasn't addressing the House of Commons or delivering a radio address to the British people. He was speaking at Harrow School, his alma mater, to students as young or younger than many of you.

In your pre-school days, many of your parents read to you *The Little Engine That Could*, the story of the little engine pulling a long train of children's gifts over a high mountain, all the while chanting to itself, "I think I can, I think I can."

Here, at Seton, we think you can. We think you can climb the mountain. We think you can succeed on your examinations. We believe in your abilities to learn, to grow, to step out of the ring a winner.

Now, good students, all that remains is for you to believe the same thing. Make up your minds to do the work and then get to it.



**Jeff Minick** is the Latin Counselor at Seton Home Study School. He has spent the last twenty-five years teaching Henle Latin to hundreds of Home-educated students. He is the father of four, all of whom were homeschooled, and grandfather to twenty-one, three of whom he homeschooled.

## WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE TIP FOR TAKING A TEST?



The question was posed to readers like you on Seton's Facebook page. You may have even added your comment there!

We thought you would enjoy and benefit from what others contributed.

- Pray to the Holy Spirit before beginning the test.
- First, answer the questions you are certain that you know. Then, answer the ones that you think you know. Finally, if you have time go for the ones you aren't sure about
- Pay attention to the directions, remain calm, pray before starting, and be confident in what you've learned.
- When in doubt, always trust your first instinct.
- Read the question and eliminate extraneous information. If multiple choice or select all that apply, treat answers as true/false statements. True is correct response(s)
- Bring a crucifix and set it next to your test 😊
- Study well, eat well, do well!
- If it's a pressure issue, find a way to put it in perspective. I have a student who once cried prior to tests as if she was in a near panic attack. Desperate, and knowing she studied hard, I finally grasped her shoulders, looked her straight in the eyes and said, "Ya know what? In the whole realm of life, so what if you totally bomb this test, so what? Is that going to define you? Is that going to close the gates of Heaven? Or change my love for you?"
- Pray, remain calm, double check your work!
- Per my daughter - "You'd better pray. Seton tests are hard!"





# Preparing Our Children for Success with Seton

BY DANEKA CAIRNIE

After touring our local schools, whose strongest selling point was the computers made available to kindergarteners (instead of books...) my husband and I said, “No thanks!” and decided then to home school our kids. We promised each other we would continue this effort as long as the results were successful. We have had our share of hurdles, but by the Grace of God and the beautiful partnership we have with Seton Home Study School, we have continued to successfully educate our 8 children for 17 years!

During a recent conversation with Dr. Mary Kay Clark, she commented that others might like to hear the success story we have experienced with our Seton graduates and how Seton helped prepare them for their futures. This success has put fuel in our gas tank as parents, but has also given us a bird’s-eye-view of what hard work and perseverance can lead to; a valuable data point for our remaining five children who are still working their way through our home school.

Elizabeth, our oldest, graduated from Seton in 2013 after completing 13 years of Seton education. She attended Penn State University and graduated a Schreyer Honors Scholar with a double major in Global Studies and International Business. During this time she traveled to South Africa and Norway, and studied for 5 months in New Zealand. Upon graduation, she accepted a Human Resource position with Air Liquide, North

American headquarters in Houston, Texas. She loves her job and has immersed herself in a new group of friends at work and at St. John Vianney Catholic Church (her confirmation saint!) which is just a block away from where she lives – God is so good!

Mark, our second born, graduated from Seton in 2015 and is currently attending Penn State University. He, too, has been accepted into the Schreyer Honors College and has maintained a 4.0 while working toward an Electrical Engineering degree with a minor in Physics. He was recently recruited by Applied Research Labs (a university affiliated research center) and is conducting undergraduate research for the U.S. Navy.

Our most recent graduate, our son George, will be attending the Reading Hospital School of Health Sciences in conjunction with Alvernia University where he will be working toward a Bachelor of Science in Nursing with plans to attain a master’s degree in Anesthesiology. This is a challenge he is looking forward to and is beginning this new endeavor with great confidence!

Both Mark and Elizabeth have stated numerous times that completing Seton’s curriculum prepared them beautifully for college. Their writing and critical thinking skills were well honed, allowing them to approach their college courses with assurance and achieve high scores on their assignments. Able to analyze, argue, and communicate, they

added valuable discourse to their classroom settings. Mark and Elizabeth entered college with confidence and the skills they needed to succeed, including the ability to manage their time and work independently.

## Our Plan for School

Our general approach to using Seton’s curriculum is “Do it all!” We immerse ourselves in our home education and make it a priority over extracurricular activities, following Seton’s well organized lesson plans each day. To accomplish this we have sacrificed a much needed bedroom for the sake of a “school room” complete with chalkboard, desks, maps, and more, creating a perfect place for learning. Maintaining a Monday through Friday school week, we begin classes early in the morning and keep





a formal schedule throughout the day. Our days are full but we incorporate many breaks and chores, so that by the time we get to the end of a day, not only is all the schooling complete but our home is in order, too. The house is clean, garden tended to, laundry done, chickens cared for, and dinner on the table! Of course, not every day is perfect but we strive toward these goals each day.

Although our goal is to accomplish the lesson plans in their entirety, we all know how “life” can get in the way; illness, harvest time, a new baby, and more. We have learned that it’s OK to cut some corners when necessary, and have implemented some of the following techniques. Sometimes, we will alternate spelling and vocabulary, instead of doing both. Recently, I have decided to do either the Reading Comprehension workbook OR the reader assignments. Sometimes, instead of memorizing all catechism questions for the weekly quiz, we just memorize the ones that will show up on the quarter test. We have consolidated two Saxon math chapters a week, allowing the kids to complete four problem sets a week and take all math tests on Friday. Although the math consolidation is an ongoing practice, everything else is implemented on an “as-needed” basis only; we do not make it the norm. If possible, I highly recommend completing all that Seton has prescribed in their lesson plans, as it definitely leads to a rock-solid education.

Clearly academics take center stage in our home school, but we certainly need to have fun and develop outside interests too. Because of our commitment to homeschooling and the size of our family, we have to be very selective in choosing outside activities. We try to practice a “one-stop-shop” philosophy, choosing activities that transcend all ages and focus on developing interests that can be carried forward throughout our lives. So, our family took up skiing; we joined a homeschool ski club and were able to learn to ski and enjoy the activity all winter long for a rock bottom price! The kids all swim in leagues or on the local high school varsity team. In fact, our son George made it all the way to states last year! We are blessed to have an active parish which allows the kids and our family to be involved with many parish activities as well as an active community providing thriving 4-H groups and scouting.

In addition to these group activities, we encourage our children to develop themselves

with many practical life skills and fun hobbies. Some play piano or guitar. Everyone can bake and cook and are so helpful in the kitchen! The girls can sew and crochet; some of their projects have placed at the county and state fair. We garden, can and freeze food, and even take care of backyard chickens. The boys have carpentry skills and know basic plumbing and electric (they put an entire addition on the house!) Having taught himself how to forge, our son George started a business making custom forged knives and displays them at a local artist showroom. Our son Mark taught himself all about computers (so much for computers in kindergarten, right?) and built the computer I am typing on right now! So, one can see that although we have made academics the primary focus of our home school, we have also made time for much personal development, preparing our children to be independent!

### Lessons We've Learned

Anyone who has home schooled knows both the joy and challenge of it all. Despite our dedication and faith, our organized curriculum, and great kids, there have been moments throughout the years when we were ready to give up and take an easier road – send them all to school! But doesn’t everyone have moments like this in every line of work and vocation? Yes! Fortunately, we overcame these hurdles and got to witness the “end game” called our children’s success – they are independent, steadfast in their faith, strong members of their communities, and happy! This is gas in our tank! My husband and I love homeschooling and we love Seton! This life choice and partnership has promoted strong family bonds, strong character and work ethic among our children, and has facilitated growth in our faith as a family. Completing the Seton curriculum three times and seeing the great happiness and success of our oldest children makes us realize how right the decision was to home school and how right the decision was to choose Seton as our curriculum provider. It clearly paid off in so many ways! Above all, we have prayed every step of the way for God’s blessing upon our work and vocation as parents, and we know that Seton has been behind us, praying too for the success and happiness of all its families. Without God’s blessing and grace none of this would be possible.





# THE HEROIC MINUTE...

## *and how it can change your life*

BY CHERYL HERNÁNDEZ



The first time I ever went on a silent retreat, I shared a room with another woman, whom I had never met.

As soon as the alarm went off on the first morning, groaning and reaching for the snooze button, I looked over across the room at my roommate. Groggy as I was, what I saw left quite an impression on me. As soon as the alarm went off, she rose from her bed, knelt, kissed the floor, and said a prayer. Then, she set about quietly getting ready. She did the same the next morning, too.

### Mystery Revealed

We were asked to remain silent throughout the weekend, so I had to wait until the end of the retreat to meet her. At the end of the retreat, I asked her about her morning ritual. She told me about a saint, St. Josemaría Escrivá, who wrote in his book, *The Way*, “Conquer yourself each day from the very first moment, getting up on the dot, at a set time, without granting a single minute to laziness. If, with the help of God, you conquer yourself in that moment, you’ll have accomplished a great deal for the rest of the day. It’s so discouraging to find yourself beaten in the first skirmish!”

In fact, he calls this moment the “Heroic Minute”. He explains that when the alarm goes off, it is “Time to get up, on the dot! Without hesitation, a supernatural thought and ...up! The heroic minute; here you have a mortification that strengthens your will and does not weaken your body.”

It seems like such a simple thing, and for some people, it may be. However, for many of us, that moment when the alarm goes off is a real battle. We just want five more minutes. That’s it. Well, maybe ten more.

We need time to think about our day, that long list of “To Do” items, how we will juggle bringing Johnnie to soccer and Annie to ballet and still get dinner on the table before choir practice. Our mind is already reeling, and our heart is already sinking, but we haven’t even set our feet on the ground yet.

But what if it could be different? What if we could set aside all the things that weigh us down, and give our first moment of the day to God? Wouldn’t that be a better way to begin our day? There was something about my roommate’s actions, not only when the alarm went off, but throughout the weekend that intrigued me. There was a peacefulness about her. Could the benefits from this simple action, this “Heroic Minute”, make a difference in *my* day?

After coming back from the retreat, I decided to find out.

At first, it was a struggle; old habits are hard to break. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak, so I prayed for the graces I would need to change. Putting the alarm clock across the room (turning the volume to the loudest), and placing a picture of Our Blessed Mother beside it also helped. It took a while, but with perseverance, it became a habit.

Harder for me was focusing my first thought on giving thanks to God for a new day, offering Him everything from that first moment. This takes practice and a lot of prayer, but I discovered just saying, immediately upon waking, a simple prayer like, “Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, I give you my heart and soul”, was enough. More prayers would come later, after a shower and a cup of coffee to wake me up! Many people who make a practice of the Heroic Minute simply say, “*Serviam!*”; which is Latin for “I will serve!”

### Why It Works

However, why is this important? How can this Heroic Minute change your life? The discipline it takes to do, as St. Josemaría Escrivá says, get up immediately, without a moment’s hesitation, does carry on to the rest of the day. If we can succeed at this “first skirmish” of the day, we can succeed in other areas that require self-discipline or immediate choices. This small act of mortification does help strengthen our will. By saying no to raising our voice to a child, or reacting with a smile instead of a snarky comment when the lady in the grocery store says, “Are you shopping for a day care?” somehow, these things become just a little easier.

We are forming our bodies to not give into laziness from the first moment of the day. Picking up an enjoyable book to read to our child becomes easier than turning on the TV. Or stopping what we are doing and taking care of a child who is being disobedient instead of raising our voices and issuing an ultimatum...yet again.

But the best reason is we have begun our day for Him, not giving one inch to the devil. No matter what happens, this day belongs to God. And if we can give to God the first moments of our day, we are more likely to give Him our entire day.

The Gospel of Luke tells us “He who is faithful in a very little is faithful also in much”. Be faithful from the first moment that the alarm goes off, and Our Lord will return your efforts sevenfold. *Serviam!*



**Cheryl Hernández** and her husband live in Florida with their 9 children. They have been homeschooling with Seton for 21 years. Their four oldest are Seton graduates with the fifth graduating this year. Born in California and raised in Europe, Cheryl has a BFA in Graphic Design.





# It's Your Track

BY JOHN CLARK

I had to remind myself that Saint Thomas Aquinas never homeschooled when I recently read the following passage in his *Summa Theologica*:

“According to the Philosopher (Aristotle), ‘virtue is about the difficult and the good’; and so where there is a special kind of difficulty or goodness, there is a special virtue. Now a virtuous deed may involve goodness or difficulty on two counts. First, from the act’s very species, which is considered in respect of the proper object of that act: secondly, from the length of time, since to persist long in something difficult involves a special difficulty. **Hence to persist long in something good until it is accomplished belongs to a special virtue.**” (*Emphasis mine.*)

Saint Thomas’ words come from the *Summa*’s section on Perseverance, and although Saint Thomas wasn’t trying to formulate a definition of homeschooling, “persisting in a great good until it is accomplished” sums it up pretty well. As for its virtuous nature, we might say that homeschooling is not only about “the difficult and the good” but that it is about the *very* difficult and *very* good. For that reason, we might rightfully claim that homeschooling constitutes a special virtue.

Homeschooling is difficult. It’s difficult for lots of reasons, including the facts that, due to the Fall of Adam, our intellects are darkened and our wills are weak. Those difficulties apply to both parents and children. The Fall helps explain why it takes two hours for your son to finish his Geometry homework and why it’s more fun to watch *The A-Team* than reading your daughter’s *Pride and Prejudice* book report. It also helps explain why, even though each of us has a learning difficulty, learning is *particularly* difficult for some of us. When a father teaches his son Algebra, the process involves two people with dimmed intellects who would often rather be watching *The A-Team* together. It’s pretty tricky. And everything I just outlined radically understates how difficult homeschooling can be for many families: there can be financial struggles, criticisms from outside family members, a heightened level of exhaustion, and a lingering sense of self-doubt. For many families, perhaps for most, homeschooling is the toughest thing they will ever do, by far.

Given all that, you might ask: Why in the world would I want to homeschool? You wouldn’t be the first to ask that question. But consider this: That same question could be applied to any of the

virtues. For instance, justice, temperance, charity, chastity, and truthfulness have their downsides, too. Why would you want to practice these virtues, either? Here’s where Thomas and Aristotle come to the rescue and answer that question for us. Thomas credits Aristotle with seeing that virtue is “about the difficult,” but Aristotle also saw something else: performing virtue makes us happy. That’s how God made us. In time, homeschooling—like all virtues—fulfills our nature. You may not recognize that fully today or even tomorrow. But you will arrive at that happiness and fulfillment.

Homeschooling is good. Catholic homeschooling is directed toward God, front and center. Sometimes, with all its difficulties, we can forget that it’s good; but when you have these difficulties, recognize its goodness.

**Just as love drives out fear, recognizing the good drives out the difficult.**

If you talk to a homeschool veteran who has been homeschooling for years, many will admit that they thought about quitting, but they stayed on track because they saw the value in what they were doing. They understood that what they were doing was vital and virtuous. When it comes to staying on track throughout the homeschool year, it is not going to be the great organization that helps you when times get tough. It is going to be the fact that God is offering you the grace to persevere, and that you are accepting that grace.

On a very practical level, feeling like you’re getting off track is a common feeling for homeschool parents. Mary hasn’t done any book reports all year and Mike is two years behind in Math. Things like this happen in homeschooling, and if you think they don’t happen in public schools, hop on the internet and see where American children are placing in math and science these days. (And, to a much larger point—THE POINT—they’re not teaching religion at all.) By all means, help your children get back on the academic track; help them get everything clicking. But please remember that the content of their knowledge is much more important than the mere volume of knowledge. When it comes to staying on track in homeschooling, always remember this: It’s your track.



**John Clark** is a homeschooling father, a speechwriter, an online course developer for Seton, and a weekly blogger for The National Catholic Register. His latest book is “How to be a Superman Dad in a Kryponite World, Even When You Can’t Afford a Decent Cape.”

# Recalculating

## The Homeschool Advantage on the Road of Life

BY TARA BRELINSKY

It was after dusk on a less than familiar highway. I was struggling to navigate between the construction cones and concrete barriers. Rain drops pummeled the windshield at an ever-increasing speed. My heart pounded in my head as I approached a fork in the road. Traffic and confusion steered me to the right, but I should have been bearing left. Then, just as my stress level reached panic-mode, the GPS said, "Recalculating."

Some days, life can feel like that car trip. Decisions must be made when the path ahead is unclear. Obstacles, like finances and personal temperaments, narrow the choices. The ticking clock propels us forward when we'd rather pull over. And sometimes our decisions point us in the wrong direction.



### Home School Advantage

Everyone faces this kind of nerve-racking situation from time to time, especially parents. However, as home schoolers, we have a distinct advantage. Home schooling families have the ability and flexibility to recalculate on demand.

Whether we're facing a major life event (moving, illness or the addition of a new child) or an educational dilemma (curriculum, learning disability or behavior), home schooling affords us the freedom to change course in real time. We don't need to wait on a hierarchy of officials to weigh in before we act. We see a need and steer our course to meet it.



### When Life Changes

When a life change throws off the schedule or necessitates a whole new plan, home schoolers rise to the occasion. Military families don't worry about finding a new school system to enroll in every time they relocate. Taking time off to manage an illness, welcome a baby or just enjoy some travel doesn't mean that a child must be held back. Home schools relocate, pause or come along for the ride.

Home schoolers can take advantage of field trip opportunities and participate in current events without extensive pre-planning. For example, when I received a last minute email about a pro-life rally being held at our legislature, I didn't hesitate to commit our help. I knew we could easily make up the half-day of missed lessons later in the week. Plus, I recognized the greater educational value to be gained by engaging my children in our local political process in real time.







## Do-Overs

— Educational challenges in the home school give rise to creative solutions rather than end in defeat. When the standard curriculum is a poor fit for a child with special needs or a learning disability, it is best overcome through tailored lessons. Home schooling parents shift gears or remap the journey while maintaining the same destination.

I discovered that one of my teenagers hadn't understood a math concept. Rather than seek help, the child skipped the daily, independent work. Of course, without a firm grasp of the foundational concepts, he was completely toppled by the later lessons which built on the previous ones.

As soon as the problem came to light, we tackled it head-on. Even though my student was well into the grade year, we turned the book back to lesson one and started again, together. We reviewed the concepts he'd grasped, studied those he hadn't, and ultimately succeeded in completing the subject.

As teacher/parent, I had the ability to discern the individual need of my child and respond appropriately. In this instance, it was not necessary to hold the child back completely nor was the algebra course finished with a failing grade.



## The Flexibility of Seton

— Seton offers flexibility, too. When my high schooler scores a low grade on a test or essay, she has the choice (in some subjects) of going back and redoing the work. She isn't locked into a poor grade, with no incentive to review her errors and correct her mistakes. This makes sense because the real goal is to master the material, not just pass the exam.

Additionally, Seton allows home schoolers to set their own schedule. Families have a full year to complete a course and they aren't hemmed into the traditional (September to June) calendar. In my household that means starting new grades in March or April and working through the summer months. On this schedule, we take two-week breaks between the semesters, celebrate the full 12 days of Christmas and liberally include social get-togethers.



**Educational challenges**  
in the home school  
give rise to **creative**  
**solutions** rather than  
end in defeat.



## The Highways of Life

— Perhaps even more importantly, the advantages of home schooling extend far beyond grades K through 12. When we (as a family) tackle obstacles head-on, implement creative solutions to problems and correct our mistakes, we teach our children that success is possible in spite of the personal challenges.

Admittedly, I was at the mercy of my GPS during my drive. Without knowledge of the area or a physical map of the roads, I had to trust that my device could put me back on track. And as real world examples have proven, it could have led me over a cliff!

As a home schooler, I have the advantage of knowing that maps exist. I know that I can find the right map, read it, and figure out my own way home when necessary.



## Recalculating

— There's no disputing that this home schooling journey is fraught with twists, turns and bumps along the route. Home schoolers are not immune to the stress and challenges that are part of every family's life. However, as primary directors of our children's education, we are best equipped to navigate the path that will steer them toward their final destination (educationally and eternally).



**Tara K. E. Brelinsky** is a home schooling mother of 8 living children, with 6 more heavenly ones. Married to her childhood sweetheart, they make their home in North Carolina where they teach Natural Family Planning, grow a garden, raise two dogs, a cat, hamster, ducks, roosters and a flock of hens (in addition to all those wonderful kids). Tara studied journalism a lifetime ago in college, but now she writes simply for the glory of God. You can read her musings and inspirations on her blog *Blessings in Brelinskyville*.



# POPE JOHN PAUL II

KAROL JOZEF WOJTYLA  
264TH POPE



"DO NOT BE AFRAID TO BE SAINTS.  
FOLLOW JESUS CHRIST WHO IS THE  
SOURCE OF FREEDOM AND LIGHT. BE  
OPEN TO THE LORD SO THAT HE MAY  
LIGHTEN ALL YOUR WAYS."

MOST WIDELY TRAVELED POPE IN HISTORY  
PATRON SAINT OF YOUNG CATHOLICS, AND WORLD YOUTH DAY

# FEAST DAY: OCTOBER 22





# Are you ready to share **your story**?



Every month, we highlight a homeschooling family in the Seton Magazine. The stories from these families help inspire, encourage, and motivate others within the Catholic homeschooling community.

**We'd love to hear your story!**

To submit your family story for consideration, visit the website link below and answer a few short questions.

Find out how to share your story at: [www.setonmagazine.com/family-story](http://www.setonmagazine.com/family-story)



## *Seton Student Achievements*

SHARING SUCCESS WITH THE SETON COMMUNITY



**Damien** | I played the young Fr. Vincent Capodanno in the EWTN documentary "Called and Chosen" which premiered on August 30, 2017!



**Lauren** | This summer I entered one of my original animations in the Disney Teen International Film Festival. Eight fellow art students and I took Second Place for our animation reel!



**John** | I was a scholarship winner of the Archdiocese of St. Louis Respect Life Apostolate's Creative Writing Contest! I was one of 10 scholarship recipients out of over 1,100 participants.

Submit your photo, your achievement and what you like most about homeschooling.

[setonmagazine.com/students](http://setonmagazine.com/students)

# Seton Home Study School

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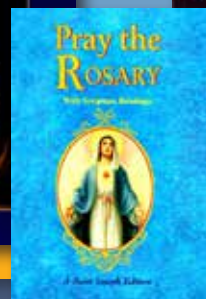
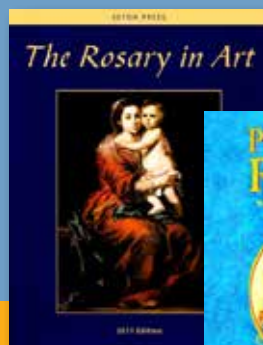
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### What Makes a Family Holy?

True joy comes from a profound harmony between persons, something which we all feel in our hearts and which makes us experience the beauty of togetherness, of mutual support along life's journey. But the basis of this feeling of deep joy is the presence of God, the presence of God in the family and his love, which is welcoming, merciful, and respectful towards all.

And above all, a love which is patient: patience is a virtue of God and he teaches us how to cultivate it in family life, how to be patient, and lovingly so, with each other. To be patient among ourselves. A patient love. God alone knows how to create harmony from differences. But if God's love is lacking, the family loses its harmony, self-centredness prevails and joy fades.

But the family which experiences the joy of faith communicates it naturally. That family is the salt of the earth and the light of the world, it is the leaven of society as a whole.

*Pope Francis  
Holy Mass for the Family  
October 27, 2013*