

CIRCLE OF GRACE
Safe Environment Program
Kindergarten through Grade 8
"Respecting All God's People"

Dear Parent,

Out of concern for all God's people and in response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, we have a program for the safe environment education of children and young people supported and mandated by

Diocese/eparchies will establish 'safe environment' programs. They will cooperate with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for children, youth, parents, ministers, educators, and others about ways to make and maintain a safe environment for children. Dioceses/eparchies will make clear to clergy and members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to sexual abuse.

Article 12 – Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People

This program is called *Circle of Grace*. It is meant to supplement and be integrated into the excellent programs and curricula for the formation of children and young people in our schools and religious education programs. *Circle of Grace* aims to equip our children and young people by arming them with essential knowledge and skills grounded in the richness of our faith. This program helps children and young people to understand their own (and other's) dignity in mind, body, and spirit.

What is a Circle of Grace?

The Catholic Church teaches that God has created each of us as unique and special. Genesis 1:27 tells us that we are created "male and female in God's image" and that God saw this as "very good." In that goodness, we are meant to respect ourselves and everyone else as persons created and loved by God.

Adults assist children and young people to recognize God's love by helping them to understand that each of us lives and moves in a *Circle of Grace*. You can imagine your own *Circle of Grace* by putting your arms above your head then circle down in front of your body including side to side. This circle, front to back, holds who you are in your body and through your senses. It holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, and sexuality.

Why is it important to help our children understand the Circle of Grace?

God intends our relationships in life to be experiences of divine love. Respectful, nurturing, loving relationships increase our understanding of our own value and help us to love others. It is never too early to help children and young people understand how very special they are and how relationships in life are called to be sacred. Understanding this can help them to protect the special person they are and to be respectful of others.

Adults, especially parents, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility to help children and young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children and young people recognize when they are safe or unsafe and know how to bring their concerns, fears, and uncertainties to the trusted adults in their lives.

How is the Circle of Grace Program different from other protection programs?

According to research, one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused by age eighteen.² Many protection programs focus on "stranger danger"; however, up to ninety percent (90%) of the time the perpetrator of abuse is known to the child or young person such as a relative or family friend. *Circle of Grace* goes beyond just protection by helping children and young people understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

Please feel free to contact your school or parish office if you have questions or want more information.

² www.usccb.org or <http://nccanch.acfhhs.gov>

Dear Parents,

The *Circle of Grace* lesson will be taught during your student's first Faith Formation class after the Christmas holiday. If you choose not to allow your student to participate, please follow the guidelines below. Please note that this letter and additional *Circle of Grace* information will be sent to all parents via E-mail. Please contact the Faith Formation Office with any additional questions at 281-578-8271.

Our office would like to take this opportunity to wish all our families a blessed and safe Christmas Season that is filled with joy!

Guidelines

Non-Participating Children/Young People

The guidelines from the Secretariat of Child and Youth Protection state:

WHEN A PARENT/GUARDIAN REFUSES TO ALLOW THEIR CHILD/YOUNG PERSON TO PARTICIPATE IN THE *CIRCLE OF GRACE* PROGRAM:

A parent may refuse to allow their child to participate, but it must be done on a case by case basis. Parents must submit the following in writing with a signature:

- Safe Environment training was offered to their child/young person
- They refused to allow their child/young person to participate in the training
- They received Safe Environment training materials for their child/young person.

Administrator/directors will provide parents with the age appropriate lessons and parent packet. A record of parent's written documentation needs to be maintained to ensure full accountability. A copy of the documentation must be submitted to the Arch/Diocesan Safe Environment Office.

Please call
if there are any questions or concerns.