

CIRCLE OF GRACE
Safe Environment Program
Grade 9 through Grade 12
"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

Circle of Grace – Administrator/Directors

Your feedback is very important in making *Circle of Grace* the best program possible for our children and young people. You may summarize your leader comments here or send the original evaluations.

Please list what worked well and any resources you would like to share.

Please list any suggestions that would improve the program.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

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.

What are the topics of the high school curriculum?

Grades 9-12 curriculum is formatted to be used in two ways. The traditional way, in which the lessons are taught to the identified grade. The second way is to use the Grades 9-11 alternate lessons for any grade or setting. We encourage you to have a conversation with your youth about these important lessons below:

Grade 9 - Lesson 1: Communion of Saints,

Lesson 2: Mary and Joseph say “Yes”

Lesson 3: When the Circle is Broken

Lesson 4: Action PLAAN- How Safe are your relationships?

Grade 10 - Levels of Intimacy and Influence

Grade 11 - N.O.T.I.C.E.: When Boundaries Go Wrong

Grade 12 - Love and the Theology of the Body, How Healthy are your relationships?

Lesson is only for seniors

Alternate Lessons

1. What is your Motto?

2. A.C.T.I.O.N.: Steps Needed When Concerns Don't Go Away

3. Modesty: A Thing of the Past or Not?

4. Tech Savvy or Tech Safe?

5. Circle of Grace Again... Really?

6. Human Trafficking: Modern Day Slavery

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>

History

Background

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops developed the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* during a three-day meeting in June 2002 in Dallas Texas. This document was the first united response by the bishops to the revelation by the secular media that priests had physically and sexually abused minors over a period of many years. The stories of abuse would appear in dioceses across the United States implicating an increasing number of priests and even bishops.

The Bishops gathered in Washington, D.C. in November 2002 to confirm a revised Charter, to develop a set of canonical norms for Vatican approval as particular law in the dioceses of the United States, to organize procedures for a compliance audit of dioceses, to commission a data gathering project on abuse of minors by priests over the previous 50 years, and to set in motion studies that would discover the causes, trace the patterns, and offer strategies for preventing future abuse and protecting minors effectively.

“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

The Archdiocese of Omaha, 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*, has developed a program for the safe environment education of children and young people. This program is called *Circle of Grace*. There are many Catholic Dioceses and Protestant churches across the United States using the Circle of Grace Curriculum. Go to www.cograce.org to read their testimonies.

CIRCLE OF GRACE SUMMARY EVALUATION FORM

Date _____ School/ Parish _____ City: _____

Circle one.

School Administrator Director of Religious Education Director Youth Ministry Other

Name: _____ Phone: _____

DATA: Please enter the number of children/youth who completed the program for each grade. This information is required for the national audit.

K _____ 1st _____ 2nd _____ 3rd _____ 4th _____ 5th _____ 6th _____

7th _____ 8th _____ 9th _____ 10th _____ 11th _____ 12th _____

Number of children/young people who did not participate in program per parents' requests: _____
(Attach a copy of the written documentation of the parents' requests.)

Each grade's curriculum was designed to meet the overall program objectives.
Please review your leader's evaluations. Based on this review has the program adequately met these overall objectives? Yes _____ No _____

1. Children/Young People will understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. Children/Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* that God gives each of us.
3. Children/ Young People will be able to identify and maintain appropriate boundaries.
4. Children/ Young People can identify types of boundary violations.
5. Children/Young People will demonstrate how to take action if a boundary is threatened or violated.

Grade 3 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of children who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of children who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of children who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of children who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Grade 6 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Grade 9 (tally of leader's evaluation)

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on their pre-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got 70% or better on the post-assessment _____

Number of Young people who got below 70% on the post-assessment _____

Circle of Grace – Administrator/Directors

Philosophy

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/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/young people 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/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, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility to help children/young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where children/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.¹ Many protection programs focus on "stranger danger," however, up to ninety percent of the time the perpetrator is a relative, family friend or other person known to the child/young person. *Circle of Grace* goes beyond just protection by helping children/young people understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

Goal of the Circle of Grace Program - Grades K-12

The goal of the *Circle of Grace* program is to educate and empower children and young people to actively participate in a safe environment for themselves and others.

Objectives of the Circle of Grace Program - Grades K-12

- Children/Young People will understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Children/Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* which God gives each of us.
- Children/Young People will be able to identify, discern and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries.
- Children/Young People will be able to identify all types of boundary violations.
- Children/Young People will demonstrate how to take action if any boundary is threatened or violated.

¹ www.usccb.org, or <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

Guidelines

Non-Participating Children/Young People

The guidelines from the Office 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.

Administrators/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.

Please call
if there are any questions or concerns.

Summary of the Key Concepts of "Circle of Grace"

God gives each of us a Circle of Grace (see below) where He is always "Present"

Raise your hands above your head, then bring your outstretched arms slowly down.

Extend your arms in front of you and then behind you embrace all of the space around you

slowly reach down to your feet.

Knowing that God is in this space with you. This is your Circle of Grace; you are in it.

God is "Present" because He desires a relationship with us

- God is with us when we are happy and sad. God does not cause bad things to happen to us. He loves us very much.
- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused (unsafe).
- Having faith may not take away all of life's struggles. It is because of these struggles, God promised to always "be present"; providing guidance and comfort in our time of need

God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace

- Our feelings help us know about ourselves and the world around us.
- God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace by allowing us to experience peace, love or contentment when something or someone good comes into our Circle of Grace.

God helps us know what does not belong in our Circle of Grace

- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused (unsafe).
- The Holy Spirit prompts (alerts) us that something does not belong in our Circle of Grace by giving us "a funny or uncomfortable feeling" that something is not safe. This feeling is there because God wants us to be safe.

God helps us know when to ask for help from someone we trust

- God gives us people in our lives to help us when we are troubled or struggling with a concern.
- God wants us to talk to trusted adults about our worries, concerns or uncomfortable feelings so they can help us be safe and take the right action.



Code of Conduct for Young People

I understand that I am created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

I understand that God does not want or cause bad things to happen.

I understand that God is with me even when I am hurting or sad.

I understand the *Circle of Grace* that God gives me and others.

I understand that God is present in my *Circle of Grace* because He desires a relationship with me.

I understand that I can help stamp out "bullying" by not being a silent bystander.

I understand that speaking out and taking positive actions when bullying occurs, makes a difference.

Because of this understanding when I interact with someone, either in person or when using technology such as texting and social networking, I will strive to:

- Have my actions be safe and show respect toward myself and others.
- Have my words and actions represent the truth.
- Identify and maintain appropriate and healthy boundaries and relationships.
- Talk with my parents/trusted adult if I have concerns (bullying) or if there is a question that that any boundary was violated.

Student _____ Teacher _____

Parent _____ Date _____