

Dear Parent,

Out of concern for all God's people and in response to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishop's *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 our Archdiocese.

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 Indianapolis is excited to offer the Circle of Grace Program to all of our children attending faith formation classes and who are attending our schools. We researched numerous programs to find one that would best supplement the excellent programs we have already in place. Circle of Grace will not be replacing any of our outstanding programs. Our Safe and Sacred program has assisted the adults in our parishes and schools who work with our children to be mindful of boundaries and has provided education on possible situations that could present an unsafe environment for children. The Circle of Grace program will be assisting our young people with education and guidance on appropriate boundaries, self-respect and respect for others. This program encourages healthy relationships and teaches our children that God is always present with us. The Circle of Grace Program is grounded in the richness of our faith.

What is 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, and soul.

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. Many protection programs focus on “stranger danger”; however, up to ninety percent 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.

If you have any questions regarding the Circle of Grace Program please contact Katie VandenBergh in the Faith Formation Office.

God bless you and your family!