

CIRCLE OF GRACE

Keeping our Children Safe—A Program of the Archdiocese of Detroit and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops

Dear Our Lady of Mount Carmel Religious Education Parents,

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 implemented a program, which began two years ago (2009/2010) for the safe environment education of children and young people, supported and mandated by the Archdiocese of Detroit.

Dioceses/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 be supplemented and integrated into the excellent programs and curricula for the formation of children and young people in our religious education program. **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.

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 that 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 four in seven boys will be sexually abused by age eighteen. 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.

The ***Circle of Grace*** lesson will be taught to all students during the month of October. Please feel free to contact the Religious Education Office if you have questions or want more information about ***Circle of Grace***.

God’s peace,

Sr. Ellen Licavoli, IHM
Director of Religious Education

Rev. Stephen Rooney, Pastor
Our Lady of Mount Carmel Parish