

CIRCLE OF GRACE
Safe Environment Program
St Patrick and St Luke Parishes

“Respecting All God’s People”

Dear Parent,

Our safe environment program is designed to help our young people understand their own (and other’s) dignity in mind, body, and spirit. As part of our safe environment program, our parishes will be use the **Circle of Grace** Curriculum beginning this school year. **Circle of Grace** will replace the safe environment curriculum we have used in past years. This curriculum is also being used in the rest of the parishes through the Diocese of Duluth.

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 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.

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 grownups about our worries, concerns or “funny/ uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe and take the right action.

Common Questions of Parents

1) How is this connected to the “Safe Environment” program?

Circle of Grace is the safe environment program for children/youth. The goal is to help children/youth understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help when needed through their relationships with trusted adults.

2) What information can this program give my child that they are not getting already?

The *Circle of Grace* Program reinforces in a peer setting that their faith community cares about their safety and wants them to understand how to seek help if they feel unsafe for any reason. It will help them identify potentially unsafe situations and know how to handle them by seeking help from trusted adults.

3) You indicate that this program will provide them with “life skills”, what do you mean by this?

It reinforces that they are valued by God and others. It gives them information on boundaries and practical directives of what to do if someone makes them feel uncomfortable when in their *Circle of Grace*. It is a good foundation for healthy relationships that will help them throughout their lives.

4) Will this program be age appropriate?

Yes! The lessons were written with great attention to the stages of child development.

5) How can parents support what is being taught in the program?

Parents will receive parent letters as well as take home activities for several of the lessons to do with their children. Talking with your children about the *Circle of Grace* at home will help your children to understand the importance of the lessons and that the lessons apply everywhere, not just at school. Additionally, you are your child’s most important teacher in the area of relationships. Much of what your child will learn and later imitate about relationships comes from what they learn by your example. Creating an atmosphere where they know that they can talk to you about anything provides a valuable safety net for your child because they know they have you to turn to whenever they have a concern.

6) Is there accountability attached to this program implementation?

Yes! There will be an ongoing evaluation of the program to ensure its effectiveness and to incorporate any suggestions that would improve the quality of the program.

7) Will there be resources (people and material) available if I have questions?

Yes! There will be a parent packet given to all parents that includes contact numbers.

8) Shouldn’t parents be the ones teaching their children about sexuality?

Absolutely! This is NOT a sex education program. *Circle of Grace* will provide children with a sound understanding of their own value and of God’s care and presence in their lives. It will also help them notice the signals that tell them when they do not feel safe and how to talk to a trusted adult. All of this will be a good foundation for healthy relationships. However, this is not a sexuality education program. Many parents will appreciate that this program will provide a spiritual framework that will allow parent-child communication about the value of all that they are, including their sexuality. Those conversations are most effective between parent and child. There are grade specific Parents First newsletters to assist you in these conversations.

9) Is this a mandatory program for my child?

The United States Catholic Conference of Bishops (USCCB) developed the Charter for Protection of Children and Young People. Article 12 of this document states that each Diocese will have a safe environment program for adults and children/youth. If you have questions or concerns about your child participating in the *Circle of Grace* Program, please contact your Pastor or the Director of Religious Education.

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