



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 James V. Johnston, Jr., Bishop of the Diocese of Kansas City-St. Joseph.

Dioceses/eparchies are to maintain "safe environment" programs which the diocesan/eparchial bishop deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles. They are to be conducted cooperatively with parents, civil authorities, educators, and community organizations to provide education and training for minors, parents, ministers, employees, volunteers, and others about ways to sustain and foster a safe environment for minors. Dioceses/eparchies are to make clear to clergy and all members of the community the standards of conduct for clergy and other persons in positions of trust with regard to children and youth.

- 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 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 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 protect the special person they are and 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?

National statistics are alarming. Before the age of 18, one in four girls and one in six boys will be sexually abused. Many protection programs focus on “stranger danger.” However, up to 90% of the time, the perpetrator 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 child’s teacher or the Director of Religious Education if you have questions or want more information about this program.