

St. Vincent de Paul Religious Education Grades 1-8 Parent Handbook 2016-2017

CLASS TIME

Wednesday Class Times

- 4:30 p.m.-5:45p.m. All Grades (Grades 6-8 open for families with younger children only) OR
- 6:15 p.m.-7:30 p.m. All Grades



PARENT'S PRAYER

Most loving Father, you have entrusted our children to us to bring them up for you and prepare them for everlasting life.

*Assist us with your grace,
that we may fulfill this sacred duty with competence and love.*

Teach us what to give and what to withhold.

Show us when to praise, when to reprove, and when to be silent.

Make us gentle and considerate, yet firm and watchful.

Keep us from the weakness of indulgence and the excess of severity.

*Give us the courage to be disliked sometimes by our children,
when we must do necessary things that are displeasing in their eyes.*

Give us the imagination to enter their world in order to understand and guide them.

*Grant us all the virtues we need to lead them by word and example
in the ways of wisdom and piety.*

*One day, with them, may we enter into the joys of our true and lasting home
with you in heaven.*

Amen.

ST. VINCENT de PAUL RELIGIOUS FORMATION PHILOSOPHY

We recognize and support that parents hold the primary responsibility for their children's religious formation. St. Vincent de Paul's Religious Education program will creatively assist in this obligation. We encourage parents to be a strong role model with a lived faith commitment and meaningful prayer life.

As a dedicated faith community, the St. Vincent de Paul Religious Formation Program is committed to providing quality lifelong education for all members of our parish.

As a community of faith, inspired by the Gospel message, we will integrate the experience of community, worship and social justice into the total educational experience of our students, their parents and parishioners. By Baptism, we are called to be faithful to the mission of Jesus. We teach God's redeeming love for us, the fullness of revelation in Jesus Christ, and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Through religious education, we will strive to develop a deep understanding of prayer and worship and its relevance in our lives. In the spirit of our patron, we will witness to and serve the needs of those in need.

The entire St. Vincent de Paul Community is encouraged to participate in the faith development of our youth and adults. The coordinators of the Religious Education program serve as a resource to those working to form the faith of the students and their families in our various programs.

BASIC PRINCIPLES

Spiritually

- To provide an atmosphere wherein the student can grow in his/her relationship with Christ and with others.
- To provide spiritual opportunities that will instruct the students in Catholic teachings and traditions.

Intellectually

- To develop a Religious Education program within each grade level that will meet the academic, creative and personal needs of each individual.
- To create an atmosphere of learning wherein the student can develop and achieve his/her God-given potential.

Emotionally

- To extend out Catholic charity to include all persons by treating them with courtesy and kindness, and above all to respect each child as a person.
- To work toward helping each student recognize their own self-worth and to foster within them a good self-image.

What You Need to Know Before 1st Class

SUPPLIES

Students in Grades 1-5 are asked to bring the following items in a container/zipper bag (no zip lock bags) labeled with their name. These will be sent home on the last night of class.

Pencils or pen

Box of 24 Crayons

ARRIVAL

Students should enter the building and wait in the Upper Commons until the bell rings:

- by 4:25 p.m. for the first session

- by 6:10 p.m. for the second session

Doors will be locked during class time. You (or your student) may gain access by using the call button at the far right school door. You (or your student) must check in at the Religious Formation Office before proceeding if you are tardy.

PROCEDURE FOR DROP OFF AND PICK UP

The safety of our children and families is a top priority. We have set the following policy for the drop-off/pick-up of students for Wednesday Religious Ed. Classes:

- The drop off lane will be open ONLY for drop off times: 4:15-4:30pm and 6:00-6:15pm. After these times, the lane will be blocked on both the east and west sides, allowing no curbside traffic.
- When parking in the lot, all vehicles must park facing north, toward the school/church building. Vehicles may not back out of parking spaces. Therefore, parking is allowed in the front row ONLY if the vehicle is backed in and facing south.
- **At dismissal time, parents must come in to the building, meet their child(ren) in the upper commons, and then walk with them to their vehicle. Parents will be responsible for crossing and guiding their students to their vehicle after class.**

Students will NOT be allowed to leave the building without an adult. Please discuss this with your child. (This includes ALL grades 1-8). Carpool arrangements are welcome whereby a parent can walk not only their children out, but those in their carpool. Parents who are unable to leave their vehicle are asked to partner with another parent who can guide their child(ren) safely to them in the parking lot. NOTE! The Religious Formation Office is happy to assist anyone who cannot leave their vehicle nor find another parent to walk their child to their vehicle. Please call us to make arrangements. Older students may not see the benefit of this requirement. We ask for parental support in ensuring your child complies. THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION!

ABSENCES & TARDINESS

Please call the Religious Formation office (402-493-1642) or email mcmahanj@sudpomaha.org prior to class time if your child will be absent from class on a Wednesday. The Religious Formation Office will contact parents any time the student does not have an excused absence and we have not received a call from you. *Excessive absences may result in repeating a grade.*

Tardiness disrupts class time! Please do your best to be on time. **If your child arrives after class has started, please direct her/him to the office before going to the classroom.**

Regular attendance is essential for the student to benefit from the continuity of the curriculum. Therefore, our expectation is that no other activities are scheduled during your child's class time. This may be a sacrifice, but a necessary one for faith formation. Thank you for your cooperation!

PROMPTNESS

Please make every effort to have your child here on time.

ELECTRONIC DEVICES/CELL PHONES

Absolutely NO electronic devices/ cell phone use is allowed during class time. If students bring these items to class, they must be placed in a location designated by the teacher. If misused devices will be confiscated and held in the Office until a parent retrieves the item. Thank you for your cooperation!

DRESS CODE

Students are expected to dress in an appropriate and modest manner. Wearing ball caps during class is not allowed. T-shirts, pants, shorts and shoes should conform with your child's school dress code. No bare midriffs, bare shoulders, or spaghetti-strap tops are allowed.

EARLY PICK-UP PROCEDURES

If your child needs to leave Religious Education classes early, you, the parent, must send a written note with the child when they come to class. At the designated pick up time, parents must present a valid photo ID and come into the office to pick-up and sign out the child. For safety considerations, students will not be allowed to go outside to wait alone. Thank you for your cooperation.

WEATHER INFORMATION

The decision to cancel Wednesday classes will be made (at the latest) by 2:00pm on the day of class, unless the public schools have cancelled classes on Wednesday due to weather. In that case, there are no classes on that Wednesday.

Notification of cancellation will be publicized by:

1. Parent email/and if possible, TV and Radio notification
2. The answering machine at the office will state classes have been cancelled (402-493-1642)

STUDENT SUPERVISION ON AND OFF CAMPUS

Every effort is made to exercise prudent judgment in the supervision of students while on Church property. In the event of an accident or medical emergency, parents/guardians will be notified as soon as possible to enable them to make a decision as to the course of action they wish to take. **It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to notify the Director of any special precautions needed to insure the safety and welfare of their child(ren.)**

All students who leave class during religious education classes with a parent or guardian must sign out in the Religious Formation Office. Once students are signed out of the office, they are the responsibility of the parents/guardians.

Staff are not allowed to take students from the church property with the exception of field trips approved by parents by signing a permission slip.

VISITATION

Parents or other guests are permitted to attend class provided the visit is approved by the Director at least 2 days before the class. No exceptions will be made. Family members are encouraged to attend any Masses or Prayers Services without pre-arrangement.

CATECHISTS/VOLUNTEERS

Catechists have participated in “Safe Environment For All God’s Children” training and undergone a background check. Parents and catechists are partners in supporting each other in their efforts to provide religious education for the children. Catechists are members of the parish community who generously give of their talents and time.

Catechists are required to attend orientation and in-service programs during the year to help them work effectively with the children.

PARENT ROLE

Parents are asked to participate actively in the program in other volunteer needs such as hospitality, traffic, office help, retreats, chaperones, etc. It is expected that parents will involve themselves in their child's progress in the following ways:

- attending Mass regularly
- helping with home activity assignments
- praying traditional and personal prayers regularly
- attending special sacrament meetings & events
- taking an interest in their child’s curriculum
- assisting the catechist as needed
- involving your child as the family extends concern and service to neighbors and community.

We need all parents to volunteer in some capacity - whether in the religious education program, youth ministry, school, or parish community. Your time and talents are important to the success of our parish.

PROGRESS REPORTS

In order to improve communication between parents, students and the Parish Religious Education Staff, students will receive a Progress Report at mid-term and the end of the year. Catechists will assess each student in the areas of mastery of material, effort in class, participation in class and area(s) needing improvement.

LITURGY

Children’s liturgies and prayer services will be held at appropriate times throughout the year. You will be made aware of these activities by email, so that you may attend. We encourage you to attend as many as possible. This visible sign of your presence affirms your child’s idea of the importance of living their faith.

***Before the students attend any Mass or prayer service, we teach them proper behavior. This includes being respectful of sacred places and things, as well as for one another. Being respectful includes being responsible for our voices and actions, and participating by singing or praying when appropriate. Especially at Mass, we stress participation, not observation. This is brought to your attention so that you may stress this also, when attending weekend Mass.*

RECONCILIATION DURING CLASSTIME

All students, Grades 2 through 8, will have an opportunity to celebrate the sacrament of Reconciliation during the Religious Education class times. Individual reconciliations could take place at any time, at the request of a student, with the availability of a priest.

Parents are encouraged to help form positive attitudes toward the sacrament by going with their children to the Sacrament of Reconciliation regularly. At a minimum, Reconciliation is to be celebrated in preparation for the season of Easter.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR EXPECTATIONS

Students enrolled in Religious Education classes are expected to maintain high standards of behavior. Our purpose is to encourage and strengthen each child's character in accordance with Catholic principles and to promote order within the school and classrooms so that an atmosphere of learning may prevail.

Our team consists of catechists and assistants who give of their time, talents, and energies and deserve the utmost respect, consideration, and support at all times.

Since the true form of discipline is self-discipline, it is our goal as educators to assist the student in acquiring self-control. Disciplinary actions will be used, if necessary, to help the individual grow in this area.

In order to maintain an atmosphere conducive for learning, each catechist/class will operate using these guidelines:

The student will:

1. Listen
2. Follow directions
3. Share time and space with fellow students
4. Ask questions to understand more completely
5. Cooperate with others
6. Demonstrate an understanding of rules
7. Accomplish designated tasks
8. Communicate appropriately
9. Demonstrate leadership when appropriate
10. Respect others and the rights of others
11. Respect school and Church property.

Respecting self and others will be shown by appropriate and modest clothing. Hats are not allowed during class, in the Chapel or in the Church. Hats may be confiscated if a student does not comply.

Weapons/Prohibited Objects

Students are forbidden to knowingly and voluntarily bring to the pastoral center and or to possess, handle, transmit, or use, any instrument in school, on parish grounds, or at parish/religious education events that is ordinarily or generally considered a weapon. Any object which could be used to injure another person may be considered a weapon. Police will be contacted when there is a suspected violation of criminal laws concerning weapons.

The following are examples of prohibited objects which students are forbidden to knowingly and voluntarily bring to the pastoral center and/or to possess, handle, transmit, or use in school, on parish grounds or at parish/religious education events: electronic devices/games & cell phones, knives of all types or any other dangerous instruments capable of inflicting, cutting, stabbing, or tearing wounds; guns of all types; lead pipes, chains, chuck sticks; throwing stars, darts, metal knuckles, blackjacks; unauthorized tools; fireworks, explosives or other chemicals; controlled substances and/or drug paraphernalia; alcohol, tobacco, matches or lighters; and laser pointers.

As a condition of continued enrollment, students must abide by the terms of the above guidelines. Students in violation of these guidelines may be subject to expulsion. Parents will be contacted immediately and/or police will be notified.

Drug Free and Alcohol Free Learning Environment

The following guidelines relative to drugs, controlled substances, and alcoholic beverages apply to all individuals enrolled in St. Vincent de Paul Catholic Religious Formation Programs.

1. Prohibited Conduct

- A) possession or use of drugs, alcoholic beverages or a controlled substance
 - possession includes any knowing and voluntary having, taking, receiving handling of drugs, alcoholic beverage or controlled substances.
 - students are prohibited from taking part in a parish function while intoxicated
- B) selling or distributing drugs, alcoholic beverages or a controlled substance
- C) possession or use of imitation controlled substances possession includes any knowing and voluntary having, taking, receiving or handling of an imitation controlled substance
- D) selling or distributing imitation controlled substances
 - an imitation controlled substance is a substance that looks very much like an illegal drug and is said to be an illegal drug, but is not an illegal drug. The following are to be considered in determining whether a particular pill/capsule is an imitation controlled substance:
 - a. The substance is said to produce the same or similar effects as the illegal drug or substance.
 - b. The person who has it or who is distributing it says that it is a specific illegal drug.
 - c. The person who is selling it charges more per pill/capsule than the pill/capsule's contents usually sell for.
 - d. The pill/capsule is packaged in the same or similar bottle or box as the illegal pill/capsule drug.
 - e. The pill/capsule looks like the illegal drug it is said to be.

2. Discipline

As a condition of continued enrollment, students must abide by the terms of the above guidelines. Students in violation of these guidelines may be subject to expulsion. Parents will be contacted immediately and/or police will be notified.

FIGHTING AND OTHER DISTURBANCES

If a fight occurs, the possibility of injury or damage to other persons or property exists. For the protection of persons and property, such activities will not be tolerated before, during or after Religious Education classes and activities. Throwing snowballs, rocks, or other objects also involves the possibility of injury or damage to persons or property. Repeated violation of this rule may result in expulsion.

NUISANCE ITEMS

Nuisance items which may cause disruptions in Religious Education classes are not allowed. All nuisance items brought to the Pastoral Center will be confiscated by staff members and turned into the office. Items brought to class for the purpose of selling and trading shall be considered nuisance items.

St. Vincent de Paul personnel will handle matters of inappropriate behavior in a fair and consistent manner. *We find that the more quickly we approach the problem, the easier it is to solve the discipline problem.* At no time will disrespect toward another person be tolerated.

Also, offensive student conduct/harassment/lack of respect of students and staff will not be tolerated. Repeated incidents of offensive conduct constitute harassment. Offensive conduct or harassment may result in suspension or expulsion. Any incidents of bullying will be dealt with immediately. Bullying is defined by:

- Repeated acts of physical or nonphysical deliberate aggressions by a person or group against another with intent to harm and includes pushing, kicking, hitting, slapping, knocking things out of hands, intimidating gestures, etc. Also includes spreading of lies, gossiping, saying mean things.

If a student is disruptive:

1. The student will be sent to the office with an explanation of the behavior. The director will visit with the student and determine if the parent will be contacted. The director will also determine if the student should be sent back to class for the remainder of the class period, or parents called.
2. If the behavior continues, the catechist will again notify the office. A phone call may need to be made to the parent by the director. If so, the parent will be asked to come and pick up the child. It may be determined that a meeting needs to be held with the catechist, director, parent and student to discuss the problem.
3. If the director, teacher, parent and student need to meet, the student may return to his/her class after the meeting and will be given a probation period. If the behavior continues thereafter, the probation period may be extended or the student may be removed from the classroom as determined by the director, and participate in private tutoring.

PARENTAL QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS

A parent or guardian who has a question or concern regarding a situation involving his or her child is urged to follow these procedures:

1. Contact the student's catechist to discuss the situation and work with the catechist to arrive at possible solutions. Appointments with the catechists must be made by writing a note requesting a conference, or by calling the Religious Formation Office and asking that the catechist return the call as soon as possible.
2. If the concern cannot be resolved with the catechist, the parent or guardian should then request a conference with the director. After discussing the situation with both parties, the director will act as a facilitator making every effort to resolve the problem and initiate reconciliation between the two parties.
3. If resolution and reconciliation have not been achieved after discussing the problem with the catechist and the director, and the parent or guardian still feels that the complaint has not received proper consideration, the pastor will be asked to assist in resolving the situation and achieving reconciliation.

Every effort should be made to resolve questions, concerns and problems at the earliest possible stage in a manner appropriate for Christians.

REGISTRATION & PROGRAM INFORMATION**GUIDELINES**

Registration takes place each April for the following fall, with forms sent home with the youngest or only. Every student must be registered each year in order to arrange for textbooks, materials and catechists. Parents will be notified of dates and times through our Parent communications (email) and Parish Bulletin. A \$30 Non-Refundable Deposit is required at the time of registration. The balance of the fees must be paid when classes begin, unless you have made special arrangements with the Religious Ed. Director. New students may be registered at any time throughout the year. Every effort will be made to accommodate your requested class time. Please know that the later the registration is received, the greater the chance that your first choice of class time may not be available. A late fee will be assessed after the due date. (for returning families)

ADMISSION GUIDELINES

Each student will be placed at the grade level that he/she attends in public school unless there are special circumstances. Class time is honored on a first come basis through registration.

SPECIAL ADMISSION TO RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAM

Registration for non-parishioners must be arranged through the Director of Religious Education. Non Parish Fees are one and one half times the Parishioner fee.

CLASS SIZE

St. Vincent's Religious Education program attempts to keep classes as small as possible. The maximum students per classroom will be 10-15.

Christian Initiation of Children (CIC)

This is a program for students 2nd grade and older, who are un-baptized coming into the church for the first time or who are baptized but have had little or no religious formation nor received the sacraments. These classes are held on Wednesdays. Each family will meet with the Director of Religious Ed for full information.

HOME PROGRAM

For families who wish to teach religion to their children at home, we offer a program resource that is consistent with standards for each grade level. This is not open to children in 2nd or 8th grades. Contact the Director of Religious Formation to register and for more information.

SPECIAL NEEDS

There are children of God who, because of a disability, may not be able to participate in the regular Wednesday evening classes. At this time, we assist families on a case by case basis. If you have any questions regarding this program, please call the Religious Formation Office at 493-1642.

HEALTH PROCEDURES & INFORMATION

Notify the director if your child has a health condition that may affect his/her routine. We will notify the catechist so he/she is sensitive to any problem that might occur. This should include allergies, hyperactivity, light sensitivity, hearing problems, ADHD and ADD medications, etc.

Asthma/Anaphylaxis Emergency Protocol

Please note-we do not have a nurse on site.

If your child has an asthma/allergy reaction during religious education classes, this protocol will be followed:

- **911 will be called, an EpiPen will be administered, and then the parents will be contacted.**

NOTE: If your child has been prescribed an EpiPen, please make sure we have one in our office or on their person during religious education class time. Place your child's EpiPen in a clear zip lock bag and write their name on it with permanent black marker. Bring it to the office on the first night of class, it will be returned to you on the last night of class if unused.

Parents of students with known diagnoses related to asthma and allergies are expected to ensure their children provide emergency medication available on site.

NOTE: Please help us make this experience enjoyable for your child. Inform the director of any special situations that exist within your family, such as: pending divorce, granted divorce, aged grandparents living with you, health problems of other members of the family that may affect

the student emotionally, single parent situations, visitation with absentee parents that may cause the child stress or absences, death of a parent or close relative, separation, etc. The director will share the information with the child's catechist, and confidentiality will be respected.

MEDICATION

Religious Education students are present for 75 minutes a week. Any medication a student would need should be dispensed before or after class at home. The St. Vincent de Paul personnel will not dispense medication. Exceptions to the policy must be authorized by the director.

STUDENT ILLNESS/INJURY DURING CLASS TIME

In case of illness or injury, the parent/guardian or those designated by the parent/guardian will be called to pick up the child. (Please see Early Pick-up Procedures.) Under no circumstances will a sick or injured child be allowed to walk home.

In case of emergency a parent/guardian will be contacted. If a parent/guardian cannot be located, the director will assume the parent/guardian's permission to take the student to the closest emergency service or to call for emergency help.

Religious Formation Curriculum

St. Vincent de Paul Religious Formation Program uses the series ***Be My Disciples***. This series shares the Christian story in a catechumenal model using reflection on Scripture and doctrine. It initiates children into the community of faith and challenges them to discipleship. ***Be My Disciples*** is a balanced approach that invites, teaches, and challenges young people to become disciples of Jesus. It leads Catholic children and their families to grow in their conversion to Jesus Christ; accept the demands of discipleship; decide each day to choose life in Christ and live as active, committed members of the Catholic Church.

Using a spiral structure, the six units of ***Be My Disciples*** explore the Catechism of the Catholic Church's four pillars of Creed, Liturgy, Morality, and Prayer. Every chapter incorporates Sacred Scripture. Fifteen seasonal lessons at each grade level give children the opportunity to experience the beauty and richness of the liturgical year of Activities and prayer experiences help children and their families keep their minds and hearts open to discipleship as witnessed in the life of Jesus.

BeMyDisciples.com is a unique web site that invites all persons of faith to share their stories of discipleship and offers unparalleled resources for children, parents and educators. The balanced approach to catechesis offered by ***Be My Disciples***:

- Teaches, reinforces, and extends knowledge of Scripture, Catholic doctrine, and the Church's seasons every year in every grade through a unique spiral structure.
- Invites children to discipleship through a dynamic methodology that incorporates the latest findings in brain research, psycho-social development, and emotional intelligence.
- Challenges children to a deeper integration of faith and life by leading them to higher levels of thinking and encouraging a weekly faith choice.
- Invites parents into a partnership with the parish in the faith formation of their children.

The program leads Catholic children and their families to:

- Grow in their conversion to Jesus Christ.

- Develop the habits of discipleship.
- Decide each day to choose life in Christ.
- Live as active, committed members of the Catholic Church.

SACRAMENT INFORMATION

FIRST RECONCILIATION, FIRST EUCHARIST AND CONFIRMATION

NOTE: Specific details for each sacrament will be provided for you at Sacrament Parent/Child Sessions & Parent/Child Mini Retreats. Please make attendance your top priority as they are mandatory!

- Each student preparing for a sacrament must supply a copy of the Baptismal certificate for our office, unless Baptism took place at St. Vincent de Paul Church.

-Parents play an essential role in sacramental preparation programs. It is vital that parents, parish and religious education work together to nurture and support the children preparing to receive a sacrament. Thank you for your cooperation.

-Parents' example of regular attendance at Mass and reception of the sacraments of Eucharist and Reconciliation are crucial.

-Catechists and parents work together in cooperative and supportive ways to provide the necessary instruction and guidance needed. Parents, as primary educators of their children, are expected to work with the catechists to determine if their children are ready for each sacrament.

-Curriculum and guidelines for preparation are provided by the Archdiocese and the Parish.

-The parents are required to attend any Mini-Retreats, Parent Meetings, or Sessions held for each sacrament their child receives.

-Under normal conditions, students receive the sacraments of Reconciliation and Eucharist in second grade, and Confirmation in the eighth grade. Special arrangements will be made for students in other grades who need sacramental preparation. Parents must notify the Religious Formation Office of this special need.

-Students must have two years, or the equivalent, of Religious Education before receiving First Eucharist, First Reconciliation or Confirmation. On-going (grades 1 through 8) religious education provides the student with the best opportunity for reception of any Sacrament to be meaningful. For this reason, we ask for your cooperation in making religious education a priority. Our expectation is that once the child begins religious education classes, they should attend consistently from one year to the next.

CONFIRMATION PREPARATION

FOR 7TH & 8TH GRADE STUDENTS

Our parish strives to journey with our young people as they discern if the Lord is calling them to the sacrament at this time. Preparation begins in seventh grade and continues throughout the eighth grade. The sacrament is usually bestowed on the candidates in late winter/spring of their eighth grade year.

During the preparation period, your child's faith journey will be nurtured toward understanding and living their faith. It will be a time of searching, challenging, learning and resolving their faith. Your active support and encouragement will enhance the process. As the child's relationship with Christ and with the community grows, they will look for you for example.

Regular Mass attendance is very important. Our Church is a worshiping community, in which each member is called to minister to one another each week. Faith formation and regular worship are closely linked. Faith brings the community together to worship; and in worship faith is renewed. The Church celebrates Christ's life, death, and resurrection in its liturgy. It proclaims its faith in His presence in the Church, in His word, in the sacramental celebrations; it gives praise and thanks, asks for the things it needs, and strengthens itself to carry out its commission to be witnesses and to do service.

It is VITAL that children see faith development as LIFE-LONG, and that one must strive continuously to grow in faith, throughout adulthood. Our faith journey does not end as long as we are living.

CIRCLE OF GRACE

Safe Environment Program Kindergarten through Grade 8

"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 Most Reverend George J. Lucas, Archbishop of Omaha.

Diocese/parishes 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/parishes 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 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.

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

²www.usccb.org or <http://nccanch.acfhhs.gmc>

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 Director of Religious Education, Principal, etc.