



## DIocese of GAYLORD

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August 20, 2020

Dear Parents and Guardians:

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 Steven J. Raica, Bishop of the Diocese of Gaylord.

*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*

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.

*Virtus* is our abuse awareness and boundary training program for adults who will either be employed or volunteering in our schools or parishes and be around children on a regular basis. *Virtus* is a national program, widely in use in dioceses throughout the United States. It is a web-based on-line training program that specializes in helping churches and religious organizations create safe environments for children and youth.

In Our Lady of Perpetual Help,

Rev. Nicholas J. Cooper  
*Interim Director of Faith Formation*

### *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.<sup>2</sup> 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.

# CIRCLE OF GRACE PARENT OPT-OUT FORM

I understand that our parish or school is scheduled to present lessons from the Circle of Grace program to children in an effort to help create and maintain safe environments for children. I understand that this faith-based curriculum teaches that each person is sacred and encourages children to have greater respect for themselves and others. I am also aware that the lessons include personal safety information specifically regarding child abuse, child sexual abuse and Internet safety, and that children will receive instructions about what to do if they are harmed, or perceive potential harm, in any way by another person. Further, I have been offered the opportunity to review the materials to be presented and discuss the lessons with our parish or school.

After prayerful consideration, I have decided to exercise my right to have my child excluded from participation in the Circle of Grace lessons. I understand this "opt-out" form must be completed and returned to the parish or school before the lessons are scheduled to take place.

Name of Child: \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Parish or School: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Please provide materials so that I might teach the information to my child at home.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not wish to receive any materials.