

St. Mary Immaculate Parish  
Religious Education Department - 707-263-4401

Dear Parent and/or Guardian,

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

*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 .*  
*Article 12 - Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*

This program is called *Circle of Grace*. It is meant to supplement our 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. 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. 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.

This curriculum will be taught in your child's class during the semester.

Please feel free to contact the Safe Environment Coordinator or Director of Religious Education, at the parish office if you have questions or want more information.

Sincerely,

Safe Environment Coordinator  
St. Mary Immaculate Parish

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Please fill out and return to the parish office or your child's classroom if you **do not** want your child to participate in the Circle of Grace Program:

CHILD'S NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **I do not** want my child to participate in the Circle of Grace Program

\_\_\_\_\_ **I** have received alternative materials to teach this information to my child. (These materials are available on our parish website under the Religious Education link at Downloads: <http://stmaryslakeport.com/ministries-2/religious-education/>)

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Parent Signature