

Circle of Grace

Catechist Preparation

Important Program “Take-Aways”

As you may or may not be aware, the U.S. Bishops’ *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* developed in 2002 mandates that each diocese have a safe environment program in place for children and youth. This program serves as the child/youth counterpart to the Safe Environment trainings (i.e. VIRTUS or Safe Haven) required for all adults volunteering with children. In the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, the children’s/youth program which was initially adopted and had been taught within the context of the CCE curriculum since 2011 was called *Sacred and Safe*.

Prior to 2017, Cardinal DiNardo requested an evaluation of the *Sacred and Safe* program and ultimately determined that a new, more updated program was necessary. Implementation of this updated program, called *Circle of Grace*, was mandated to the parishes beginning in the 2017-18 catechetical year. This is a curriculum which originated in the diocese of Lincoln, NE and was subsequently adopted by many dioceses around the nation.

As Cardinal observes, the *Circle of Grace* program, “... is centered on helping children and young people understand their own sacredness, the sacredness of others, and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults. It also teaches a *culture of respect and faith* that goes beyond mere protection.” Since its introduction at St. Laurence in January 2018, the *Circle of Grace* program has facilitated a culture of respect and faith amongst our faith formation learners and their families by providing a common knowledge, tools and language to support this safety endeavor.

Circle of Grace Lessons will be presented in January of each year during the context of Unit 3 in the *Catechetical Framework for Lifelong Faith Formation* (CFLFF). This falls in the Morality Unit where we explore with our learners, *How Does Jesus Teach Us to Live a Moral Life?* Please refer to the *Elementary CCE Lesson Schedule* provided in your Catechist folders and also on-line on the St. Laurence Catechist webpage – www.stlaurence.org – (EDUCATION/ELEMENTARY CCE/CATECHIST/DOCUMENTS/LESSON SCHEDULE) to determine when the lessons will be taught in class.

The *Circle of Grace* program is an important initiative of the local Church and will require some preparation *beforehand* on your part so that we can deliver the best experience to our learners. Please read through everything below to make sure you understand the goals of this initiative. If you have any questions, be sure to let us know.

Thank you for your support of the *Circle of Grace* program! It is an essential part of our Children’s Faith Formation (CCE) program and we appreciate your support as we strive to provide the safest environment possible for all of the children and families of St. Laurence.

Catechist Preparation/Getting Started

In order to prepare your adult heart and mind to present this lesson to your learners begin by:

Watching the [CHARTER FOR THE PROTECTION OF MINORS](#) video and reviewing the [COG Quick Reference Guide for Facilitators/Catechists](#) even if you have implemented the *Circle of Grace* curriculum previously.

If you have never implemented the *Circle of Grace* lessons in class before, please listen to the [COG Training](#) audio. Even if you have taught *Circle of Grace* before, a refresher may be worthwhile, time permitting. While dating back to our first implementation of this program in 2018, it will provide you with the basics of understanding regarding the *Circle of Grace* program and also inform you of our [Reporting Responsibilities](#) should something be revealed by a child in class. Certain sections of relevance on the audio recording can be located as follows:

- **Intro/Background:** From :25 to 9:15
- **Training Content:** From: 35:40 to 1:09
- **Final Overview/Summary:** From 1:35:10 to 1:39

***Circle of Grace* CCE Lesson Schedule**

Please refer to the *Elementary Faith Formation (CCE) Lesson Schedule* on the St. Laurence Catechist webpage – <https://stlaurence.org/the-catechist> - to determine when the *Circle of Grace* lessons will be implemented in class. You will also receive your weekly Catechist Updates reminder email in advance containing the link to the upcoming lesson outline. Be reminded that these lessons are not optional, as they are a requirement of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, and should be followed as closely as possible by the facilitators/catechists.

In years past, certain grade-levels (i.e. K-3) have had multiple *Circle of Grace* lessons to implement over successive weeks in class. Note that for those grades, the *Circle of Grace* lessons **have now been consolidated from multiple lessons into a single content filled teaching**. Bear in mind that given the structure of our weekly CCE sessions, there is always a buffer session at the end of each curriculum Unit – i.e. the Review/Evaluate session - which can be used at the catechist's discretion to finish introducing new content from the Unit or to reinforce material already covered. Since you each know your learners and the pace of your class the best, it is up to your discretion to cover the *Circle of Grace* material over one or two sessions, so long as all of the content is covered. If necessary, you have the option of pushing the successive *Dignity of the Human Person* lesson (i.e. the final lesson in Unit #3) into the Unit review class time should you need two sessions to adequately cover the *Circle of Grace* material.

Key Points to Remember...

- For a visual on the Circle of Grace 'meditation' please go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x4OzF7-VtWA>
- The **lesson plans provided are 'scripted' and should be followed as closely as possible to ensure that all pertinent content is addressed**. While discussion/interaction is invited and of course encouraged, it should be focused and fruitful to the lesson content without preventing all of the material from being presented.
- ***Circle of Grace* is first introduced to our learners in Kindergarten**. There is no preschool counterpart to COG although many of the foundational concepts – i.e. God's

creation of each of us uniquely and un-repeatedly – are represented in PREK faith formation.

- **For Grades 1-5, all of the lessons assume the introduction of the *Circle of Grace* concepts in the *prior* grade level.** Since we may have some learners who have not participated in faith formation (CCE) previously, bear in mind that these concepts may be new to some of your students. In some instances, a review of the general *Circle of Grace* concepts – i.e. the meditation, prior year’s vocabulary, etc. – should be a part of your lesson for reinforcement and understanding. The necessity of a brief review can be ascertained from your learner’s responses in the EXPLORE section at the beginning of your lesson. Each *Circle of Grace* curriculum lesson includes vocabulary introduced in the prior and next grade-levels.
- **For Grades 1-3, there is a repetition of the concepts from year to year** in the lesson plans since these are important foundational concepts, definitions, etc. of the *Circle of Grace* program.
- **For every grade-level, an overall listing of supplies necessary has been provided and is also incorporated into the underlying *Circle of Grace* lesson.** This outline indicates what materials will be prepared/provided for you by Faith Formation Staff and available to you the first day of your COG lessons (i.e. a separate COG basket will be put in your class bin). Note that the underlying grade-level *Circle of Grace* content to be implemented in the EXPLAIN section of the weekly lesson outline can be found (a hard copy) in the grade-level folder placed in your class bin or on the [Catechist webpage](#) under *Circle of Grace Resources*.
- **Some lessons provide optional Lesson Extenders**, which are at your discretion to implement, time permitting.
- **The *Circle of Grace* curricula for Grades K-3 have been intentionally condensed into a single lesson format.** While one lesson technically, the K-3 grade-level lessons do contain a lot of material, *particularly* in the 3rd grade curriculum. The Grade 4 and 5 lessons were written originally and intended to be completed in one class session.

That said, only you as the class facilitator know the learners in your class best and can determine the pace in which the *Circle of Grace* material should be presented to them. Be reminded that each Unit has a Review/Evaluate session where no new content is introduced. We would suggest, then, that if the COG discussions in your class lap into a second class session the following week, that’s OK. Just present the COG material in back to back weeks and use the Review/Evaluate time at the end of the Morality Unit (i.e. Unit #3) to cover the last Unit lesson on the schedule – i.e. the *Dignity of the Human Person* lesson.

- **If a child is uncomfortable participating in *any* activity do not force the issue.** In the alternative, ask for volunteers to play the game or participate in the activity.
- **Grade 3 Facilitators/Catechists note:**

- **In the Grade 3 materials prepared for you, a *Pre-Assessment* will be provided for each student which can be used at the beginning of the lesson as a small group activity and class discussion starter to segue into the lesson materials. You could use this activity as an alternative to the EXPLORE questions in the weekly lesson outline.**
- **The Grade 3 COG lesson incorporates an activity using various ‘*Boundary Scenarios*’ where the children work in groups and then you will bring their small group work back to class discussion. Be sure to review these scenarios beforehand, so that you can respond appropriately within the context of the lesson. If you have any questions about what the answers to the activity questions are, please be sure to let us know.**

Child Safety Concerns

We understand that in the course of presenting the *Circle of Grace* Safe Environment lessons to your class sometimes children may reveal personal information or details about incidents that, in order to respect confidentiality, need to be handled *outside* of the group/classroom environment. This may range from information which is concerning but does not threaten the immediate safety of the child, to clear indications of abuse where the immediate safety of the child is of the utmost concern. In either case, it is information which should be shared with and documented by the program Coordinator, so that appropriate action can be taken where necessary.

If this happens in the classroom setting, tell the child, “Thank you for sharing that, _____. That sounds really important. I will talk to you about that later at _____ (i.e. the end of class, the break, etc.).” When this happens, contact the program Coordinator for assistance in speaking with the child.

Remember that the direct recipient of any such information is the responsible reporter in cases of suspected abuse. For a refresher, please go to Section 2.6 of the [St. Laurence Parish Health, Safety and Environment Policy and Procedures](#) which you reviewed and acknowledged at the beginning of the CCE year and the Archdiocesan [Safe Environment Reporting Requirements](#) for suspected abuse of a minor. These documents can also be found on the St. Laurence Catechist webpage at <https://stlaurence.org/the-catechist>.

While we do not anticipate having information of a reportable nature being shared by any of our students, please be sure to prepare yourself for the ‘what if’ scenario by *thoroughly reviewing and understanding the Circle of Grace Quick Reference Guide for Facilitators/Catechists*. In particular, be sure to review the suggestions on the action steps to take if something of a potentially reportable nature is shared and also on how to react to a child who may come forth with such information. It is important that we practice our ‘game face’ *before* we have any such encounter with a child in our care.

If you have any questions and/or concerns, please be sure to let us know. We are here to support you as you teach these lessons to your students. Thank you for helping us build a culture of respect and faith at St. Laurence!