

Diocese of Rockford Formation in Christian Chastity and Safe Environment Program

Overview

The *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* requires parishes and schools to provide formation to children in the areas of safety and the integrity of their person. The Diocese of Rockford is pleased to announce its new program for the children and youth of our Diocese: The Diocesan of Rockford Formation in Christian Chastity and Safe Environment Program for grades 1 through 8. The materials are comprehensive, thorough and meaningful, and are being used by educators in other dioceses with success. The program is mandatory for all Parish Religious Education programs and Catholic primary schools in the Diocese of Rockford. A separate program exists for high school aged youth.

The “Diocese of Rockford Formation in Christian Chastity and Safe Environment Program” consists of two parts – a Formation in Christian Chastity program to be taught in every grade from Grades 1 through 8, and a Safe Environment program taught in Grades 1, 3, 5 and 8.

The benefits of this new program are twofold. First, the program places a strong emphasis on the Church’s recognition that parents are the primary educators of their children, particularly in the areas of human intimacy. (See the section entitled, “A Parent-Centered Program,” which follows.) Throughout both the Formation in Christian Chastity portion of the program and the Safe Environment portion, parents are given a wealth of ideas and tools designed to assist them in fulfilling their task as primary educators of their children in these areas. Under this program the classroom will serve as reinforcement of the concepts taught in the home, always sensitive to the primary role to be played by parents.

Secondly, the program in its Chastity Formation portion more concretely answers the Bishops’ call “to provide formation to children in the area(s) of...the integrity of their person.” Put quite simply, when we faithfully instill in our children the Catholic faith, we are protecting them against abuse and teaching them how to respond should they be victimized.

The program the Diocese of Rockford offers is based in large measure on programs developed by the Diocese of Harrisburg (PA), which has received considerable positive attention nationally; and the Diocese of Peoria, which program itself was also an adaptation of the Diocese of Harrisburg program. Indeed, the majority of our program has been redacted from the programs of those two Dioceses. We have found that the additions the Diocese of Peoria made to the Harrisburg program will be useful and appropriate in our Diocese, and so those additions are included in our program. The Diocese of Rockford made additional modifications to the programs being used by the Diocese of Harrisburg and Peoria and the culmination of all this is the document before you now.

Introduction

The work of catechesis is the task of forming a disciple of our Lord Jesus Christ. For young people who have been brought to the Lord through baptism in their early years, this means a process of formation that accompanies them as they mature, both physically and spiritually. Programs of catechesis address the nature and demands of the Christian life. We find this special life of discipleship in the teaching of the Church, the sacraments, the moral life, our spiritual life and the wholesome integration of these diverse elements of faith by the person who believes in Christ. One of the key elements of that formation is the proper understanding of how we live out the virtue of chastity.

Formation in Chastity

The virtue of chastity is how we, as disciples, integrate the understanding of our faith and life, most especially in the areas that involve human sexuality. Young people will, at the appropriate times, need to understand the intricacies of the workings of the human body, as well as the moral and spiritual imperatives that flow from the teachings of Christ and a correct understanding of the natural moral law. This program is intended to help meet these needs in keeping with the mind of the Church.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, starting with paragraph 2331, introduces the section that discusses the virtue of chastity under the heading of the Sixth Commandment. Here the text starts with an understanding of human persons by way of their creation as male and female. We are by our very design capable of a unique form of love in the union of husband and wife. The very differences between a man and woman create a natural complementarity between them. Human sexuality is an essential component of the human person. Through the correct understanding and exercise of our sexuality we are able to develop a capacity to love and to generate new life. The *Catechism* continues with a reflection on the sixth commandment that prohibits adultery and places the teaching of the Decalogue within the context of the additional teachings of our Lord in the Gospels as they relate to the correct understanding of the exercise of human sexuality in thought, word and deed.

The *Catechism* speaks of a “vocation to chastity.” Two key words used in the description are self-mastery and integrity. Chastity, as a virtue, is a part of the cardinal virtue of temperance. The virtue of temperance seeks to guide the passions and appetites of the human person by the use of reason. Chastity, as a specific part of the general virtue of temperance, seeks to order the exercise of our human sexuality through the use of our reason, always guided and informed by faith. Chastity also involves a gift or grace from God to help us in our following of Christ. As self-mastery, chastity involves the ability of a person to deny himself in favor of a higher good. This self-denial is an essential component of love. Integrity means that we have a respect for the human person, both physical and moral. Our body is used in ways that are in keeping with the design given by our Creator. Morally, we direct all of our human actions in accord with the moral law and right reason.

The elements of this program do not simply look at how our human sexuality operates, nor do they simply offer a list of acceptable or unacceptable actions. Our goal is to provide an overview of how our spiritual, social, and physical lives are shaped by a truly Christian understanding of a life characterized by joyfully living the virtue of chastity. As a result, you will note that there are some general teachings on the mystery of God to help ground the teachings related to chastity. All things flow from our relationship with God, and by living out that relationship as “a being at once corporeal and spiritual” (CCC 362). Areas such as family, vocation, prayer, and a healthy environment for the development of young people all form a part of this approach.

A Parent-Centered Program

There are many ways in which the topics related to human sexuality have been presented. Many approaches focus on classroom instruction as the primary element or core of their program. In 1995 the Pontifical Council for the Family issued a document entitled “*The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*.” This document offers guidance on how the question of forming young people in these critical, yet sensitive areas of human sexuality, should be addressed. At the very heart of this document is the understanding that parents are the primary teachers of their children. This is especially true in the formation of children for a life of healthy and holy chastity. The questions around human sexuality require a certain maturity and development on the part of the child for a proper and healthy understanding. Those best situated to know their children and what they need are the very ones who have given them life and nurture them on a daily basis.

The document specifically notes a concern for the “years of innocence,” as Pope John Paul II referred to them. These are the years generally from the age of five to the onset of puberty. Children at this time are generally not overtly interested in sexual matters, and this natural innocence should not be disturbed. They do begin to develop a personal understanding of the distinctions of male and female, especially as they observe the roles of their parents. Parents are best situated to monitor the needs of their child at this stage of his or her life, and are able to provide appropriate and sufficient information for their healthy development and their safety, without going into great details that may not be age appropriate.

The “Formation in Christian Chastity” portion of the program has been developed with the understanding that most of the human and religious concepts that revolve around the topics of human sexuality, family, and moral living, are best and most meaningful when coming directly from the parents to their child. For the first four years, parents will be provided with letters that outline a series of teaching points along a particular theme that matches with the general development of their children. These teaching points will be reinforced in class with a “Chalk Talk” and activity. For grades five through eight, parents continue to receive letters and guides explaining the teaching points, and students receive basic classroom presentations focusing specifically on the moral teaching of the Church. However, the intimate details of human development are always reserved to parents, in keeping with the understanding outlined above regarding the differing developmental needs of children and the essential role of parents. Safe environment topics have been incorporated into some basic lessons plans for younger

children in an age-appropriate manner, and parents receive resources for additional support in this area.

Recommendations for Teachers and Catechists

In working with the Formation in Christian Chastity portion of this program, educators should understand the basic philosophy that is proper in this approach to education. The parent is the primary teacher. However, parish religious education programs and schools have a valuable role to play. They will assist with the preparation and support of parents; they also provide the moral teaching of the Church for the young people in their classrooms.

Educators do get questions from students that require responses. In such situations educators should ask themselves this question: What part of this child's question can be answered from the moral doctrines of the Church, and what part is personal developmental information that should be referred back to the parent? Essentially, specific questions about the physical development or strictly biological information are always appropriate for parents to deal with. If a child seems to have many unanswered questions in this area, the teacher or catechist might want to give the parent a call and advise them of the matter.

Safe Environment

The *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People* requires the parish and school to provide formation to children in the areas of safety and the integrity of their person. This program accomplishes this in two ways:

- (1) Parents will receive materials on teaching children about the issues of safety. This will take the form of information sheets entitled "Know the Rules" and "Q and A" developed by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a nationally recognized center on child safety,¹ "The Internet, Social Networking and Telephone Use," an "Warning Signs to Watch For" and "Rules to Protect Yourself;" and additional materials incorporated into the parents' letters.
- (2) Classroom lesson plans included with this program that teach children their role in maintaining a safe environment. The lesson plans are arranged for both younger and older elementary students.

¹ Copyright permission on their web site notes that these pages must be duplicated in their entirety and may not be sold. The information is provided as a service to the public and does not constitute an endorsement of our program.

Directions to Administrators

Prior to teaching the safe environment curriculum each year, the Parish and School must offer a meeting for parents. Attendance by parents at the parent session is optional, but offering the annual meeting is not. A single annual meeting can be scheduled to include parents of School students as well as parents of students in the Parish Religious Education program. The parent session shall address the following:

- General guidelines to assist parents in protecting their children from abuse;
- Appropriate boundaries for adults working with children;
- How parents can discuss personal safety issues with their children, including touching safety and Internet safety; and
- A review of the content of the school's safe environment curriculum for children.

Guest speakers, such as law enforcement officials, DCFS personnel, social workers, and counselors from Catholic Charities, may be enlisted to assist the Parish and School in making this presentation to parents. Parishes and Schools are required to document the date of the meeting and the estimated number of parents in attendance on a verification form (see "Documentation of Annual parent Meeting" form, to be completed by the Pastor, Principal and DRE, under the Forms Section of this Document), as well as retain copies of school newsletters or bulletin announcements promoting the annual parent meeting. See the "opt-out" forms to be used by Schools and Parishes in circumstances where a parent requests that his or her child attending the School or the Religious Education program not participate in a particular lesson or lessons (see separate "Opt Out" Forms for School and Parish Religious Education Programs, under the Forms Section of this Document). It should be emphasized in the parent meeting and in any other communications with parents that the safe environment curriculum is not sex education; rather, the curriculum is an abuse prevention program to help create and maintain a safe environment for children and young adults.

"Opt-Out" forms are to be used by Schools and Parishes in circumstances where a parent requests that his or her child attending the School or the Religious Education program not participate in a particular chastity or safe environment lesson or lessons (see separate "Opt Out" Forms for School and Parish Religious Education Programs, under the Forms Section of this Document). It should be emphasized in the parent meeting and in any other communications with parents that the safe environment curriculum is not sex education; rather, the curriculum is an abuse prevention program to help create and maintain a safe environment for children and young adults.

Teachers and catechists will complete classroom attendance sheets when the Lessons are taught, to calculate accurate numbers of those who are receiving from the safe environment program. Pastors, principals, and Directors of Religious Education will complete Parish/School tally sheets adding classroom attendance sheets to provide accurate numbers for the each parish and school. (See "Classroom Attendance Sheet" forms and "Tally Sheet" forms, under the Forms Section of this Document.)

Date of Completion: Schools are to complete the curriculum for all students on or before April 30 of each year. Any requests for extensions must be approved in advance by the Superintendent of Schools.

Reporting: The United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) periodically audits each diocese to ensure compliance with the principles and requirements outlined in the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. Consequently, schools must maintain appropriate documentation of their safe environment programs and procedures. Specifically, each school is to submit a report to the Diocese stating the number of students enrolled in the school, the number of students trained, the number of students who opted out of the curriculum at the request of their parents, and the number of students remaining to be trained. This report must be submitted on or before May 1 of each year (See Tally Sheet under the Forms Section of this Document).

Program Details

Details for the program are provided by grade level. They include both materials prepared for a classroom presentation and materials that are to be reproduced and provided to parents. A specific outline for each grade follows:

Grade 1

For the home:

Parent Letter on Formation in Christian Chastity Lesson: Creation

Information Sheets on God and prayers

Parent Letter on Safe Environment Lesson: Keeping Myself Safe

Information sheets from the Center for Missing and Exploited Children on safety¹

Opt Out Form

For the classroom:

Lesson Plan on Formation in Christian Chastity: Creation, God, the Holy Family

Lesson Plan on Safe Environment: Keeping Myself Safe

Grade 2

For the home:

Parent Letter on Formation in Christian Chastity Lesson: Every Human Person is a Child of God

Opt Out Form

For the classroom:

Lesson Plan on Formation in Christian Chastity: Every Human Person is a Child of God

Grade 3

For the home:

Parent Letter on Formation in Christian Chastity Lesson: Mystery of the Triune God and the Human Family of God

Information sheet on the Internet and social networking

Parent Letter on Safe Environment Lesson: God gave us a conscience to know when something is good or bad

Information sheets from the Center for Missing and Exploited Children on safety

Information on Warning Signs to Watch For and Rules to Protect Yourself

Opt Out Form

For the classroom:

Lesson Plan on Formation in Christian Chastity: Mystery of the Triune God and the Human Family of God

Lesson Plan on Safe Environment: God gave us a conscience to know when something is good or bad

Grade 4

For the home:

Parent Letter on Formation in Christian Chastity Lesson: The Mystery of God and Our Personal Relationship to God

Information sheet on the Internet and social networking

Opt Out Form

For the classroom:

Lesson Plan on Formation in Christian Chastity: The Mystery of God and Our Personal Relationship to God

Grade 5

For the home:

Parent letter on Formation in Christian Chastity Lessons: God Made Us to Know the Truth

Information sheets on the Internet, social networking and telephone use

Parent letter on Safe Environment Lesson: Wise Decisions/Being Prudent

Information sheets from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children on safety

Opt Out Form

For the classroom:

Two lesson plans for Formation in Christian Chastity: God Made Us to Know the Truth

Lesson Plan on Safe Environment: Wise Decisions/Being Prudent

Grade 6

For the home:

Parent Letter on Formation in Christian Chastity Lessons: God Made Us To Love and To Be Loved

Information sheets on the Internet, social networking and telephone use

Opt Out Form

For the classroom:

Two lesson plans for Formation in Christian Chastity: God Made Us To Love and To Be Loved

Grade 7

For the home:

Parent Letter on Formation in Christian Chastity Lessons: God Made Us to be Happy In Him

Information sheets on the Internet, social networking and telephone use

Opt Out Form

For the classroom:

Two lesson plans for Formation in Christian Chastity: God Made Us to be Happy In Him

Grade 8

For the home:

Parent Letter on Formation in Christian Chastity Lessons: Love and Responsibility

Information sheets on the Internet, social networking and telephone use

Parent Letter on Safe Environment Lesson: Our Dignity as Children of God

Information sheets from the Center for Missing and Exploited Children on safety

Opt Out Form

For the classroom:

Two lesson plans one Formation in Christian Chastity: Love and Responsibility

Lesson plan on Safe Environment: Our Dignity as Children of God

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