

Circle of Grace

Safe Environment Training

Love and Theology of the Body

Grade 12 Lesson

Philosophy

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 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 young people 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 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, as they strive to provide a safe and protective environment, hold the responsibility to help young people understand and respect their own dignity and that of others. A truly safe and protective environment is one where 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 Curriculum different from other safety programs?

According to research, one in four girls and one in seven boys will be sexually abused by age eighteen.¹ Many protection programs focus on “stranger danger,” however, up to ninety percent of the time the perpetrator is a relative, family friend or other person known to the child/young person. Circle of Grace goes beyond just protection by helping young people understand the sacredness of who they are and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults.

Goal of the Circle of Grace Curriculum - Grades K-12

The goal of the *Circle of Grace* curriculum is to educate and empower children and young people to actively participate in a safe environment for themselves and others.

Objectives of the Circle of Grace Curriculum - Grades K-12

- Children/Young People will understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
- Children/Young People will be able to describe the Circle of Grace which God gives each of us.
- Children/Young People will be able to identify, discern and maintain appropriate physical, emotional, spiritual, and sexual boundaries.
- Children/Young People will be able to identify all types of boundary violations.
- Children/Young People will demonstrate how to take action if any boundary is threatened or violated.

¹ www.usccb.org, or <http://nccanch.acf.hhs.gov>

Grade 12 Leader Guidelines

- A **Leader** is defined as clergy (priest or deacon) school administrator, director of religious education/formation, teacher, or catechist who has been trained to teach the *Circle of Grace* Curriculum.
- Every leader should read the Philosophy, Goals and Key Concepts to better understand and prepare to teach the *Circle of Grace*. The Key Concepts review the essence of the curriculum, that God is always present in our *Circle of Grace* because He desires an intimate relationship with His children.
- The time frame may vary depending on size of class, age of young people, amount of discussion, etc.
- Vocabularies with definitions are intended for the leader. The explanation of vocabulary should be integrated within the context of the lessons to assist the young people in their understanding of the *Circle of Grace* Program. A master vocabulary list of the *Circle of Grace* Curriculum is in the administration/director section. The pertinent vocabulary is listed in each lesson.
- Leader's instructions for each lesson are italicized. Non-italicized text needs to be presented by the leader to the students.
- If possible, it is always "best practice" to have two adults in the room during the lesson due to the sensitive nature of the material.
- The 9-12 curriculum is formatted to be used in two ways:
 - ✓ The traditional way: lessons taught to the identified grade.
The lesson for grade 12 is only to be taught to seniors.
 - ✓ The second way: select alternate lesson or retreat to teach the class or group.
Leaders will need to keep a record of what lesson is taught each year.
- Ongoing reinforcement of the concepts is encouraged throughout the year. Hopefully, the language of *Circle of Grace* will become a part of a positive culture of respect, care, and faith that will help protect our young people and help them to know what to do when they feel unsafe.
- Your School Administrator, Religious Education Director, or Youth Minister Director will be sending out a letter to all parents regarding *Circle of Grace*. Lesson specific parent information should be handed out as directed. Parent information is included in the Curriculum. Every parish/school is encouraged to provide parent education opportunities both to inform parents about the *Circle of Grace* curriculum and to foster greater communication in families.
- Evaluations for each grade are to be completed and returned to the School Administrator or the Director of Religious Education/Formation. The evaluations will be used to complete the Summary Evaluation that is used for ongoing improvement of the curriculum and for the audit records.

Summary of the Key Concepts of “Circle of Grace”



God gives each of us a Circle of Grace (see below) where He is always Present:

*Raise your hands above your head, then bring your outstretched arms slowly down.
Extend your arms in front of you and then behind you
embrace all of the space around you
slowly reach down to your feet.
Knowing that God is in this space with you. This is your Circle of Grace; you are in it.*

God is Present because He desires a relationship with us.

- God is with us when we are happy and sad. God does not cause bad things to happen to us. He loves us very much.
- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused (unsafe).
- Having faith may not take away all of life’s struggles. It is because of these struggles, God promised to always be present; providing guidance and comfort in our time of need

God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace

- Our feelings help us know about ourselves and the world around us.
- God helps us know what belongs in our *Circle of Grace* by allowing us to experience peace, love or contentment when something or someone good comes into our *Circle of Grace*.

God helps us know what does not belong in our Circle of Grace

- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused (unsafe).
- The Holy Spirit prompts (alerts) us that something does not belong in our *Circle of Grace* by giving us “a funny or uncomfortable feeling” that something is not safe. This feeling is there because God wants us to be safe.

God helps us know when to ask for help from someone we trust.

- God gives us several trusted adults, in addition to our parents, to talk to about our worries, concerns or “funny/ uncomfortable feelings” so they can help us be safe. If a parent or trusted adult is not available or unable to help us, God wants us to go to another trusted adult until we get the help needed to be safe.

Love and the Theology of the Body

Sometimes young people reveal personal information or details about incidents that, in order to respect confidentiality, need to be handled outside of the group environment. If this happens, tell the young person, "Thank you for sharing that, _____. That sounds really important. I will talk to you about that later (at the end of class, at the break, as soon as humanly possible, etc.)." When this happens, be sure you talk to the young person at your first opportunity and alert the administration. Remember that you are the responsible reporter in cases of suspected abuse.

This lesson complements the following Catholic teachings:

- Analyze and profess belief in the Creed
- Church teachings revealed in the Creed applies in our daily lives
- Human relationships are intended to be experiences of Divine Love
- Personal covenant with God
- Live responsibly as fully initiated members of the Church
- Discipleship is our call to holiness
- The relationship between the love of God, our love of self, and our love of others
- The image of God is in ourselves and others

Lesson Objectives

Young People will be able to:

1. Understand the beauty of God's plan for their life and to interpret the gift of their sexuality within this larger plan
2. View any freely chosen violation of God's plan as sinful and contrary to their dignity as human persons

Materials Needed

1. Summary of Key Concepts of *Circle of Grace* handout for each student (front of lesson)
2. Copy of one of the three principle handouts A, B, C for each young person to use in small group discussion (end of lesson)
3. Copy of the "Theology of the Body" Handout (end of lesson)
4. Christopher West workbook "An Introduction to the Theology of the Body: Discovering the Master Plan for Your Life" (optional resource)
5. Each student must bring to class two to three magazines in preparation for this lesson. The magazines need to be approved by the leader/teacher.
6. How Healthy are your Relationships Handout (see the end lesson)
7. Large index cards with one of the principles A, B, or C written on them.
8. Props for skits.

Opening Prayer

Leader calls class to prayer by asking youth to quiet down and join in the Sign of the Cross.
Then say together,

God,
we ask for Your guidance and a little more:
guidance in relationships,
guidance in decisions,
guidance in love,
and guidance in worshiping You.
Amen.

Getting Started

Review (Distribute and review the Summary of Key Concepts of *Circle of Grace* Handout.)

It is important that the youth understand the relationship between the Circle of Grace and the Circle of Virtue. The Circle of Grace is always present and never leaves us. Our Circle of Virtue is our response to our Circle of Grace and can change due to our free will.

Circle of Grace: The love and goodness of God that always surrounds me and others.

Circle of Virtue: Our response to the invitation of God's grace by cultivating goodness and virtue in our lives.

Vocabulary

Review the following vocabulary.

1. **Freely Chosen Violations:** Every person is responsible for those violations they freely choose and know are wrong. We should never blame or accuse persons who are victims of abuse and manipulated or exploited in unequal relationships.
2. **Moral Responsibility:** As we grow into mature adults, we must take greater responsibility for protecting ourselves and others from violations of God's plan for our spiritual, sexual, and moral lives.
3. **Survivor:** A person who not only lives through but thrives despite abuse, affliction, or adversity.
4. **Victim:** A person who has suffered injury/harm (physical, sexual, or emotional) by forces beyond his or her control and not of his or her personal responsibility.

Introduction: Many of you may be going off to college soon and will, for the first time, be on your own. This will be an exciting time, but it will also be filled with difficult choices. Will you live up to your Catholic values on sexuality and marriage or will you choose what popular culture says about sexuality? Will you treat your sexuality casually or with the great respect it deserves? Will you believe the lie that what you "do" with your body does not impact who you are

as a person? Today we will discuss the principles of St. John Paul II's document "Theology of the Body" that will help you think more about some of these questions.

Choose from one of the two activities.

Activity 1: Applying Principles to the Popular Culture

- *Divide into 3 groups.*
- *Give each group a principal (A, B, or C) handout (see the end of lesson) and have them work on the identified task.*

A. Principle: We are to use things and love persons.

Share examples of how people in our society tend to use persons and love things. (*Pornography, advertisements promoting products that make you lovable*)

B. Principle: Ultimate happiness comes from love. We were made for and to love.

Share examples where in our society we tend to pursue other things as our ultimate good, especially money, power, fame/popularity, pleasure, knowledge, etc. What effect does this have on society?

(*Cheating on exams to increase your GPA to get into a prestigious college, needing the latest electronics to be popular, presenting yourself on social media differently than who you really are*)

C. Principle: Love is a sincere gift of self. It is the deliberate choice to give of ourselves – to spend our lives to the last drop in service of God and others.

Share examples of what "love" looks like in our modern world, in popular movies, social media, streaming shows on cable etc.

(*Media portrays love as casual, it is a current "feeling" and not a lasting commitment*)

- *Have class reassemble back to the large group and bring their handouts.*
- *Discuss each principle separately.*
- *Begin by allowing each of the three groups to share about the principle they brainstormed. Allow other students to comment on and add to the discussion.*
- *Instruct the young people to write down key discussion points for each principle.*

Activity 2: Actions Speak Louder Than Words

- *Divide the young people into 3 groups.*
- *Give each group an index card with one of the three principles on it (A, B, or C)*

A. Principle: We are to use things, and love persons.

Share examples of how people in our society tend to use persons and love things.

(Pornography, advertisements promoting products that make you lovable)

B. Principle: Ultimate happiness comes from love. We were made for and to love.

Share examples where in our society we tend to pursue other things as our ultimate good, especially money, power, fame/popularity, pleasure, knowledge, etc. What effect does this have on society?

(Cheating on exams to increase your GPA to get into a prestigious college, needing the latest electronics to be popular, presenting yourself on social media differently than who you really are)

C. Principle: Love is a sincere gift of self. It is the deliberate choice to give of ourselves – to “spend our lives to the last drop in service of God and others.

Share examples of what “love” looks like in our modern world, in popular movies, social media, streaming shows on cable, etc.

(Media portrays love as casual, it is a current “feeling” and not a lasting commitment)

- *Tell them to create a dramatic scene/skit that depicts this principle.*
- *Have them choose props for their skit.*
- *The skit should be no more than a few minutes long*
- *Have the skits performed in front of the other groups*
- *Ask the young audience to guess the principle that this skit is portraying.*

Large Group Discussion

The goal of this section is to discuss the following principles D, E and F. Discussion questions and possible answers are provided for each principle. These principles outline married and single life. It is important to reinforce that all, married or single, are called to give of themselves to others. The principles are on the handout.

D. Principle: “The body language of Love – God wrote his vision for love right into the fabric of our bodies.” Neither man nor woman is complete without the other. We are literally made for each other. Each was created and made to be given to the other. Husband and wife are called to a permanent, committed “communion”, a mutual self-giving that touches upon every aspect of life. What is expressed physically in the sexual embrace (a complete unreserved gift of self) is echoed in every other aspect of life where they give of themselves to the other and to their children.

Q. How do husband and wife show care and love for each other in non-sexual ways? How do they show care and love for their children?

Possible Answers: *Caring for the needs of the other, sacrificing for the sake of the other, praying for the good of the other. Some examples include doing the dishes, taking out the trash, reading to children at night, working hard to provide for the family, providing emotional support, etc. "It is not about doing Great Things. It is about doing small things with Great LOVE." – St. Teresa of Calcutta*

E. Principle: "The fundamental vocation of every human being is to live in loving relationship with others." For single persons, this means to give of themselves to others (non-sexually) just as husband and wife give of themselves to each other and to their children. Moreover, because priests, religious and other single persons are not primarily responsible for the care and well-being of spouse and children, they are uniquely free to give of themselves to others in a radical way.

Q. What examples can you think of where priests, religious/consecrated, or single persons give of themselves?

Possible Answers:

Have flexible schedules to meet the community needs, more time for prayer.

Review:

F. Principle: Unmasking the Counterfeits – Looking for Love in All the Wrong Places² "If given the choice between a real million-dollar bill and a counterfeit, which would you prefer? The real one, of course. But what if you were raised in a culture that incessantly bombarded you with propaganda convincing you that the counterfeit was the real thing?" This is precisely the situation in which we find ourselves – trying to come of age in a modern world so profoundly confused about the meaning and purpose of sexuality.

Q. How does society try to confuse us with false images of real love?

Media bombards us with constant messages that portrays false images as real love and happiness (you need a perfect body, money, possessions to be happy and be lovable. Consider giving some examples to illustrate this point). Because we see it over and over, we tend to be immune to the false message.

Activity

1. Direct the students individually or in a group to find two images of false love and two images of authentic love in their magazines to share with the class.
2. Have each student or group present their images and share why they thought they represent false or authentic love.
3. Write the examples on the board.

² West, Christopher. *Introduction to the Theology of the Body: Discovering God's Glorious Plan for your Life*. West-Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2004, 3-4.

Summarize Points

- Desperate for true “communion” and the experience of being loved (for which we were made) we are tempted to settle for the cheap counterfeit that our society seeks to sell us. Even if “IT FEELS LIKE LOVE” ... it does not last!
- God’s plan for the body is union, communion, marriage: this brings life.
- Satan’s counter plan for the body is separation, fracture, isolation: this brings death.
- Marriage and the family are “placed in the center of the great struggle between good and evil, between life and death, between love and all that is opposed to love”.
- Any use of the gift of our sexuality outside of the permanent, loving, life-giving relationship of marriage violates our dignity and the very meaning and purpose of our sexuality. It is communion without commitment.
- Any effort by us or others to exploit our sexuality for “use” rather than “love” is a violation of our dignity and the dignity of the other.
- We must make choices which respect and defend our dignity and personhood especially against those who would violate, manipulate, and victimize us.

Identify/Discuss:

- What are some common examples of these violations: (*Write on board/flip paper*)
 - Relationships where there is unequal power and it is used in a manipulative or abusive way. Differences in power may include age, knowledge, position, authority, social status, etc.
 - When social media, cell phones, or computers are used to threaten, intimidate, or gossip about persons.
 - Relationships where there is secrecy and isolation. Again, God made us for healthy relationships, not these fake counterfeits. We’re made to give of ourselves, not to be manipulated and threatened. We’re made for better than this.

Identify/Discuss:

- What to do when these violations happen to you or someone you know? (*Write on board/flip paper*)
 - Tell someone who can help. Talk to someone you trust – a parent, a professional counselor, teacher, or other adults who will listen and offer help.
 - When someone takes advantage of you, you can take yourself out of the situation. You can free yourself from unhealthy relationships.
 - Be honest and admit that something bad happened to you. Do not hide the secret anymore.

- You may have normal feelings of fear, anxiety, depression, or anger. Talk with a counselor and learn how to deal with these feelings.
- Learn to recognize the behavior and situations that can get you in trouble. Avoid or get away from abusive people and negative environments.
- Learn how to create and maintain healthy boundaries.

Activity: How healthy are your relationships (*see the end lesson*)

- *Distribute the “How healthy are your relationships?” handout.*
- *Allow time for the young people to complete the handout.*
- *Ask the young people to think of any statement requiring them to give a response of False.*
- *Encourage them to review the areas where there was “False” response with one of their “trusted adults”.*

Conclude by saying:

According to St. John Paul II, we were made *for* love, and we were made *to* love, to give of ourselves in powerful and Godly ways. We must begin to build a culture of love which is free of abusive and manipulative relationships, which respect our freedom, our integrity, and our infinite value as persons made in the image and likeness of God. We are loved.

Closing Prayer

**God help me slow down
 and be present to Your everlasting love.
 Help me have REAL conversations with You
 that guide and heal my brokenness.
 Cultivate in my heart Your truth
 and help me respond to Your Grace.
 Give me courage to reject the lie
 that You are a “distant” God.
 Bless me with the gift of discernment,
 knowing Your compassion and love is not relative,
 but eternal.
 Your greatest desire from me
 is my sincere “yes”.
 Amen**

Opening Prayer

God,
we ask for Your guidance and a little more:
guidance in relationships,
guidance in decisions,
guidance in love,
and guidance in worshiping You.
Amen.

Closing Prayer

God help me slow down
and be present to Your everlasting love.
Help me have REAL conversations with You
that guide and heal my brokenness.
Cultivate in my heart Your truth
and help me respond to Your Grace.
Give me courage to reject the lie
that You are a “distant” God.
Bless me with the gift of discernment,
knowing Your compassion and love is not relative,
but eternal.
Your greatest desire from me
is my sincere “yes”.
Amen

Love and Theology of the Body Handout A

Principle A: We are to use things and love persons.

Task: Brainstorm examples where our society seems to get these two things backwards – where we tend to use persons and love things.

Love and Theology of the Body Handout B

Principle B: Ultimate happiness comes from love. We were made for and to love.

Task: Brainstorm the examples of the kinds of things that most people seem to think will bring ultimate happiness, money, power, etc. What effect does this have on our society?

Love and Theology of the Body Handout C

Principle C: Love is a sincere gift of self. It is the deliberate choice to give of ourselves, to “spend our lives to the last drop” in service of God and others.

Task: Brainstorm what “love” looks like in our modern world, in popular movies, Streaming Shows on Cable, Internet/Social Media Sites etc.

ST. JOHN PAUL II THEOLOGY OF THE BODY

A. We are to use things and love persons.

B. Ultimate happiness comes from love.

C. Love is a sincere gift of self.

**D. The Body Language of Love: God wrote His vision of love
right into the fabric of our bodies.**

**E. The fundamental vocation of every human being is to live
in loving relationship with others.**

**F. Unmasking the Counterfeits: Looking for
love in all the wrong places...
But it feels like love...**

How Healthy Are Your Relationships?

Choose a relationship in your life. Put a “T” (true) or an “F” (false) by each of the following statements. These actions can be in person or using technology (texting or social media).

- Never embarrasses you or puts you down
- Shows respect by their words and actions
- Respects your freedom to choose your friends.
- You feel comfortable disagreeing with them.
- You feel comfortable saying, “No,” to a request from them.
- Never ask you to keep a secret that makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Respects your property.
- Respects your privacy.
- Respects your right to say “no”
- Never physically interacts with you in a way that hurts or makes you confused.
- You feel safe and free from pressure when you are around them.
- Honors and respects your values and opinions.
- Does not repeat confidential information with others without your permission.

Works Cited:

West, Christopher. *Introduction to the Theology of the Body: Discovering God's Glorious Plan for Your Life*. West-Chester, PA: Ascension Press, 2004 (Copyright permission granted). (An updated edition of the workbook is titled *An Introduction to the Theology of the Body: Discovering the Master Plan for Your Life*.)

Grade 12 Evaluation

Date _____

Parish/School _____ City _____

Leader _____ Number of young people in class _____

Each grade's curriculum was designed to meet the overall program objectives.

Please check if whether the objectives of the *Circle of Grace* Program were met.

1. YES _____ NO _____ Young People understand they are created by God and live in the love of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
2. YES _____ NO _____ Young People will be able to describe the *Circle of Grace* which God gives each of us.
3. YES _____ NO _____ Young People will be able to identify the six Theology of the Body Principles.
4. YES _____ NO _____ Young People will be able to identify and maintain appropriate boundaries.
5. YES _____ NO _____ Young People can identify types of boundary violations.
6. YES _____ NO _____ Young People can demonstrate how to take action if a boundary is threatened or violated.

Please list what worked well and any resources that you would like to share with others (use back if necessary).

Please list any suggestions that would improve lessons (use back if necessary).

Return to your School Administrator, Director of Religious Education, or Director of Youth Ministry.