



ARCHDIOCESE of BALTIMORE

September 6, 2023

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Since 1986, the Archdiocese of Baltimore has been committed to providing our children and their parents/guardians a holistic catechesis for family life. According to the curriculum updated in 2011, “This catechesis includes an understanding of the call to live a chaste life, developing an understanding of the dignity and value of all human life”.

In accordance with the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*, since 2002, safe environment training for children and education about child abuse prevention has been integrated into the Family Life curriculum in our parishes and Archdiocesan schools. Experts recognize this kind of training as an important component of keeping children and young people safe.

The goals of safe environment education included in the Catechesis for Family Life in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are: to encourage children/youth to speak freely and frequently with their parents and other trusted adults; to teach children/youth to express their feelings appropriately; to teach children/youth that abuse is never the fault of the child/youth.

The Department of Catholic Schools and the Institute for Evangelization, in consultation with the Office of Child and Youth Protection have approved Loyola Press’ ***Growing with God: Safe and Sacred*** as the new Family Life Curriculum. The themes of this Family Life Curriculum include: social-emotional learning, child protection, human development and reproduction, and morality. *Below you will find additional information about the lessons:*

This curriculum will be taught to all students in Kindergarten through Grade 8. There are six lessons that will be taught over the course of the school year. The following five lessons will be taught at the beginning of Unit 2 in the Religion Curriculum for the Archdiocese of Baltimore:

- **Lesson 1: God Creates Us** helps students build confidence
- **Lesson 2: Boundaries** helps students understand appropriate boundaries
- **Lesson 3: Friendship and Bullying** helps students understand the importance of building healthy relationships
- **Lesson 5: Digital Discipleship (Digital Safety)** helps students build safe and healthy habits online
- **Lesson 7: Trust and Secrets** helps students recognize people in their lives who are worthy of their trust

The final lesson, titled **Lesson 6: My Sacred Self** will be taught to students in the spring of 2024 during the Morality and Family Life Unit for each grade level (K-8). A child’s understanding

of the following concepts taught in **Lesson 6: My Sacred Self** develops as the child moves from one grade to another. This lesson:

- helps students understand that God created us, men and women, body and soul, in His own image;
- helps students recognize their responsibility to care for themselves and to treat each other with dignity;
- helps students not only to recognize, but value the differences between boys and girls who grow up to be men and women with the potential to create new life.

You may have noticed that Lesson 4 is not included. Teachers in the Archdiocese of Baltimore are required to skip Lesson 4 because the lesson emphasizes the concept of “Stranger Danger”. We do not teach this concept to students at the recommendation of national and local experts, who explain that focusing on strangers creates a dangerous sense of safety with adults in their community. Statistics tell us that 90% of harm to children is done by someone the child knows and trusts. Instead, students are taught how to identify a safe adult by their actions, which applies to all adults in their lives.

Principals will send parents a link to the At-Home Parent Guides for each grade level, upon request, which parents may review. The At-Home Parent Guides provide an opportunity for parents to learn what is being taught in school and can help parents continue the conversation at home. After examining the materials, if you have any concerns about your child participating, please contact your child’s principal.

Sincerely,



Dr. Donna Hargens, Superintendent of Department of Catholic Schools



Edward Herrera, Executive Director, Institute for Evangelization



Jerri Burkhardt, Director Office of Child and Youth Protection