

Safe Environment Coordinator's Talk at all Masses - 4/13/19 & 4/14/19

Good day,

We are Juan Jesus and Deacon Subby Enzolera. We have both been parishioners of St. Bernadette for many years and have seen our children and grandchildren attend St. Bernadette school and PRE. We have both served many ministries here at the parish but a couple of the most important are in Safe Environment. We both serve as Safe Environment coordinators for our parish, with Lynn Schultz being the school coordinator. Also, we are both certified Safe Environment trainers in our Archdiocese. As this month has been designated as National Child Abuse Prevention month, we would like to talk to you about the great concern we and Lynn share with our Archdiocese and Fr. Harry on creating a Safe Environment at all times for our children.

After the sexual abuse crisis in 2002, the church created a charter where the Bishops mandated that each diocese implement programs to address the issue, including Adult Safe Environment training and Safe Environment Awareness for Children.

Our Archdiocese acted immediately to develop and implement two programs in 2004. First is The Circle of Care Program which must be taken by any adult, volunteer or staff, entrusted with the care of children and youth in the name of the Church. Here adults not only learn what are appropriate behaviors and actions for themselves and other adults serving in any ministry of our church but also how to be observant of the children and their surroundings in order to identify any existing or potential child abuse situations, and then how to report any concerns appropriately.

Second is The Circle of Grace Program, which is taught to grades K through 12 in all Catholic schools and PRE programs. Here, children learn about safe boundaries within the three different Circles of Grace. They also learn who are the trusted adults that they can turn to when they feel one of these boundaries have been violated. These same programs are also being used by over 40 diocese throughout the United States.

These programs provide the basis in providing our children with a Safe Environment. A place where they can feel safe, physically and emotionally. A surrounding they deserve. But our children's safety is all our responsibility. I ask that if you have the privilege of working with our children in any capacity; accompanying them on field trips, coaching, helping in the classroom, don't look at the requirement to be Safe Environment trained as a punishment or hardship. Look at it as an opportunity to participate in providing that caring, safe place for all our children and as a way to honor their trust in us.

As you leave church today pick up a small pamphlet from the Archdiocese entitled 'Word of Honor'. Take it home with you and as you read through it you will see how we are all working together to provide this Safe Environment for our children. And remember, protecting our children is the responsibility of all of us. On behalf of the children we minister to daily, we sincerely thank you for all you do for them.