

This fall our school of religion will include a special unit to help children protect themselves against sexual abuse. The program endorsed by our diocese divides the children into age groups. We will begin with students from seventh grade through high school. We are inviting parents to a meeting next Saturday night, and our youth will meet 3 times in September. I have previewed the videos for this program, and I think they're excellent. We are offering this not just for students in the confirmation program, but for our all young people.

The series stresses that most adults are trustworthy. Kids don't have to be afraid that every adult will harm them. But children should know about boundaries. There are physical boundaries such as who can touch you, how much they can touch you, and where they can touch you. There are emotional boundaries such as how close you feel to a person, how much time you spend with a person, and what information you share with a person. And there are behavioral boundaries, such as what you will do and what you won't do. The youth are taught how to recognize boundaries, and what to do if someone tries to violate them – how to distance themselves from a potential abuser, and how to say no.

If any of our youth have been abused, our series will encourage those victims to speak up. It is very difficult for a young person to talk about this. Abusers are very good at tricking kids into thinking the abuse is their fault, that no one will believe them if they speak up, that their friends will embarrass them, or that their parents won't love them anymore. It's so hard for young victims to tell someone else, that many of them go months or years without reporting sexual abuse. Some never do. They carry the emotional scars with them for a lifetime. But it is important for victims to speak up. It helps them. It stops the abuser. And it protects other children from suffering the same way.

This program is being offered by our diocese for the first time this fall. I'm happy that we can be part of this for the sake of our kids.

The verses of today's responsorial psalm come from the same one we sang last week, "Taste and see the goodness of the Lord." The verses this week include some comforting words, especially for victims of abuse: "I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. When the poor one called out, the Lord heard, and from all his distress he saved him." God loves each one of us, no matter what we have done, and no matter what someone else has done to us. As a church we are the body of Christ and we aim to act like Christ in defense of those who cannot defend themselves.

Before the age of 18, one in four girls and one in eight boys will be sexually abused. We have a responsibility to protect them. If you think it can't happen your family, it can. I'd like to encourage parents and children to participate in all the programs of our school of religion this fall, so we can build a stronger and wiser church.