

Next Saturday night we will hold a meeting of parents to introduce our Personal Safety Program for children from preschool through 6th grade. The sexual abuse of children is more prevalent in our society and its consequences are more serious than people realized. Those abused as children grow up with emotional disturbances that affect their abilities to form relationships, hold jobs and behave in a sexually appropriate manner.

Some of our leaders in the Catholic Church are guilty of committing crimes against children and protecting the perpetrators rather than the victims. The recent page scandal in Washington DC shows how easy it can be for other people in authority to have access to youth and take advantage of them.

In recent years our diocese has educated its personnel in the chancery, our parishes and our schools to help prevent abuse. This is the first year our diocese is training children to help them recognize what kind of touching is right and wrong. Earlier this fall, I addressed this issue when we began our program for children in junior high and high school. We are now about to begin the training of younger children, and it is very important that their parents attend our meeting next Saturday night.

The protection of children happens in a variety of ways. They learn right and wrong not just from our Personal Safety Program, but from all their religious education. They learn about the beliefs we hold, they prepare for and receive the sacraments of our church, they learn how to pray, and how to make good judgments. Of course, we expect that all these matters will be reinforced at home. As we've learned again from several school shootings in our nation over recent weeks, we need to protect children, and they need to learn how to deal with anger. They learn most of that from adults.

All of us here have a responsibility toward children, no matter how old we are, and whether or not we are parents of grade school kids. If you want children to learn appropriate sexual behavior, we have to behave appropriately. If you want children to practice religion, we have to practice it. If you want children to refrain from violence, we have to find peaceful solutions to our problems. If you want children to value education, we have to devote ourselves to it as well.

In the coming weeks, we will offer adult education on the bible on 3 Monday nights. You want children to know you take education seriously? Come and participate. You want children to develop a sense of right and wrong? Come to our penance service next month and confess your sins before God. You want children to know they can make a difference in our society? Vote in the election on November 7.

The refrain from the responsorial psalm today is, "Fill us with your love, O Lord, and we will sing for joy." This psalm prays for wisdom and gladness. If we seek wisdom of heart by making time for education, prayer and citizenship, we will have gladness, and our children will be safe.