

# Introduction

Developing of the Circle of Grace Program has been a passionate journey for all involved. The Archdiocesan committee was brought together by the mandate of the U.S. Bishops' Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People. The charter mandates that each diocese must have a safe environment program for children and youth which includes an audit to ensure compliance.

The committee set a goal early on that we wanted a program rich in our Catholic faith and clinically sound. The committee knew the program needed to first meet the standards of the U. S. Bishop's audit, but we also wanted much more for our children and youth. Thus, we decided that our main commitment was above and beyond meeting the needs of the U.S. Bishops' audit; we want to ensure the safety, well-being, and spiritual formation of our children and youth. With these goals in mind, we have developed a program which includes teaching a culture of respect and faith that goes beyond mere protection. This program helps children and young people understand their own sacredness, the sacredness of others, and how to seek help through their relationships with trusted adults. Consequently, the Circle of Grace concept was born.

What is the Circle of Grace? It is a metaphor for the love and goodness of God that surrounds us and all others. It is the recognition that God is with us always and is there to help us in difficult situations. Through the Circle of Grace Program, adults assist children and youth to recognize God's love by understanding that each of us lives and moves within a Circle of Grace. Your Circle of Grace encompasses who you are in your body and including your senses. It holds your very essence in mind, heart, soul, and sexuality.

This holistic concept allows children and youth to identify uncomfortable situations long before any inappropriate touch may occur. Those who molest children start to groom them by manipulating them to break rules and keep secrets such as consuming alcohol and viewing pornography. This manipulation usually occurs before any attempt at inappropriate touch. The Circle of Grace program helps children and youth to identify early on when they are uncomfortable with a situation and includes ways to seek the help of a trusted adult. The Circle of Grace PreK-12 Program goals and objectives are met in all grades. The program is self-contained for each grade with everything needed to teach the material.

One of the benefits of the Circle of Grace program is that the instructors also have the opportunity to ponder their own belief and experience of God's presence in their lives. During a training session an operating room nurse, who was a catechist, asked the following question: "So Jesus is right with us in the operating room?" Her prior faith formation taught this belief but the Circle of Grace Program finally allowed her to understand God's love in a very visual and real way for her life.

**What would our world look like if we all lived believing and truly knowing that God is that close?**