

Preface

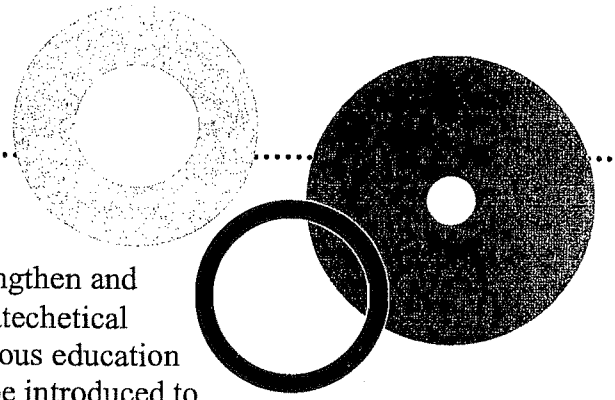
The foundation for *Circles of Care* is rooted in our faith as Catholic Christians: we are created in God's image and likeness, we share a common dignity as human persons, God's declaration that all creation is "good," and that, created in God's image and likeness, we are called to relationship, to community, and to care for one another, especially those most in need.

Circles of Care also addresses topics presented in *The Catechism of the Catholic Church*; in particular, Section Three: Life in Christ (pp 421-611) which addresses The Dignity of the Human Person, The Human Community, God's Salvation: Law and Grace, and The Ten Commandments. It reflects, too, dimensions of our life as the Church in New Hampshire expressed by Bishop John B. McCormack in his letter of December 2003 introducing the *Promise to Protect, Pledge to Heal, The Protection of Children and Young People: Policy and Procedures*:

"All persons in the Church must strive to conform to Christ Jesus, the Good Shepherd (John 10:11-16) who knows His sheep, cares for them, nurtures and protects them. It is Jesus the Christ who, gathering the children to Himself (Luke 18:15-17), lives the law of love, risking and laying His life down for the sake of God's people."

The name of the program is rooted in the universal symbol for wholeness, the circle. Throughout the history of humankind the circle has signified completeness, infinity, and the sphere within which communication and dialogue happen best. A variety of cultures have expressed these understandings by gathering physically in circles for decision-making and/or prayer and using rings to symbolize commitment and interrelationship. The following quote from a Catholic theologian illustrates this well:

"We all need companions on the way. We thrive best in concentric and ever-widening circles of care. This has always been the assertion of the church: that we need one another to know and grow into God. That is what Christian community ideally is about." (Wendy Wright, The Vigil. Wendy Wright is a Professor of Theology at Creighton University.)



The lessons in *Circles of Care* are intended to strengthen and complement the care that is already part of the catechetical ministry in our Catholic schools and parish religious education programs. Throughout the lessons students will be introduced to foundational principles of living our faith, especially personal safety, making good decisions, developing wholesome relationships, and self-esteem. This is done within the context of the religion curriculum for each grade. Prayer experiences that conclude each lesson are also linked with the religion curriculum.

As in all curricula, there will be a need for adjustments based on the students who are in the group, the events happening in our communities and in our world, the comfort level of the instructor, and any other factors influencing the participants. Make these adjustments using your best judgment. Adapt the prayer experiences and the activities as needed. Just be sure to set aside time to teach the appropriate lesson. The goal is to achieve the outcomes that are outlined for each lesson.. Consult with other instructors who are teaching in your school or parish program as well as your principal or catechetical leader.

Also included in this manual is a letter to parents, an opt-out form for parents to sign if they do not want their child/children to participate, class activity sheets, take-home pages for pre-k through grade 6, and forms for reporting attendance to the Diocese of Manchester.

In preparing this curriculum, the intention and hope has been that all of the materials will assist you in continuing the ministry we share with you, that of caring for and forming in faith the young members of the church.