



OFFICE OF THE BISHOP

DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The education and formation of children and young people is a vital aspect of our Catholic life in the Lord. It is in this context that priests, deacons, religious and laypersons collaborate with parents in educating children and helping to form them to be faithful disciples of Christ. On behalf of all the ministers of the "Good News," I express our admiration for the parents who are so faithful and dedicated in forming their children to know God's love.

As you know, Bishop Christian and I joined all the Catholic bishops in the United States in the development of the *Charter for the Protection of Children and Young People*. Article 12 of the *Charter* states that dioceses are to maintain "safe environment" programs, including programs for children and youth, which the diocesan bishop "deems to be in accord with Catholic moral principles." Since 2002, the Office for Ministerial Conduct has published and distributed a Parent Guide to assist parents as they teach their children about personal safety issues; offered a personal safety program for children and their parents entitled *Safe and Sound All Around*; provided materials to parents on how to talk to their children about abuse and held programs in diocesan junior high and high schools on the dangers of bullying, hazing, and abuse. The Office has been guided in these efforts by both the Safe Environment Council and the Diocesan Review Board.

In 2006, *Circles of Care* was introduced into the curriculum of diocesan Catholic schools and religious education programs. Authored by Mary Ellen Mahon, Director for Catechetical Formation, and Mary Jane Silvia, Director for Youth Ministry, both of whom have extensive experience in pastoral ministry, in teaching at all grade levels, and in developing curricula for schools, *Circles of Care* is a personal safety curriculum that has been incorporated into Catholic religious education classes. Based on feedback from the schools and parishes and the input of catechetical leaders, teachers, and a Catholic bioethics expert, in 2007, *Circles of Care* was recently expanded and improved. Like the other programs that the Diocese offers to children, *Circles of Care* respects Catholic teaching that parents are the primary educators of their children.

I am grateful to everyone who collaborated in the development of *Circles of Care* and to the persons who will present it in our diocesan schools and parishes. By making the work of the protection of children and young people our common responsibility and priority, I am confident that we are following the Lord in fulfilling His mission and ministry.