

Family, Faith and Circle of Grace

Family Gathering Option A



Preparation- Please review 'Family Faith Guidelines' for more information.

- Prayer Leader- Invite clergy or another leader (like yourself) to lead the opening/closing prayers.
- Decide how you will divide students into groups (by grade level or multi-age).
- Assign and reserve rooms or space where groups will meet. Space is needed for adults and for each grade or grouping of students. Many parishes find using their worship space for the family and adult sessions works well and sets an appropriate tone.
- Give lesson plans and materials to those adults who will be teaching the lessons.
- Choose the topic for the adult session. Invite someone to facilitate the discussion. (Ideas for topics are listed in the 'Adult Sessions' section.)
- Get materials needed for each of the grade levels or multi-age lessons you will be teaching. Materials needed are listed at the beginning of each grade-level lesson.
- If you will be doing the family blessing closing activity, you may want to purchase crucifixes for families or small individual crosses. Have them blessed before-hand if clergy will not be present to do it during the gathering.
- Make copies of lesson handouts and parent letters for students in each grade level or multi-age group. These can be found at the end of each student lesson. Make sure you have enough copies for all the children in each group.
- Make copies of the 'Family Gathering A- Agenda for Parents' for all adults who will be attending (available at the end of this Family Gathering plan.)
- (Recommended) Make copies of the grade-appropriate *Parents First* newsletters to give to parents for students in each grade. *Parents First* are age appropriate, so if you are using multi-age lessons, you should copy the grade-level the student actually attends.
- Make copies of any handouts or resources used in the adult session or for family enrichment (ex. '*Your Family and Circle of Grace*' *Parents First* Special Edition- in resource section).

- Key to using the 'Family Faith Gathering Leaders Guide': Leader instructions are italicized; leader script is in blue. Family discussion topics are easily identifiable in the leader guide and parent agenda handout by a *Circle of Grace* symbol next to each topic for conversation.



- Key to using the 'Family Gathering Agenda for Parents': Family discussion topics are easily identifiable in the parent agenda handout by a *Circle of Grace* symbol next to each topic for conversation. The words parents say to lead the family discussion are in bold.



- **These lesson plans for *Circle of Grace* are only to be used when parents and children can come together in a large group to learn about *Circle of Grace* in the format written here.** If children will be meeting by themselves without parents, or if children and parents meet separately for whole the event, or any situation when this family gathering format can't be used as written, children should be taught the regular *Circle of Grace* curriculum. This is because several critical parts of the *Circle of Grace* lessons are taught or reinforced within the family group discussions and are not included in these Family Faith youth lessons.

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Family Gathering Leader Guide- Option A



Key: Leader instructions are *italicized*, leader script is in **blue**.

1. **Welcome and Prayer-** *Group leader (Faith Formation leader, Pastor or other clergy or parish leader) can welcome the group and lead an opening prayer. Hand out Family Gathering Agenda A to parents.*

2. Gather in Family Groups

Leader: Why do we need to know about our Circle of Grace?

In today's world, it's more important than ever to take time to remember how much God loves us and how important it is for us to be safe. There are many distractions in our lives that make us forget about God, and new ways for us to fall into harm's way. Circle of Grace helps us remember how much we are loved by God, how to set safe boundaries and how to ask for help from parents or one of the other Trusted Adults that God has placed in our lives.

Let us imagine our Circle of Grace together.

Direct each family to gather in a circle quietly. Ask parents to first raise their hands high as a visual way of inviting and covering their family in this holy space. Then the group leader directs the following:



**Raise your hands above your head,
then bring your outstretched arms slowly down.
Extend your arms in front of you and then behind you.
Embrace all of the space around you.
Slowly reach down to your feet.
Know that God is in this space with you.
This is your Circle of Grace.
You are in it.**

Family Discussion (brief): *Leader- direct families to discuss these topics.*

1. Our Circle of Grace reminds us of God's real presence in our lives. He is truly with us at all times!

Parents, ask each family member to tell if they truly believe that God is with them at every moment.





2. If everyone truly believed that God is with them always, how might that look in each of these situations?
- A child being bullied
 - A person suffering from a serious illness
 - A doctor in an operating room
 - A fireman going to a bad fire
 - A family that moves to a new city
 - A child who is lost and can't find his way home

3. Sending to next activity!

Leader: Family members! Now we are going to break up into groups to talk about our Circle of Grace and do some activities.

When we are all done, we will come back here and 'compare notes' with our families about what we have each done!

Split into their groups and give directions on where each group should go. One group will be adults. The children will be divided by into groups, usually by age or grade - see below.

Make sure to re-affirm that families will be rejoining each other shortly and will have time to discuss with each other.

4. Group Lessons and Discussions

- a. *This is when **parents/adults** will have their session. Topics are provided in the 'Adult Sessions' section.*
- b. ***Children and teens** will have their lessons* presented at this time. Depending on the number and ages of children/teens, you may decide to divide children into their grade levels, or you may break them into groups by their age group.*

**Lesson plans for students are in the 'Student Lesson' section in this binder.*

5. Families Gather Again!

Leader: **Welcome back!! Families, please sit together again.**

We have all had the chance to talk about our Circle of Grace and how much God loves us and wants us to be safe!

Let us share in our family groups some of what we learned.

Family Discussions



1. Have each person share one thing they learned tonight about how God loves them.

Examples of responses:

- God is with us always- when we are happy, sad, asleep, lonely or afraid.
- God loves us very much. He puts Trusted Adults in our lives to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused.
- God helps us know what belongs in our *Circle of Grace* by experiencing peace, love or contentment when something or someone good comes into our *Circle of Grace*.



2. How do we know when something doesn't belong in our *Circle of Grace*?

(Examples of responses- we get a funny or uncomfortable feeling that something or someone is not safe, we may be afraid or feel like we want to get away).

God helps us know what does not belong in our *Circle of Grace*:

- God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared, or confused (unsafe)
- The Holy Spirit prompts (alerts) us that something does not belong in our *Circle of Grace* by giving us a "funny or uncomfortable feeling" that something is not safe. This feeling is there because God wants us to be safe.
 - **God does not cause bad things to happen to us. He loves us very much.**
 - **Having faith does not take away all of life's struggles. But God promised to always "be present" providing guidance and comfort in our time of need.**



3. God gives us people in our lives (our parents, teachers and Trusted Adults) to help us when we are troubled or struggling with a concern. Parents, ask each child or teen in the family what they would do if they were afraid that something unsafe may happen to them, or has already happened to them? (Tell our parents, or a Trusted Adult.)

- God helps us know when to ask for help from someone we trust.
- God wants us to talk to a Trusted Adult about our worries, concerns, or "funny/uncomfortable feelings" so they can help us be safe and take the right action.
- Circle of Grace helps us learn skills for good decision making and reminds us of God's presence and assistance when we are facing difficult and confusing situations.



4. One of the most successful components of Circle of Grace is having children choose several trusted adults, in addition to their parents, to turn to if something happens. When the child and parents have identified several other trusted adults that God has placed in their child's life, a bigger safety net is developed to protect them.

Parents, please ask each child or teen in your family to tell you who they chose to be their Trusted Adults. Do you think their Trusted Adults are good choices? If not, respectfully and gently help them choose others who might be more helpful, more available...

6. Closing Activities

- Please distribute take home materials (handouts from lessons, Parents First...) for parents.
- Leader: **Parents, please discuss these topics with your children. Please continue discussing them at home if you haven't finished.**
- If time allows: (Remain in family circles)

Leader: Parents or guardians, please make the Sign of the Cross on each person in your family's forehead and repeat the promise of Jesus by saying "I am with you always, even unto the end of the AGE". (Matthew 28:20 NRSV)

(Parishes or schools may choose to give each family or individual a small crucifix as a reminder of God's presence in our lives. Crucifixes can be purchased in bulk and blessed either before or during the Family Faith Formation Gathering)

Closing Prayer: Group leader or Clergy could lead a closing prayer, song or give a blessing for parents and children.

Sample closing prayer (From student lesson):

Thank you, God,
for always being with me in my *Circle of Grace*.
Thank you for giving me people who care about me,
especially my parents and trusted adults,
who want me to be safe. Amen.

Family, Faith and Circle of Grace

Family Gathering A- Agenda for Parents



1. Welcome and Prayer

2. Why do we need to know about our *Circle of Grace*?

In today's world, it's more important than ever to take time to remember how much God loves us and how important it is for us to be safe. There are many distractions in our lives that make us forget about God, and new ways for us to fall into harm's way. *Circle of Grace* helps us remember how much we are loved by God, how to set safe boundaries and how to ask for help from parents or one of the other trusted adults that God has placed in our lives.

Let us imagine our *Circle of Grace* together.

The group leader directs each family to gather in a circle quietly. Parents are asked to first raise their hands high as a visual way of inviting and covering their family in this holy space. Then the group leader directs the following:



Raise your hands above your head,
then bring your outstretched arms slowly down.
Extend your arms in front of you and then behind you.
Embrace all of the space around you.
Slowly reach down to your feet.
Know that **God** is in this space with you.
This is your **Circle of Grace**. You are in it.

Family Discussion (brief): Family leader topics for discussion are in bold and have a *Circle of Grace* icon next to them. Examples of responses and information is italicized.

Group Leader: Our Circle of Grace reminds us of God's real presence in our lives. He is truly with us at all times!

Parents, ask each family member if they truly believe that God is with them at every moment?

If everyone truly believed that God is with them always, how might that look in each of these situations?

- **A child being bullied**
- **A person suffering from a serious illness**
- **A doctor in an operating room**
- **A fireman going to a bad fire**
- **A family that moves to a new city**
- **A child who is lost and can't find his way home**



3. Sending to next activity

Family members! Now we are going to break up into groups to talk about our Circle of Grace and do some activities.

When we are all done, we will come back here and 'compare notes' with our families about what we have each done!

4. Group Lessons and Discussions

5. Families Gather Again!

Welcome back!! Families should all be seated together again.

We have had the chance to talk about our Circle of Grace and how much God loves us and wants us to be safe.

Let us share in our family groups some of what we learned. Parents, please discuss these questions now or complete discussing them at home if you haven't finished by the time we end.

Family Discussion

1. Have each person share one thing they learned tonight about how God loves them.

Examples of responses:

- *God is with us always- when we are happy, sad, asleep, lonely or afraid.*
- *God loves us very much. He puts Trusted Adults in our lives to help us when we are hurt, scared or confused.*
- *God helps us know what belongs in our Circle of Grace by experiencing peace, love or contentment when something or someone good comes into our Circle of Grace.*

2. How do we know when something doesn't belong in our Circle of Grace?

(Examples of responses- we get a funny or uncomfortable feeling that something or someone is not safe, we may be afraid or feel like we want to get away).

God helps us know what does not belong in our Circle of Grace:

- *God desires to help us when we are hurt, scared, or confused (unsafe)*
- *The Holy Spirit prompts (alerts) us that something does not belong in our Circle of Grace by giving us a "funny or uncomfortable feeling" that something is not safe. This feeling is there because God wants us to be safe.*
- *God does not cause bad things to happen to us. He loves us very much.*
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3. God gives us people in our lives (our parents, teachers and Trusted Adults) to help us when we are troubled or struggling with a concern.

Parents, ask each child or teen in the family what they would do if they were afraid that something unsafe may happen to them, or has already happened to them? (Tell our parents, or a Trusted Adult.)

- *God helps us know when to ask for help from someone we trust. God wants us to talk to a trusted adult about our worries, concerns, or "funny/uncomfortable feelings" so they can help us be safe and take the right action.*
- *Circle of Grace helps us learn skills for good decision making and reminds us of God's presence and assistance when we are facing difficult and confusing situations.*



Question 4. *One of the most successful components of Circle of Grace is having children choose several trusted adults, in addition to their parents, to turn to if something happens. When the child and parents have identified several other trusted adults that God has placed in their child's life, a bigger safety net is developed to protect them.*

Parents, please ask each child or teen in your family to tell you who they chose to be their Trusted Adults. *Do you think their Trusted Adults are good choices? If not, respectfully and gently help them choose others who might be more helpful, more available...*

6. Closing- *Parents, please gather any handouts from the lessons for each of your children. It is important for you to continue discussing the family topics at home if you aren't yet done.*

Optional Closing Activity: (Remain in family circles)

Parents or guardians, please make the Sign of the Cross on each person in your family's forehead and repeat the promise of Jesus by saying "I am with you always, even unto the end of the AGE". (Matthew 28:20 NRSV)

Closing Prayer

Sample Closing Prayer (from student lesson):

**Thank you, God,
for always being with me in my Circle of Grace.
Thank you for giving me people who care about me,
especially my parents and trusted adults,
who want me to be safe. Amen.**