

Foreword by Archbishop Marcel Gervais

There is a beautiful prayer from the Old Testament that captures the spirit of *Fully Alive* ...

For you love all that exists, you abhor nothing you have made...

because all things are yours, Lord, lover of life.

(Wisdom 11:24-26)

The Lord is the lover of life, and of human life especially. God loves us with a love that is unending. *Fully Alive* will have succeeded if it gives our children even a glimpse of God's love for human life.

Catholic parents are aware of their great responsibility as their children's first and most important teachers. They know that it is through them that their children first learn of God's love of life. Within the family, the generous and unselfish love of parents provides children with lessons in life that cannot be learned anywhere else.

The Catholic schools want to do all that they can to help parents fulfill their great responsibilities. *Fully Alive*, a Catholic Family Life program sponsored by the Bishops of Ontario, was developed for this reason. It is the result of the work of many people. Large numbers of parents and teachers have commented on the program in its early stages. They have been listened to carefully and their recommendations have enriched the program. We, the Catholic Bishops of Ontario, publish *Fully Alive*, convinced that it can be a genuine support to parents in the Christian formation of their children.

This *Fully Alive* Online Family Resource is a response to the requests of parents. Some parents have told us of their desire to be active participants in their child's school Family Life Education program. This Online Family Resource

helps them to do this. Some have asked for help in talking to their children about sexuality. This Online Family Resource offers many suggestions in this area. Some have stressed how important it is that parents be the first people to talk to their children about intimate matters related to sexuality. The *Fully Alive* Online Family Resource supports and encourages parents in their special role as the first teachers of their children. Important information about sexuality included in the classroom program is provided well ahead of its classroom presentation.

Fully Alive is about human persons and the relationships and experiences that are part of all of our lives. Our Catholic tradition has always stressed the dignity of human life. The first pages of scripture tell us that we, men and women, are made in the image of God. In particular, we are like God in our ability to love, to know, and to create and support life. These important aspects of our human nature are explored in *Fully Alive*.

1. *God loves.* To love is to see what is good and to want to be united with it. God, who is love, sees the goodness of all that he has created and wants to be one with it. We too are called to love, to see what is good, and to want to be united with it. We are meant to love God and all of his creation.

God also asks to be loved. It is his first commandment. We are like God in this too, for we are also made to be loved. We first know love through our parents. They open us to the love of others, and especially to God's love through his son, Jesus Christ.

2. *God knows, recognizes, and understands.* All things are known by God. Each one of us is known by God through and through, and loved. We are like God

in this as well. We are created with a special ability to know, to recognize, and to understand.

But the Lord also wants to be known. God reveals himself to us through creation, through scripture, and through every unselfish act of love we receive from others. We are known by God,

but we are also meant to be known by other human beings. We cannot be truly human, made in God's image, unless we reveal ourselves and allow ourselves to be known.

3. *God creates and supports life.* Each one of us, and the earth we live on, are his creation. In this too we are like God. We are called to multiply, "to fill the earth," and to care for the earth so that it can continue to support life.

Our duty, our destiny, and our greatest dignity is to know and love God. We are also called to know others and to be known by them, to love others and to be loved by them. And we share God's power to create and support life.

We also know, sadly, that although we are made to be like God, we do not always live up to this image. Sin entered the world and its deepest effects are recorded in the first pages of Sacred Scripture.

The first effect of original sin is the shame that Adam and Eve experienced before God and each other. They hid. They hid because they could no longer see good in themselves; they hid because they could no longer fully see that God was good. They were ashamed of being human. Just as the ability to see goodness leads to love, so the inability to see goodness leads to hate.

We are constantly dealing with this effect of original sin in our lives. We are inclined to see ugliness in ourselves rather than beauty. We continually struggle to believe that we are worthy of being loved. How desperately we need to know that the Lord sees us and finds great goodness and beauty in us, even though we are sinners. How deeply we need to experience the love of others. This is the great gift that parents give to their children — the confidence and strength that come from knowing they are loved.

Fully Alive is meant to help our children know God's love for them. It encourages them to reflect on and appreciate the love they receive from their family members, their friends, and others.

Like Adam and Eve, we are also inclined to hide from God and from each other. Although we are called to know and to be known, we are often afraid of intimacy. We avoid communication and self-revelation. This fear of being known can lead us into destructive behaviour — violence, alcoholism, drug addiction, sexual promiscuity, even suicide. It is the most frequent reason that marriages fail. Without real intimacy, husband and wife are isolated from each other. Sexual intercourse, which should be one of the deepest ways a man and a woman can know each other, becomes a shallow physical act.

Self-revelation is learned at home. Loving parents create an atmosphere in which children learn the joy of being known and accepted by others. Fully Alive supports this special role of the home by encouraging children to express themselves to their parents, family members, friends, and responsible adults.

We are also called to share in God's creative power and to support life.

The effects of sin on this great blessing are all too obvious in the world around us.

For a large number of people, fertility and the gift of children are seen as something to be avoided, and sexual pleasure is seen as an unconditional right for all.

Fully Alive presents fertility as a blessing from God. It speaks of the wonder of sharing God's power to create and promotes a sense of awe and respect for new life from the moment of conception. It teaches our children that sexual intercourse is a special act of love between a husband and wife; all other sexual activity is against God's will.

In reaction to the sexual permissiveness of our times, however, some people are inclined to view the body and sexuality as evil, as something to be hidden and ashamed of. This is not what the Lord intends.

Children need to be given, as early as possible in the home, a positive sense of the dignity of their bodies and of their sexuality. Fully Alive is meant to help parents accomplish this task. In later years, as children prepare for the changes of puberty and the responsibilities that are part of God's gift of sexuality, Fully Alive will offer them and their parents guidance and support.

Our times demand that a special effort be made to support parents as they guide their children to live lives of chastity and faithfulness. Chastity is the virtue that helps us to live as sexual persons according to God's will. To educate children for chastity is much more than to teach them the facts of sexuality. It is to educate their whole person — their view of themselves, their commitment to their

relationships, and their sense of responsibilities to others. *Fully Alive*, along with the religion program, is intended to help our children understand the dignity of their calling in Christ. Together, parents and Catholic teachers become partners in leading our children to the One who created all of us and who wants us to be fully alive.

*The glory of God is man and woman fully alive,
but life for them consists in seeing God revealed in his Word.*

St. Irenaeus.