

Fully Alive Grade 6

Grade 6, Theme One

Family Letter

Dear Family,

We are ready to begin the first theme of *Fully Alive*, our family life program. Because the partnership of home, church, and school is so important, this letter is written to let you know what we talk about in class and to offer some ideas for your involvement. For more information, please go to www.acbo.on.ca.

About Theme One

The first theme of *Fully Alive*, called “Created and Loved by God,” is like the foundation of a house. Everything else depends on it. In this theme, we explore the Christian belief that we are made in God’s image and that God knows and loves each one of us. We are a very special creation. Because of this, we respect and value ourselves and others.

In Theme One we will

- read a story about the power of love to transform people’s lives and reflect on God’s creation of us to be people of love.
- explore the presence of life-giving people in our lives.
- discuss a story about bullying and learn more about the harm it causes.
- examine some of the ways in which we can be life givers and make a difference in other peoples lives.

Working together at school and at home

- Ask your child to tell you about the story of the little girls in the orphanage and how their lives were changed.
- The students will be creating jigsaw puzzles about themselves related to their interests, talents, hobbies, feelings, friends, and plans for the future. Ask your child about his or her puzzle.
- We will be discussing what it means to be a life giver, someone who helps you to grow and develop. You could talk with your child about the life givers in his or her life and also about your child’s efforts to be a life-giver and make a difference in other people’s lives.
- The story we will read about bullying includes some ideas you may want to discuss with your child: the need for adult help when there are serious problems; that friends should not keep a

confidence if another person's well-being is at risk; and how destructive bullying is, both to the victim and the bully.

Theme One Topics

In Grade 6, this theme is developed through five topics. The theme begins with a true story about two little girls from an orphanage who find love in an unexpected way, which leads to a reflection on the meaning of being created in the image of a loving God. The next topic explores the meaning of being a unique and complex person, and introduces four imaginary Grade 6 students who appear throughout the *Fully Alive* program this year. In the remaining topics, the students examine the meaning of life-giving love from several perspectives: their experience of this kind of love in their own lives; the harm that is caused by bullying, which is the opposite of life-giving love; and their own capacity to be life givers in their daily encounters with others.

Topic 1 — A Life-Giving Love

*God is love and in Himself He lives a mystery of personal loving communion.
Creating the human race in His own image and continually keeping it in being,
God inscribed in the humanity of man and woman, the vocation,
and thus the capacity and responsibility, of love and communion.
Love is therefore the fundamental and innate vocation of every human being.*

Pope John Paul II

Summary

This topic helps the students appreciate that every person is created to be loved and to love. The teacher and students read a true story about two little girls in an orphanage. They discuss the amazing transformation that happened when the little girls received the attention, care, and affection they needed to grow and develop.

Main Ideas

- God is love, and we are made in God's image to be people of love.
- We all need to be loved and to offer our love to others.
- Our generous love for each other makes God's goodness visible on earth.

Family Participation

- You will find “A Love Story,” the true story of the two little girls from the orphanage at the end of this theme. You may want to read the story so that you can discuss it with your child.
- It’s important for children to know that our capacity for love comes from God, and is both a gift and a responsibility. God loves us and wants our love. We respond to God by keeping the commandments, talking to God through prayer, and by our efforts to be patient and loving with others. Our efforts to be loving people make the goodness of God visible in the world.
- In class, the students discussed some of the reasons that it can be hard to love others — they annoy us, they hurt our feelings, they won’t let us do what we want, or maybe we are jealous of them. You may want to discuss this with your child. Who are the people in his or her life who offer an opportunity to be more loving? It might be a brother or sister who is not always easy to get along with. It could be a relative or family friend who is in need of special attention. Relationships in the family and with friends can be difficult at times, but they are also the most important opportunity in our lives to learn how to be loving persons.

Topic 2 — Getting to Know You

First see whether you have learned to love yourself. . . If you have not learned how to love yourself, I am afraid you will cheat your neighbour as yourself.

St. Augustine

Summary

This topic helps the students recognize and appreciate the complexity and mystery of people. Four imaginary Grade 6 students, each with unique personalities, interests, life experiences, and families, are introduced. The teacher and students discuss the uniqueness of persons and the need to respond to each other with respect, openness, and fairness.

Main Ideas

- Our individual differences are a reflection of the variety of gifts God gives to each of us.
- Each person is always a mystery; we can never know everything about another person.
- It is not possible to be friends with everyone, but we are meant to be friendly, tolerant, and open toward others.

Family Participation

- The four imaginary children who are introduced in this topic are an important part of the Grade 6 *Fully Alive* program. Two other imaginary children, Martin and Jian, are also featured in a few stories. Here is some background information about the four main children and their families:

Elizabeth Boychuk — Liz is an only child who lives with her parents. She is somewhat reserved and often seems older than she is. Her best friend is Maureen Bouclin. Liz's mother has multiple sclerosis (MS). This disease affects areas of the brain and the spinal cord that carry signals throughout the body. There is no cure for MS, but there are treatments that can be helpful. Mrs. Boychuk has reached the point of needing a wheelchair to move around. She does volunteer work at home, using a phone and computer to organize volunteers for the MS association and for Meals on Wheels. Mr. Boychuk is an accountant for a large company.

Maureen Bouclin — Maureen lives with her parents and four brothers: André (age 14), who is usually called Andy, and three younger brothers, Mark (age 9), Dennis (age 7), and Peter (age 5). Mark was born with cerebral palsy and severe developmental disabilities and attends a special-needs class in the same school as Maureen. Maureen is generally outgoing, but her feelings are easily hurt and she tends to be a worrier. Her father is from Sault Ste Marie and works as an electrician. Her mother is from Hamilton and is now working half-time as Kindergarten teacher.

Donald Russo — Don Russo lives with his parents, his grandmother, and an older brother (Joe, age 14) and sister (Carla, age 16). His parents and his aunt and uncle own a fruit and vegetable store together. It is a family business, and the older children help out on weekends. Mrs. Russo's mother lives with the family. Don is talkative and can be attention-seeking. His parents work long hours in the store, and Don is often home alone with his grandmother. He spends a lot of time on the computer and playing video games. He is popular to the extent that he has the latest electronic gadgets, but he does not have any close friends. He is not as sure of himself as he would like people to believe.

Robert Rickart — Rob is Cree and was born on a reservation in northern Ontario. His mother died when he was a baby, and his father had a difficult time accepting this loss. A year later, Mr. Rickart moved to a city in southern Ontario to live with his brother and sister-in-law and left Rob with his grandparents. With the help of his brother and the Aboriginal

Friendship Centre in the city, Mr. Rickart put his life back together and found a job in the construction industry. When Rob was four years old, he came to the city to live with his father. Rob continues to spend summers with his grandparents and has a great interest in Aboriginal culture and traditions, an interest his father shares. He and his father have a basement apartment in his uncle's home, and Rob enjoys the company of his cousins, Greg and Sam, who are 7 and 9 years old. Rob is generally quiet and does well at school. He rarely volunteers an answer or comment but is a hard worker.

- You will find the stories of Elizabeth, Don, Maureen, and Rob at the end of this theme. You may want to read them so that you can talk to your child about these young people. Which one of these stories did he or she like best? Why?
- A suggested activity related to this topic is the creation of a puzzle representing the students' stories — their interests, talents, hobbies, family, friends, dreams, and plans for the future. Your child may want to talk to you about the items that will make up his or her puzzle.
- An important idea in this topic is that we cannot be friends with everyone, but can be friendly and open with everyone. It is in the family that children first learn about tolerance and openness to others. Because of the love family members share, they learn to be tolerant of the things that irritate them about each other. If the opportunity arises, you may want to explain that tolerance is more than putting up with someone. It means an attitude of fairness and openness toward those whose personalities, opinions, interests, or customs are different from ours. When parents demonstrate this attitude in their lives, it provides children with a wonderful model.
- As children start to mature, their interests and personalities become more distinct, and it is natural that they are drawn toward some people and not toward others. They can also expect that not everyone will want to be friends with them. For this reason, the difference between “being friends” and “being friendly” becomes more relevant in their lives. If the opportunity comes up, you may want to discuss this difference with your child.

Topic 3 — Life Givers

Blessed is the influence of one true, loving soul on another.

George Eliot

Summary

This topic helps the students recognize and appreciate that other people nurture their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, and spiritual growth. The teacher and students read five short stories that illustrate some of the ways people can be life givers to the people around them and help them grow and develop.

Main Ideas

- We all need other people in our lives to help us develop physically, emotionally, socially, intellectually, and spiritually.
- Many people encourage and support us through their live-giving love and attention.
- Life-giving love is a gift that we can offer to others in our families and our classrooms.

Family Participation

- You will find the five short stories, “Elizabeth and Maureen,” “Dr. Hunt and Don,” “Mr. Artuso and Martin,” “Dinner at the Bouclin’s House,” and “Mrs. Beck and Jian” at the end of the theme. Each story highlights one of the five areas of human development.
- In class, the students were asked to complete an activity sheet about life-givers in their lives and how these people support and encourage their growth and development in each of the five areas — physical, emotional, intellectual, social, and spiritual. You might ask your child about this activity. Who are the life givers in his or her life?
- Many examples of what it means to be a life-giver — helping another person, listening to someone who is upset, or recognizing that a person is in need of attention — are part of each family’s life. There are daily opportunities for family members to be life-givers to each other.
- Day-to-day family life involves a lot of challenges and pressures, and time for reflection is rare. But it is important to take a few minutes here and there to think about your child’s growth as a well-balanced person, one who is developing in all areas. Some thoughts on each of the five areas you may want to consider are:

Physical: Are there regular opportunities for physical activity, for example, outside play, team sports, bike riding, hiking, swimming, and skating? For many North American children, activities like watching television, playing video games, or using a home computer have taken the place of outside play and sports. Creating a balance between active and passive activities is essential for children’s physical development.

Emotional: Is your child growing in the ability to handle frustrations and disappointments? Is your child more aware of other people's needs and feelings, and more sensitive to them? These are both indications of greater emotional maturity. You may also notice, especially if your child is a girl, some new signs of moodiness and sensitivity, which are most likely related to the onset of puberty.

Social: Does your child have one or two good friends? Is he or she able to handle normal friendship difficulties without too much difficulty? Friendship becomes increasingly important around this age, and provides important lessons in loyalty, co-operation, and sensitivity to the feelings of others.

Intellectual: Some signs of intellectual growth include: deeper and more sustained concentration; desire to explore areas of special interest; enjoyment of challenges; and the ability to look ahead and plan more carefully. Children thrive intellectually when they are exposed to a variety of experiences, and are encouraged to pursue their interests and solve problems as independently as possible.

Spiritual: Spiritual growth in children is strongly influenced by their families. In his writing, Pope John Paul II referred to the family as the "domestic church." It is in the home that children first hear the name of God and of Jesus. It is also in the home that they learn to pray — bedtime prayers, grace before meals, or the lighting of the Advent wreath as part of the preparations leading up to Christmas. A Catholic school can contribute to the spiritual growth of children, but cannot replace the influence of the family. In particular, children's participation in the celebration of the Eucharist, which is the heart of our faith, depends on the presence of their families.

Topic 4 — Life Givers in Action

*Can we not teach children, even as we protect them from victimization,
that for them to become victimizers constitutes the greatest peril of all. ...
And that destroying the life or safety of other people, through teasing, bullying, hitting or
otherwise "putting them down," is as destructive to themselves as to their victims?*

Lewis P. Lipsitt

Summary

This topic features a story about bullying, and offers the students an opportunity to reflect on the harm that is caused by bullying, and to recognize the need to seek adult help when there is a serious problem. The teacher and students also explore an approach to resolving conflicts known as restorative justice programs.

Main Ideas

- Bullying is a serious issue. All forms of bullying harm both the victims and the bullies.
- When young people are having a serious problem, they need to seek help from trusted adults.
- Restorative justice programs give victims the opportunity to describe the harm that was caused, and to participate in discussion of how it might be repaired.

Family Participation

- You will find the story about bullying, “Rob’s Secret,” at the end of this theme. You may want to read this material so that you can discuss it with your child.
- Bullying among children and young people is a serious concern, and is an important topic to discuss with your child. Bullying can be physical (e.g., hitting, kicking), verbal (e.g., threatening, name-calling), or social (e.g., deliberately excluding someone, spreading negative rumours). Another type of bullying involves e-mails, instant messages, or messages and photos on social internet sites (e.g., Facebook) that are designed to harm another person. Using electronic communication to cause harm to others is known as *cyber-bullying*.
- Bullying is not an occasional disagreement among children involving name-calling or pushing and shoving. It is usually a repeated activity involving someone more powerful against someone who is weaker, and, most importantly, the intent is to harm the other person. Bullying involves three groups of people: those who bully, those who do the bullying, and bystanders. Almost all children have been in the position of being a bystander.
- An important goal of this topic is to communicate the message that serious problems usually require adult help. Ongoing bullying is one example of a problem that children can rarely handle on their own. Some other examples of problems that require adult intervention are sexual or physical abuse, eating disorders, and serious depression.

Children who are being bullied may not tell anyone, except perhaps a friend, for a number of reasons. They often believe that nothing can be done to change the situation and that telling

someone will likely make it worse. Ongoing bullying eats away at a child's self-confidence, making it even more difficult for him or her to do something about the problem. Also, as children get older they tend to think that they should be able to handle their own difficulties without adult assistance.

Children and young people have a somewhat rigid code about "snitching." The distinction between tattling on someone in order to get the person into trouble and telling an adult about a serious problem a friend or classmate is experiencing is clear to adults, but not necessarily to children and young people. It's important for parents to talk to their children about bullying, and the need to talk to a trusted adult when they are aware of a serious problem.

- If your child has been the target of bullying at school or has been involved in bullying other children, you need to talk to your child's teacher or the principal of the school about what is happening, and what you can do. If you are interested in learning more about bullying, there are many helpful resources, including books, articles, and websites.

Topic 5 — We Can Make a Difference

Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for kindness.

Seneca

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that they are meant to be life-givers to others. The teacher and students read a story about Don and his discovery of the difference he made in another person's life.

Main Ideas

- Each one of us can be a life giver to other people.
- Our efforts to be generous, kind, and helpful can make a difference in other people's lives.
- Life-giving love is the most powerful force on earth. It makes God's love and goodness visible in the world.

Family Participation

- You will find the story about making a difference, "Don and Nina," at the end of this theme. You may want to read it so that you can discuss it with your child.

- As part of this topic, the students discussed some of the ways they could be life-givers in their classroom and their school. You might ask about this discussion. What are some of the ideas and suggestions the students came up with?
- The greatest gift we can offer our children is to help them become strong, loving people. They can make a difference by their actions, but they need to know that it is often very hard to do what is right — to get their homework done each day; to look after a younger sister or brother when they don't feel like it; to help out with family chores; to tell the truth even though they know they are going to be in trouble; or to refuse to make fun of a classmate when all of their friends are doing it. What makes it easier is practice and perseverance.

If your child plays a musical instrument or is a skillful swimmer or skater, you could use this as an example. What was it like when he or she began playing an instrument or put on skates for the first time? What has made the difference? Why is it so much easier now?

In the same way, becoming a life-giving person takes many years of practice. When we work at it, we develop good habits (also called virtues) of living. Without these good habits, we are not really free to be the life-giving and loving people God intended us to be.

- Our society tends to be more concerned with success than with goodness. We praise children for their accomplishments, but often fail to notice an act of kindness or an effort to be helpful at home. It is important for parents to communicate the message to children that what really matters is their efforts to be loving and life-giving persons, in other words, to be the people God created them to be.

Theme One Stories

Topic 1: This is the story of two little girls who lived in an orphanage.

A Love Story

The word *orphanage* is rarely heard today in North America. But in the past, babies and young children without families to care for them spent the first years of their lives in orphanages. They could leave only if someone adopted them.

Many orphanages were very crowded, and there were never enough people to care for the children. The children usually had enough to eat and were kept clean, but no one had time to play with them or talk to them.

About seventy years ago, something quite remarkable happened in an orphanage in the United States. Two baby girls came to live at the orphanage. This is how the psychologist who first saw them described their appearance:

“The youngsters were pitiful little creatures. They were tearful, had runny noses,

and sparse, stringy, and colourless hair; they were emaciated, undersized
Sad and inactive, the two spend their days rocking and whining.”

Although the little girls were both more than a year old, they behaved more like six-month-old babies. Everyone thought they were seriously disabled, so they were moved from the orphanage to a residence for people with developmental disabilities.

Six months later, the psychologist was visiting the residence where the little girls now lived. He happened to notice two bright-eyed, lively little girls who were alert and smiling. They were the two children from the orphanage! He was amazed, and wanted to find out what had happened to them.

He discovered that when the little girls had arrived at their new home, they were placed in a ward for women. The women had been delighted to have two children to care for. They gave the little girls attention and affection, took them out for walks, played with them, and provided them with toys and books. The children soon began to thrive. The residents of the home had brought the two little girls to life through love and attention. Several years later the little girls left the residence and were adopted by families.

The people in charge of the orphanage decided to send other children to live at the home. The same thing happened. Children who were very slow to develop were transformed by the love they received. Similar children who stayed in the overcrowded orphanage became more and more delayed in their development as time went on.

The story of the two little girls from the orphanage is still discussed today by people who study child development. It has an important lesson to teach. A bed to sleep in, food to eat, and clothes to wear are not enough for growing children. They need love and attention to become the people God intended them to be.

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Topic 2: These are the four short stories of Elizabeth, Don, Maureen, and Rob.

Elizabeth’s Story

My name is Elizabeth Boychuk. I’ll be 12 in February. Most people call me Liz, but when my parents are mad at me, they call me Elizabeth Anne. I don’t have any brothers and sisters, which is sometimes good and sometimes bad.

I go to St. Peter’s School and I’m in sixth grade. My teacher is Mrs. Beck and I really like her. Math is my best subject, and my favourite. I won’t mention my worst.

When I was little, my mom got multiple sclerosis (most people call it MS). It’s a disease of the nervous system and nobody knows what causes it or how to cure it. Before, my mom could walk with canes, but now she has to use a wheelchair.

I do a lot of things around the house that other kids my age don’t have to do. Sometimes it makes me feel sorry for myself, which isn’t good. When I vacuum, I listen to music and it makes the work go faster.

My favourite sport is basketball, but I’m not very good at it. My best friend, Maureen, and I are both on the basketball team, but we’re definitely the two worst players. I really like horseback riding. I went riding once, and it was great.

My mother says that the two things I do most are send messages to my friends and

look in the mirror. I don't agree about the mirror, but I do spend a lot of time messaging. I sing in the children's choir at church on Sunday. Dad and I go together because my mom can't always go with us.

I think I'd like to be a doctor when I grow up and help find a cure for MS.

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Don's Story

I'm Don Russo, and I'm here to entertain you. Just kidding! I like making people laugh, and my ambition is to be a stand-up comedian.

I'm 11, and I have an older brother and sister — Joe and Carla. My parents and my aunt and uncle own a fruit and vegetable store. Carla and Joe help out on Saturdays and sometimes after school. My dad keeps reminding me that in another year or so, I'll be busy working at the store, too. He thinks I'm lazy, which is probably true.

My grandmother lives with us, and she's really nice. She's there when I get home from school and she always laughs at my jokes.

My grandmother is supposed to make sure I do my homework before my parents get home from the store, but it's pretty easy to get around her. When I'm at the computer, she thinks I'm doing school work, but I'm usually playing games or messaging someone.

I like and I don't like school. I hate writing stuff, because it's hard for me. I'm a much better talker than a writer. Mrs. Beck is okay, but she always says I could do better if I tried harder. Until this year, I went to a special class three afternoons a week to work on my written work. It did help, but I hated it when some kids called me "Special Ed" just because I went to the that class. Everyone says, just ignore it, but that's hard to do.

I don't have a best friend, but I have people I hang around with. We're all into video games, and that's what we talk about mostly. It would be nice to have a best friend.

* * * * *

Maureen's Story

I'm Maureen Bouclin, and I'll be 11 next month. I have four brothers, but no sisters. Mom and I are always complaining that we're outnumbered.

I go to St. Peter's School and so do my brothers. My oldest brother, Andy — his name is really André — is in Grade 8, Dennis is in Grade 2, and Peter is in Kindergarten. My brother Mark, who is nine, has severe developmental disabilities, and he's in a special-needs classroom with five other students. He's often sick, and my parents worry about him a lot.

I'm in Mrs. Beck's class and so is my best friend, Liz. We have been friends forever. I love going to her house because it's so quiet, and she loves coming to my house because it's so noisy.

I like school, and I'm a pretty good student. But I don't like tests, because they make me nervous. I worry that I'll get a bad mark. I worry about a lot of things. My dad

calls me “What If.” That’s because I say things like, “What if I fail the test? What if Mark gets really sick again? What if I have to wear braces my whole life?” My dad likes to tease me, and he always makes me laugh.

Things I really like: my family, my cat, and my friends, especially Liz. I also like reading, swimming, and watching Andy play hockey. He’s really good, and my dad and I embarrass my mother because we cheer so loudly.

Things I really don’t like: people who talk behind your back, tests, scary movies, and people who think they’re better than everyone else.

I have no idea what I would like to do when I’m grown up. It’s a long way off, and I’ll probably figure it out when the time comes.

* * * * *

Rob’s Story

My name is Robert Rickard, and I live with my dad, my aunt and uncle, and my cousins, Greg and Sam. I’m called Rob, and I am a member of the Cree First Nation. I was born on a reservation in Northern Ontario, and spent my first years there.

My mother died when I was a baby. I have pictures of her, but I don’t remember her. My grandparents have told me many stories about her, so I can imagine what she was like. My dad doesn’t talk about her very often because it hurts him. He had a very bad time after she died, and he went to live in a big city with his brother, my Uncle John. I stayed with my grandparents.

When I was five, I came to live with my dad and my aunt and uncle. I missed my grandparents, but I was happy to be with my dad. I go back and stay with my grandparents every summer.

I’m in Grade 6 at St. Peter. Mrs. Beck is very kind, and she’s a good teacher. She’s calm, and I like calm people. My favourite subject is Social Studies, because I like learning about the past. I also like science.

I get along with most people, but I have only one good friend. That’s Martin. We both love soccer and we’re both quiet.

My dad is taking courses in the evening to become a community worker. He works in construction right now, but he would like to do something to help Aboriginal people who live in the city. He talks to me about what he’s learning, and it sounds very interesting. I’m proud of him, and so are my grandparents. He’s a really good dad.

* * * * *

Topic 3: These are the five stories that highlight areas of human development.

Elizabeth and Maureen

“What’s wrong with you, Liz?” Maureen asked. “You’re not listening to me at all!” Liz sighed. “I’m really scared,” she said. “My mom went to the hospital again last night. She has another infection, and she’s very sick.”

“Oh Liz, I’m sorry. Is she going to be away for long?”

“My dad doesn’t know,” Liz answered. “Last time she went it was five weeks. They say her MS is getting worse. I hate it when she’s in the hospital.” Liz’s eyes filled up with tears. “I hate that she’s sick all the time,” she whispered.

Maureen put her arm around Liz’s shoulders. “It must be really hard,” she said. “Have you told Mrs. Beck?”

“No, I was afraid I’d start crying.”

“Well, I’ll tell her. Maybe we can send some cards.”

* * * * *

Dr. Hunt and Don

“That looks awful,” said Dr. Hunt as she peered into Don’s ear through her instrument. “This is more than a cold. You’ve got quite a nasty ear infection.”

“My throat’s really sore too,” croaked Don.

“Is there any part of you that doesn’t hurt?” asked Dr. Hunt.

“Yeah, my big toe!” laughed Don. “Ow, it hurts to laugh.”

“I’m going to give you some antibiotics to clear up this up.”

“What about school?” Don asked as he buttoned his shirt.

“I know this will disappoint you, but not for a few days,” Dr. Hunt replied. “And I want to see you on Thursday to check that ear. I’ll let your grandmother know that you need another appointment.”

“Thanks Dr. Hunt. See you Thursday.”

* * * * *

Mr. Artuso and Martin

Martin knocked on his neighbour’s door.

“Hi, Mr. Artuso. I’m doing a school project about people who came to Canada from another country. Would you let me interview you?”

“Interview me? I must be a big shot. Interview!” Mr. Artuso chuckled. “Sure, why not? Come on in, Martin.”

“I’ve got lots of questions,” Martin said, and he pulled out his papers from his bag.

“You ask the questions, Martin. I’ve got lots of time. I’m eighty years old. You know, I’ve been in Canada sixty years.”

“Wow, that means you were twenty when you came from Italy,” Martin said. “What was it like, coming to live here?”

Martin and Mr. Artuso spent the afternoon together talking. Mr. Artuso told Martin about the boat trip, about arriving in Montreal, and about being homesick. He told him how he found a job in a kitchen so he would have enough to eat. He told Martin about meeting his wife and building the house where his children were born. He showed Martin many pictures. It was dark outside when they finished talking.

“I learned a lot from you,” Martin said. “I’ve got so much information for my project.”

“You come again, Martin,” said Mr. Artuso. “I think I like being interviewed.”

* * * * *

Dinner at the Bouclin's House

A few days after Maureen told her mother about Liz's mom, Mrs. Bouclin called Ed Boychuk, Liz's dad, and invited him and Liz for dinner on Friday night. Mr. Boychuk hesitated, but then said yes.

"It's very nice of you," he said. "Liz is moping around, missing her mother, and so am I. We need to get out and be with other people."

"I'd better warn you," Mrs. Bouclin said. "You're probably used to quiet dinners, and there's no such thing in this house!"

"That sounds wonderful," Mr. Boychuk said. "We could do with some noise."

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Liz and her dad arrived on Friday night, after visiting Mrs. Boychuk in the hospital. They had good news.

"The doctors say Mom is getting better and should be able to come home next week," Liz said.

"That's great, Liz," Mrs. Bouclin said. "Now we have something to celebrate!"

Everyone gathered around the table and said grace together. Mr. Bouclin added an extra prayer, thanking God for the happy news about Liz's mom.

Just as Mrs. Bouclin had said, it was a noisy dinner, with lots of talking and laughter.

"Just what we needed," Mr. Boychuk said as he and Liz drove home.

* * * * *

Mrs. Beck and Sandy

Sandy dawdled in the classroom after school. She wanted to talk to her teacher, Mrs. Beck.

"Can I help with the bulletin board?" she asked.

"Great, Sandy. It goes a lot faster with two people."

They worked quietly together. Mrs. Beck knew that Sandy wanted to talk to her. Sandy's parents had recently separated and Mrs. Beck knew how badly she was feeling.

"Mrs. Beck, do you think God answers prayers?"

"I do, Sandy," Mrs. Beck answered slowly. "But not always in a way that we understand."

Sandy sat down at one of the desks. Mrs. Beck came and sat beside her.

"I've been praying that my mom and dad will get back together," Sandy said, and she hung her head so that her hair covered her face.

"You're feeling very sad, aren't you, Sandy?" Mrs. Beck said softly. "And you think God's not listening to you."

"I just want things to be the way they were," Sandy cried. "I don't want my mom and dad to be separated."

"I know you don't," Mrs. Beck said. "Listen to me, Sandy. Your mom and dad are adults. You can't make them do anything. And God doesn't make us do things. But your parents do need your prayers. This is a sad time for them too."

“Do you think they’ll get back together?”

“Sandy,” Mrs. Beck answered, “I don’t know. But I believe that they both love you, no matter what happens.”

They sat quietly together for a long time.

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Topic 4: This is the story about Rob and his problem with bullies.

Rob’s Secret

Rob’s dad knows something is wrong. So do Mrs. Beck and Rob’s friend, Martin. But only Martin knows what that something is. Rob is being bullied by three older boys from the high school down the street from Rob’s house. Usually, they wait for him when he’s coming home from school. He’s tried using a different route, but they still seem to find him.

It started about four weeks ago with name-calling and insults, but then it got worse. They took Rob’s backpack and dumped his books and papers in a puddle of dirty water. A few days ago, they told him they wanted his jacket, and if he didn’t give it to them, they would beat him up. There were three of them, so Rob gave them his jacket.

Wednesday morning at Rob’s house

“What do you mean, you lost your jacket?” Rob’s dad said. “How did you lose it?”

“I don’t know, Dad. I just did,” Rob muttered and stared at the floor.

“Rob, what’s going on? You’re not getting your schoolwork done, and you’re watching way too much television. I know something’s wrong. I wish you would talk to me.”

Rob shrugged his shoulders. “Don’t worry, Dad,” he said. “I’m fine. Just not in a talking mood. I have to go or I’ll be late. See you after school.”

Rob’s dad watched him leave, and sighed. “There has to be something I can do,” he said to himself. “I think I’ll call Mrs. Beck.”

Wednesday noon

“Thank you for calling me back, Mrs. Beck. I know Rob’s in some kind of trouble, but I can’t get him to talk to me.”

“I’m glad you called, Mr. Rickard,” Mrs. Beck said. “I was hoping you had some idea about what’s wrong. Rob’s not getting his work done, and he looks miserable.”

“Has he talked to you at all?” Rob’s dad asked.

“No. I tried,” Mrs. Beck said, “but he just says everything’s fine and he’ll try to work harder.”

“That’s what he tells me.”

“Let me talk to Rob’s friend, Martin,” Mrs. Beck said. “He may know what’s going on.”

Wednesday after school

The classroom was empty, except for Mrs. Beck and Martin. “You don’t have to look so worried,” she said. “You’re not in trouble. I want to talk to you about Rob.”

Martin avoided looking at her. “What about Rob?” he asked.

“His dad is worried, I’m worried, and you look worried, too. I think Rob may have talked to you. Did he?”

“Yes,” Martin said, “but he made me promise I wouldn’t tell anyone. I don’t want to be a snitch.”

“I know, Martin,” Mrs. Beck said, “but if there’s a serious problem, you and Rob may not be able to solve it on your own. Rob is your friend, and I’m asking you to help me help him. His dad is terribly worried.”

Martin looked at her for a moment, and sighed. “Okay,” he said, and he told her.

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Topic 5: This is the story about making a difference.

Don and Nina

The school day at St. Peter’s had just begun, and the principal was making announcements. One of her announcements was about the special class for students with severe disabilities.

“Mrs. McMahon tells me that she and her assistants need some more volunteers, especially at recess and lunch time. Grade 5 and 6 students — here’s your chance to be helpful and have a great time.”

Don Russo muttered under breath, “Oh, sure, have fun with the funny people!” Unfortunately for Don, Maureen heard him.

“Don Russo,” she said, “you think you’re so smart, but you’re really dumb. You don’t know anything about Mrs. McMahon’s class because you’ve never been in it. And my brother Mark is NOT one of the funny people!”

Maureen’s face was quite red, and she was close to crying. Mrs. Beck put her hand on Maureen’s shoulder, and Liz turned around and glared at Don.

“Let’s all calm down,” Mrs. Beck said. “Don, I didn’t like what you said any more than Maureen did. It was mean, and it was disrespectful. Think about that.”

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Later in the morning at recess, Rob went up to Don and said, “You were really out of line. I volunteer in Mrs. McMahon’s class, and it’s good. Why don’t you try it?”

“No way,” Don said.

“I think you’re scared,” Rob said. “I was too when I started. But now that I know the kids, I like being with them. And Mrs. McMahon is really great.”

“I’ll think about it,” Don muttered.

When Don got to school the next morning, he told Maureen that he was sorry for what he said.

“Okay,” Maureen said, “and I’m sorry I called you dumb. I should have said that what you said was dumb — because it was.”

“I talked to Rob, and I’m going with him to volunteer today,” Don said. “I don’t know if I’ll keep going, but I’ll try it once.”

• • •

Don wasn’t sure what to think about his first experience in the special classroom. He helped feed some of the students, zipped up jackets, checked straps on wheelchairs, and helped the staff get the students outside for some fresh air. Before he knew it, lunch hour was over.

As he left, Mrs. McMahon called, “Thanks Don, come again. We can use your help.”

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Don wasn’t sure if he would volunteer again, but he did. He didn’t really know why. There were things he didn’t like, but there was something that kept him coming back. And there was one girl named Nina whom Mrs. McMahon always asked him to help. She hardly ever smiled, and he had never heard her laugh.

He couldn’t tell her any of his jokes because she wouldn’t understand them. So he made funny faces as he sat with her while she ate lunch. He also made silly noises and pretended to eat her food. One day, he stuck his face so near her pudding, he got some on his nose. And she laughed!

Mrs. McMahon looked over at them. “I’ve never heard Nina laugh,” she said. “You’re a miracle worker!”

“That’s me,” Don said. “I make people laugh.”

“You do more than that,” Mrs. McMahon said.

Nina’s laughter and Mrs. McMahon’s words gave Don a feeling he had never had before. He continues to volunteer and tries to find new ways to make Nina laugh.

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