

Grade 6, Theme Four

Family Letter

Dear Family,

We have come to the fourth 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 Four

Theme Four of *Fully Alive* is called “Growing in Commitment.” Each one of us is challenged to grow in commitment to God and to each other. This is part of what it means to be fully human. Growth toward maturity is never a straight path. As children learn to make more decisions about their lives, they need to know that freedom is best understood as a freedom *for*, rather than a freedom *from*. Commitment is really the free gift of ourselves to being the best people we can be at each stage of our life.

In Theme Four we will

- explore the meaning of commitment and how we learn to be committed persons.
- examine the qualities and accomplishments of people, both famous and unrecognized, who are models of commitment.
- explore commitments in the students’ lives and reflect on the rewards and difficulties of becoming a committed person.

Working together at home and at school

- This theme includes the important idea that the task of becoming a committed person takes time and involves both rewards and difficulties. When you see your child is trying to be a responsible family member, student, and friend, be sure to acknowledge these signs of growing maturity.
- We will be reading about Terry Fox as a model of commitment. You might ask your child about Terry’s qualities that he or she admires most. You could also talk about other people who inspire your child and about people who inspired you when you were growing up.
- We will be exploring areas in which the students have commitments: family, school, friends, activities, community, and themselves, to be the person God created them to be. You might ask about these commitments, what aspects your child finds rewarding and what he or she finds hard. It’s important to let your child know that adults also find some of their day-to-day commitments difficult at times.

Theme Four Topics

I have fought the good fight,

I have finished the race,

I have kept the faith.

2 Timothy 4:7

This theme is developed through three topics. In the first topic, the students explore the meaning of commitment and some of the ways in which they learn to be committed people. In Topic 2, they examine the influence of people who are models of commitment, some well known, and others ordinary people whose dedication and faithfulness is known to few. In the final topic, the students look at their own commitments, and consider both the price and the rewards of becoming a committed person.

Topic 1 — Learning About Commitment

When we feel us too bold, remember our own feebleness.

When we feel us too faint, remember Christ's strength.

St. Thomas More

Summary

This topic helps the students deepen their understanding of the meaning of commitment. The teacher and students explore the many different ways in which people learn about commitment, and some of challenges of being a committed person.

Main Ideas

- A commitment is a responsibility that you try very hard to keep. It might be a commitment to a person, a cause, and activity, or a relationship.
- We learn how to be committed people from our parents and teachers, from our experiences, and by practising.
- Learning to be a committed person takes a long time; the more we are faithful to our commitments, the more we grow toward being committed people.

Family Participation

- A suggested student activity in this topic is to work in small groups and discuss one of four scenes involving imaginary Grade 6 children who are having commitment difficulties. You will

find these scenes, “Commitment Lessons,” at the end of this theme. You may want to read them and discuss them with your child. What does she or he think should be done in these situations?

Why?

- At the beginning of this topic, the students examined three definitions of commitment:

- 1) something that takes up time and energy, especially an obligation
- 2) devotion or dedication, for example, to a person, cause, activity, or relationship
- 3) a planned arrangement or activity that cannot be avoided.

You might ask your child about this discussion, and the obligations that she or he has.

- Children need a lot of encouragement and practice to grow in commitment as family members, friends, students, and members of a parish community. Parents have a major role in this growth: reminding children about their commitments; encouraging them to accept responsibility for their actions; and helping them understand that frequent failures to be responsible result in other people losing faith in them.

- Often, the only time parents talk about responsibility is when children have failed to be responsible. The best time to talk about responsibilities, however, is when it is not an immediate issue, and your child isn’t feeling defensive. You might ask your child to think of an occasion when she or he accepted responsibility for something, even though it was difficult. You could also discuss any new responsibilities your child has because she or he is growing up and how he or she is managing them.

- It is also good for parents to let children know that they understand just how hard it can be to persevere and live up to the expectations of the adults in their lives. As children get older, adults expect a lot more of them and are less inclined to overlook their failures. For this reason, it makes a big difference when parents offer encouragement, praise when they see sustained effort, and help when children are having obvious difficulties.

Topic 2 — Models of Commitment

A child’s life is like a piece of paper on which every passerby leaves a mark.

Chinese Proverb

Summary

This topic helps the students recognize that the qualities of deeply committed people often inspire others to follow their example. The teacher and students discuss the example of Terry

Fox and his commitment to raise money for cancer research, and identify some of his qualities. They also explore examples of people who are not well known, but are models of faithfulness to the commitments they have in their lives.

Main Ideas

- An important way we learn about commitment is from people whose lives are examples of loyalty, faithfulness, determination, and courage.
- Some models of commitment are well known and influence many people; others are known only to their families and friends, whom they inspire with their dedication.
- Through their example, people who are models of commitment encourage others to become committed people.

Family Participation

- You will find the story of Terry Fox, “A Young Man with a Dream,” at the end of this theme. You may want to read it so that you can discuss the story with your child. What qualities of Terry Fox does he or she especially admire?
- Heroes and heroines are very important to Grade 6 children. The strong influence of media, however, often results in admiration of famous singers, actors, and athletes, some of whom are good role models and some who are not. This is a normal part of child development. What is important is to widen children’s horizons and introduce them to other models — courageous and strong individuals whose lives are inspiring. If your child enjoys reading, there are many good books in the library about such models of commitment. It is also good for children to learn about the lives of the saints. These are heroes and heroines who can inspire your child with their dedication and goodness.
- In class, the students discussed some models of commitment who are not famous like Terry Fox, but inspire those people who do know them. You might let your child know about people you admire because of their commitment. It might be a member of your family or someone you work with who inspires you to be a more committed person.
- An important area of commitment to talk about with your child is the commitment of marriage. As children grow up, they become more aware of divorce, even when it has not touched their own families. As the occasion comes up, let your child know what an important decision marriage is, and how essential it is for people to have developed the virtues of a committed person — faithfulness, loyalty, dependability, and perseverance — before they get married.

With divorce as frequent as it is now, children often come to see it as something normal and inevitable. Unless parents talk about their beliefs in Christian marriage, their children will have no way of knowing that this is not so. This does not mean to judge or blame those whose marriages have broken down, but to let children know that sacramental marriage is meant to endure for a lifetime. It is a very serious commitment and the failure of marriages leads to suffering for the whole Christian community.

Topic 3 — A Commitment to Others

Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance.

Samuel Johnson

Summary

This topic helps the student examine the commitments they have to their families and friends, as students and members of a classroom, to their activities, to their communities, and to themselves. The teacher and students examine each of these commitments, and consider both the difficulties and the rewards of keeping these commitments.

Main Ideas

- We all have commitments in our lives. Sometimes it is easy to live up to these commitments, and sometimes it is difficult.
- The price of commitments is time, enthusiasm, and sometimes, sacrifice and disappointment.
- Living up to the commitment to be the people God created us to be is the most important commitment in our lives.

Family Participation

- In class, the students examined the areas of their lives in which they have commitments and identified some examples of both the price and the rewards of keeping them. An important idea is the need to be prepared for hardship in the process of becoming a committed person. You might ask your child about this discussion. What hardships does he or she experience in keeping commitments?
- You could ask about your child's views on family commitments. Most children think of family commitments as a list of chores they are expected to do at home. In class, the students learned that family commitments are much more than chores. Getting along with each other, making up

after an argument, and spending time enjoying each other's company are important commitments for all family members. For many families it is difficult to find time just to be together without other pressing obligations. Commitment to being a family member is greatly strengthened by ordinary events (a meal, a game, a movie) that involve the participation of the whole family.

- You can help your child learn to be a committed friend by showing an interest in his or her friends and by being ready to listen to the difficulties all children experience with friendship. For example, if you know your child has had a disagreement with a friend, you might ask about it. What could be done to solve the problem? How could each person compromise? You can also encourage your child to stick up for friends, to avoid gossip, and to forget past quarrels.
- Your child's commitment to school work is also strengthened by showing your interest, insisting on a regular time for homework, and by letting your child know that you have confidence in her or him. This is especially important for children who find schoolwork difficult. When you see your child making a real effort, tell her or him how pleased you are. You could also let your child know that you find some work difficult or boring, but that there is satisfaction to be found in perseverance.
- At this age, children are often involved in a variety of activities, but some find it difficult to remain committed over a long period of time. They begin with good intentions, but after a few months decide that it's boring to practise the piano or that soccer games interfere with something else they want to do.

Most parents think that their children should complete something that they have started. If you have been in this situation with your child, it helps to remember that there are many things children would never do without a push from parents. Very few children, for example, practise a musical instrument without encouragement, reminders, and resolve from their parents. When a child has made a good effort, however, and still is not enjoying an activity, it's probably time to try something else.

As well as a variety of activities that develop their talents and skills, children also need time to daydream, to be with friends, or to read a good book. Too many commitments outside of school and family can be stressful.

- In class, the students also discussed ways they could show their commitment to the community, for example, participating in food collections, being part of a read-a-thon or bike-a-thon for a good cause, or being an altar server in their parish. When parents are active in their community,

their example inspires children to get involved.

- The final commitment the students explored was the commitment they have to themselves — to be the people God created them to be. This is not something they can do alone. When the people around them, especially their families, respond to them with love and attention, appropriate rules, and encouragement, they make it possible for children to be loving and life-giving people. The other essential ingredient is prayer. The experience of praying with their family members provides children with a model of what it means to be a Christian — to express gratitude for our existence, to ask for help, especially in the difficult areas of our lives, and to acknowledge that we cannot keep our commitment to be the people God created us to be without a relationship with our Creator.

Theme Four Stories

Topic 2: This is the story about Terry Fox.

A Young Man with a Dream

In April, 1980 a courageous twenty-one-year-old named Terry Fox set out to run across Canada. His plan was to raise money for cancer research. He had lost his right leg to cancer just above the knee.

When Terry began his run in Newfoundland, no one paid much attention. It was mentioned briefly in newspapers and on television. But other than a few people who travelled with him, no one seemed very interested in his efforts. Maybe they thought he wasn't serious. Or perhaps they didn't believe that a young man with an artificial leg could accomplish very much.

By the time Terry entered Ontario, this lack of interest had changed. Everyone wanted to hear about Terry Fox. The newspapers and television began to report regularly on his run. He was able to raise more and more money. People lined the roads to watch him pass by, and when he arrived in big cities, special receptions were arranged for him. Since he was shy, he found speaking in public difficult. But he did it.

Before Terry had finished running through Ontario, he became ill. He struggled to continue, but it was impossible. The cancer that had destroyed his leg was back, this time in his lungs. He was forced to quit. He had been on the road for one hundred and forty-four days and his run was over. It was a very sad day for him and for Canadians.

Terry returned home to British Columbia to begin treatment. He continued to hope that he would get well enough to return to his run. But it was not to be. He died less than a year later. He was not quite twenty-three years old.

When Terry Fox died, the whole country mourned. People felt as if they had known him. And, in a way, they had. They had seen his courage, his determination, his shyness, and, when the run had to end, his sadness. They cared deeply about this young Canadian.

Why did Terry Fox have such an impact? He was an ordinary young man in many ways. He could have been the young man who lives next door. He wasn't incredibly smart, handsome, or rich. But when he began his run, everyone soon knew that this young man had something very special about him, something we all admire. He was completely committed to what he was doing. He had made a decision to raise money for cancer research by running across the country. It was hard for him to run. His body ached at the end of each day. He had to give up everything else in his life. But he overcame these difficulties. The only thing that could stop him was something that was outside his control.

Terry Fox is a model of commitment. If his story had not become widely known, only a few people would have known about him and been inspired by him. But instead, he became a model for many thousands of people, young and old. Terry Fox Runs are now held all over the world to raise money to find a cure for cancer.

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