

Fully Alive Grade 8

Grade 8, 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

- consider the human person as the wonder of creation, made in the image of God and given the powers of human intelligence and free will.
- examine the human abilities to learn, to remember, to reason, to create, to feel, and to act freely.
- explore the concept of character — the moral self; and discuss the importance of the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) for moral growth.
- reflect on the virtue of humility in light of the limitations and weaknesses that are part of each person’s life.

Working together at school and at home

- In the opening topic, we will explore some of the wonders of the world. You might ask your child about this discussion.
- The idea of human persons as the wonder of the world is an important one in this theme. In class the students will look at the amazing powers of the human mind — to learn, to remember, to reason, to create, to feel, and to act freely.
- The development of children’s minds is always important to parents. One of the most common problems for young adolescents is a lack of good work habits — getting homework done regularly, taking time to review for tests, and learning how to balance

their lives. Parents can help by encouraging, setting limits, and offering assistance when their young people are having difficulties coping with their many responsibilities.

- Making thoughtful decisions is an important focus in Theme One. The goal is to help young people become “thinking doers.” The ability to make thoughtful decisions is an essential one to develop during adolescence, and families can make a big difference by encouraging their children to

- take on appropriate responsibility as they grow up
- recognize that all decisions have consequences
- review their decisions when something goes wrong
- learn from their past mistakes.

All young people need encouragement, especially those who are inclined to act first and then think. A parent can also contribute to the process of reviewing a decision that did not work out, by discussing the situation and suggesting some new ways of looking at the problem. In order to do this, however, the intention of the parent has to be to help, not to blame or criticize.

- Ask your child about the virtue of humility, which is highlighted in Theme One. At school the students will be encouraged to recognize that each person has limitations and weaknesses, as well as amazing abilities, and that humility is the virtue that helps us to put God and other people ahead of ourselves.

Teacher: _____ Date _____

School telephone: _____

Theme One Topics

In Grade 8, Theme One is developed through five topics. The theme begins with an examination of persons as the wonder of creation, and then goes on to explore some of the extraordinary powers humans have been given: the ability to learn, remember, and reason; the capacity to create and experience emotions; and the ability to act freely. The final topic examines the concept of character and moral choices.

Theme One Virtue

The virtue of humility is highlighted in Theme One. This focus on humility provides a balance between the vision of the person as the wonder of creation and the limitations and weaknesses that are also part of the human condition. Humility is presented as the necessary remedy for the sin of pride. This reflection on the virtue of humility is from the student text.

The Virtue of Humility

“Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you shall find rest for your souls.” (Matthew 11:29)

How are we to make sense of this? We are the wonder of creation, but Jesus tells us that if we are to find peace, we must learn to be gentle and humble in heart.

Yes, we are the wonder of creation, but a far from perfect wonder. Each of us has limitations and weaknesses. Among these weaknesses is the sin of pride — wanting to be first, to be noticed, to be best, to have power and status. The virtue of humility is the necessary remedy for our pride.

To be humble is to acknowledge our weaknesses and failings, and to recognize our dependence on God. True humility means putting God and others ahead of ourselves. It does not mean denying our worth and talents, or demeaning ourselves so that others will say, “What a modest person.” To act this way to gain attention and praise is actually false humility, which is really pride.

The society in which we live does not promote humility. The message we absorb is that fame, power, and wealth are what really matter. We are also encouraged to ridicule and judge people we have never met when their flawed behaviour becomes public. And we bring these attitudes to our own lives. We put someone down to make ourselves feel powerful. We look for compliments instead of pointing out the gifts of others. We use electronic communication to gossip and spread rumours without thinking about the harm we can cause.

It is difficult to develop the virtue of humility in an environment that promotes pride. The first step, as it is for all of the virtues, is reflection and prayer.

- Do I know my weaknesses and faults?
- Am I gentle with the people around me?
- Am I jealous of the strengths and talents of others, or do I appreciate them?
- Do I push myself forward or do I encourage others to step up?
- Do I judge other people far more often than I judge myself?

Once we answer these questions honestly, we can turn to God and ask for help and healing.

During the Mass, just before we receive the Eucharist, we recall the words the centurion said to Jesus: “Lord, I am not worthy to receive you, but only say the word and I shall be healed.” We say these words with deep sincerity, but too often forget about them once we have left the church. This prayer of humility is meant to guide our lives.

Topic 1 — The Wonder of Creation

God has made you in his image that you might in your person make the invisible Creator present on earth.

St. Peter Chrysologus

Summary

In the opening topic the students are introduced to the idea of the human person as the wonder of creation — created in the image of God, given amazing powers of intelligence and free will, and intended for eternal friendship with God.

Main Ideas

- There are many wonders in the world, but persons are the true wonders of creation.
- Our ability to love, to know, and to act freely is a reflection of the love, knowledge, and freedom of God.
- We are God’s representatives on earth and have been given special responsibilities to care for all creation.

Family Participation

- The opening topic introduces an imaginary teacher, Mr. Sato, and his Grade 8 class. This class appears at various times throughout the program. In particular, six students in Mr. Sato’s class are featured in a number of topics. The following is a brief description of these students:

Meneki Da Silva — Meneki live with her parents and a younger brother, Roshan. Her parents came to Canada from Sri Lanka in the early 1980s. Mr. Da Silva is an engineer; his wife does not have paid work outside the home but is involved in Sri Lankan cultural activities. Meneki is a good student and tends to be somewhat anxious and shy. She doesn't have any good friends in the class.

Jeff Grant — Jeff lives with his father and stepmother. His mother died when he was eight and Mr. Grant remarried three years later. Mr. Grant is a sports reporter and is often away from home. Mrs. Grant is a real estate agent. Jeff tends to be impulsive and is easily led by others. He is intelligent but rarely does the work necessary to develop his potential.

Michael Cormier — Michael lives with his parents and his younger brother, Paul. His father is an accountant and his mother works from home creating illustrations for children's books. Mrs. Cormier's sister, Elly, is also part of the family and is close to Michael. Elly has leukemia and has recently moved to a hospice. Michael is a serious boy who tends to be a perfectionist and to judge others by his rigid standards.

Lydia Connolly — Lydia is one of four children. She has an older sister and a younger sister and brother. Her father is a police officer and her mother, whose heritage is Filipino, works part time as a nurse. Lydia's older sister, Abby, is seriously depressed and has recently been hospitalized. Ordinarily, Lydia is a sunny and outgoing person, but Abby's illness has been very difficult for her.

Joe Morano — Joe lives with his mother, older sister, and two younger brothers. Mrs. Morano was very young when she married and her husband had difficulty keeping a job. He abandoned the family several years ago. The family receives welfare and Mrs. Morano's relatives sometimes provide her with extra groceries. Joe is an average student and takes his responsibilities seriously. He is very protective of his mother.

Megan Bauer — Megan was adopted as a baby, and has cerebral palsy. It affects her speech to a moderate degree and she uses canes to walk. Her parents were aware of her disability when they adopted her and have provided her with support and many opportunities to develop. Mrs. Bauer is a doctor and Mr. Bauer works in hospital administration. Megan's physical limitations frustrate her at times, but overall she is a spirited and self-confident person.

- **Mind Alerts** — The opening topic also has a feature called “Mind Alert,” which may be a question to answer, a problem or puzzle to solve, or a quotation to reflect on. In Topic 1 the Mind Alert is a question: “What would you choose as the seven wonders of the world?” You might ask your child about his or her choice of wonders.

- **Young adolescents and doubts** — During early adolescence, parents may notice that their children seem to have more doubts about themselves than they did in the past, and find it difficult to see themselves as a wonder of creation. They often compare themselves unfavourably to others and question their own abilities. Some young people are also painfully self-conscious.

These attitudes and feelings are not always expressed in words, but are evident in the way they react to other people or to situations in which they feel challenged. It takes a lot of tact from parents to help young people see their strengths. When parents go overboard in their praise, their children often respond, “You’re just saying that because you have to.” But even when they seem to reject efforts to compliment them, it’s essential to continue to provide them with support and encouragement.

At the same time, it is important for parents to provide young people with a model of appreciation and enjoyment of the gift of others, for example, those of friends or extended family members. This is part of the practice of the virtue of humility — to recognize the talents and achievements of others, without feeling that other people’s gifts diminish or a threat to your own.

- **Responsibilities of persons** — In class the students examined some of the responsibilities that come with being made in the image of God. We are God’s representatives on earth, and have a special mission: to create goodness and peace, to care for each other and for all creation, and to work for the coming of God’s Kingdom.

With encouragement and reminders from their families, these are responsibilities that young people can begin to assume in their daily life, for example: make an effort to resolve conflicts with family members or friends; treat others with respect; do what is right even when it is hard; stand up for people who are badly treated; do what they can to protect the environment; and get involved in helping others, especially those who are vulnerable. When young people see the adults around them accepting these

responsibilities, it inspires them to make an effort.

Topic 2 — The Mind: Learning, Remembering, Reasoning

*Almighty God influences us and works in us through our minds,
not without them or in spite of them.*

Blessed John Henry Newman

Summary

In Topic 2 the students explore three capacities of the human mind: the ability to learn both from personal experience and from the assistance of others; the ability to remember, which includes the differences between short-term and long-term memory; and finally, the ability to reason — a power of the mind that shows striking development during adolescence.

Main Ideas

- The ability to learn is one of the amazing powers of the human mind. We gather knowledge and skills through our own experience (first-hand learning), and with the assistance of others (second-hand learning).
- The ability to remember is another amazing human power. There are two kinds of memory — long-term and short term. The ability to remember can be affected by stress and by insufficient contact with the information.
- The ability to reason is another amazing human power. Reason is the process of thinking logically and is especially important for complex learning. During adolescence, the power of reasoning develops and becomes more abstract.

Family Participation

- **Mind Alert** — In class, the students began this topic with another Mind Alert — a problem involving six glasses, the first three empty and the last three filled with milk. The instructions are to rearrange the glasses so that no full glass is next to another full one, and no empty glass is next to another empty one, but you may move only one of the glasses. You might ask your child about this problem. Did she or he find the solution? Your family may enjoy trying to solve it.
- **Attitudes toward learning** — It is often around this time in their school career when young people decide that they're not good at learning some particular subject. Their

judgements tend to be black and white, and they need encouragement to look at the situation more carefully. An important message for children of this age is that most people can all learn just about anything to a certain level of competence. We may not have a special talent for math or writing, but that doesn't mean we can't learn to solve math problems or to produce an acceptable piece of writing.

When young people have an all or nothing attitude toward success, it often leads them to drop school subjects during their high school years and avoid anything they can't do well. It can be helpful when parents let their children know that sometimes success means keeping your head above water — this subject was hard for me, but I managed. It's also important for parents not to confirm children's judgments by making comments like, "Well, I was never very good at math," or "I hated writing when I was in school."

- **Homework, tests, and studying** — The challenge of becoming self-disciplined young people is particularly relevant for Grade 8 students since they will be facing greater demands at the secondary level. In class the students discussed the difference between short-term and long-term memory, and the importance of doing homework regularly and setting time aside to study for a test. Without sufficient contact with the material to be learned, even the brightest students have difficulty remembering specific information when faced with a test. The information never makes it into their long-term memory.

- **Developing minds** — An important aspect of helping young people develop intellectually is giving them problems to work on. Whether their concerns are about school work, friends, or how to organize their time, it's important to encourage them to find solutions. When parents show their interest by asking questions — What do you think you should do? Why? Does that seem like a good idea to you? Why? What other solutions have you considered? — they are encouraging their children to develop their ability to reason and to make thoughtful decisions.

- **Exercise for the mind** — There are many games, puzzles, and other activities that provide a work out for the mind, for example, Concentration (memory), chess (reasoning), 20 Questions (memory and reasoning), and number games like Sudoku and Ken-Ken (reasoning). There are also many books and online sites that offer a variety of puzzles involving memory and reasoning.

Topic 3 — The Mind: Creating and Feeling

Whatever that be within us that feels, thinks, desires, and animates, is something celestial, divine, and, consequently, imperishable.

Aristotle

Summary

The next aspect of the human mind the students examine are creativity, the power to bring about something new and original, and the capacity to experience a great variety of emotions.

Main Ideas

- The ability to create — to bring something new and original into existence — is one of the amazing powers of persons. Each of us is born with this power and has the ability to express this gift in some way.
- The ability to experience a great variety of feelings in response to events and people in our lives is also an amazing power of persons. Understanding our feelings and being in control of how they are expressed are important goals as people grow up.
- Both creativity and emotions have the power to transform life into a rich and exciting experience.

Family Participation

• **Creative activities** — In class the students discussed the wide range of creative activities — solutions to problems, paintings, inventions, poems and stories, performances (music, drama, dance, athletic), recipes, clothing designs, computer programs and games. The point is that creativity is a human ability, and is expressed in many ways.

It's important to encourage young adolescents to try a variety of activities, including some that are traditionally associated with creative abilities: music, art, drama, dance. It's good for young people to know that enjoyment of the arts doesn't depend on being unusually talented. There are also other creative activities that some adolescents become interested in at this stage of their life, for example, cooking, crafts, mechanics, online games and website design, and computer programming. Support and encouragement from

parents for these interests is important.

• **Emotional development** — During adolescence emotional development is an uneven process. Many young people experience moods that change quite rapidly, especially in early adolescence. This is confusing and upsetting for them since there's no apparent reason for the way they feel. The same hormones that cause the changes of puberty have some effect on the emotional ups and downs of adolescence.

Most young adolescents tend to be self-conscious. As a result, they are easily upset or embarrassed by others. Their emotional reactions sometimes seem to be out of proportion to the situation from an adult's perspective. Tact and sensitivity to their feelings is important, but beyond this there is not a great deal that parents can do. Sometimes, depending on the child, humour can be helpful. It's also important for parents to keep a sense of perspective, and to avoid getting too involved in their young adolescents' changing feelings.

• **Difficult emotions** — Young people are generally more aware of the power of their emotions, and at times have difficulty managing difficult emotions like anger, jealousy, embarrassment, or sadness. In class the students discussed some ideas about how to handle such feelings:

- 1) to stop and think, calm themselves, and avoid expressing the feelings in a way that may be harmful to other people and to themselves
- 2) to talk to someone — a family member, close friend, or a counsellor
- 3) if someone has angered or hurt them badly, they may want to let the person know, but only after calming down and reflecting on the situation.

Parents can help young people with their difficult feelings, but mainly by listening. It is always tempting to offer advice or to suggest that the situation is not worth worrying about. Most often, however, what young people want is the opportunity to share their feelings with someone who is sympathetic.

• **Emotionally intelligent people** — An significant goal during adolescence is to become an emotionally intelligent person. Some researchers are convinced that a person's emotional intelligence is even more important than intellectual intelligence when it comes to having a successful and fulfilling life. In class, the students discussed some characteristics of emotionally intelligent people. Parents may find it helpful to consider

these characteristics as they help their young people understand and manage their feelings in a healthy way. Emotionally intelligent people:

- are self-aware and familiar with their own emotions.
- are aware of and tuned-in to the emotions of other people.
- have developed self-control over how and when to express their emotions.
- recognize when they are stressed and likely to overreact.
- don't get worked up over small irritations. They know how to let them go.
- don't hold grudges. They realize grudges are an unnecessary burden.
- know when it's time to apologize and ask for forgiveness and do it sincerely.

Topic 4 — The Mind: Acting Freely

Decision is a risk rooted in the courage of being free.

Paul Tillich

Summary

The human ability to act deliberately and freely is examined in Topic 4. The students are introduced to ongoing neurological research on the development of the ability to exercise conscious control over one's actions. They also explore some personal and environmental factors that may be helpful as young adolescents develop the capacity to be "thinking doers."

Main Ideas

- The ability to act freely is a unique human ability. We can make decisions about how we will act.
- The ability to have conscious control over our decisions develops during adolescence.
- Our ability to be thinking doers can be affected by lack of good habits, a tendency to be impulsive, lack of guidance in how to make good decisions, or the influence of peer pressure.

Family Participation

- **Acting freely** — Young adolescents tend to see the meaning of acting freely as being able to do what they want. Parents, on the other hand, are concerned with the right use of

freedom, thoughtful decision-making, and the ability to stick to a plan of action. As children reach adolescence, most parents give them more and more opportunities to make decisions. Often young people need suggestions and advice as they learn to do this. One of the most helpful strategies parents can adopt is to ask questions: Have you thought about this? What would happen if you did that? How would you feel about it? If you decide on this course of action do you think you can stick with it? When you ask your child these kinds of questions, you are encouraging thoughtful decision-making and a responsible use of freedom.

As children grow up they often face pressured situations in which immediate decisions are needed. A strategy parents can use to prepare young people to make good choices under difficult circumstances is to create imaginary situations and ask questions about them. For example, “What would you do if you were in a store with your friend and he or she wanted you to shoplift something? How would you handle the situation? What would you do?”

• **Development of the human brain** — Research on brain development shows that the areas of the brain most involved with a person’s conscious control over his or her actions are the frontal lobes, and especially the prefrontal cortex. These areas of the brain are the last to develop, and are not complete until people reach their early 20s. In other words, there are some physical reasons for the difficulties young people can have making a decision and carrying out the decision.

It might seem that research in brain development provides a great excuse for young people who make impulsive and risky decisions. There are other factors, however, that play a role in helping young adolescents become “thinking doers” — people who consider their options, make good decisions, and carry them out. In class, the students discussed these other factors: developing personal habits, like self-discipline, self-control, and a sense of personal responsibility; the influence of friends, which may interfere with a person’s ability to make thoughtful decisions, and the role of families.

• **Role of families** — Helping growing children to become thoughtful decision-makers is a long process. Some suggestions to reach this goal are:

- Encourage children to take on responsibilities that are appropriate for their age, and make it clear that you expect them to be dependable.

- Give young people the freedom to make some decisions for themselves, and encourage them to consider possible consequences of a decision before they act.
- It's always helpful to ask questions when young people are trying to make a decision, for example: Have you thought about this? What might happen if you do that? How would you feel about it? If you decide to do this do you think you can stick with it? When you ask these kinds of questions you are encouraging thoughtful decision-making and responsible use of freedom.
- Take time to talk to them when something goes wrong with a decision, and help them recognize that they can learn from past mistakes.

All children need help from their families to become responsible, self-disciplined people who think before they act.

Topic 5 — Character

*Character is like a tree and reputation is its shadow.
The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.*

Abraham Lincoln

Summary

The last topic in Theme One continues to examine the capacity to act freely, this time from the perspective of moral choices and the development of character. The cardinal virtues — prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance — are introduced and explored in this topic.

Main Ideas

- We are the only creatures on earth who can act freely, strive for goodness and service to others, and develop our moral self, which is our character.
- As people grow up they have to accept more responsibility for developing their character and becoming the people God intends them to be.
- The four cardinal virtues — prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance — are an important foundation for building a good character.

Family Participation

- The ability to act freely is an enormous responsibility. Human freedom can be used to strive for goodness and service to others or to strive for pleasure and power. This topic looks at character, which is a person's moral self.

- **Role models of character** — In class, the students began this topic with a number of examples of people who are recognized for the strength of their character. You might ask your child about some of these people. People of all ages need heroes, and role models that inspire them.

Young people are often caught up in the popular culture, and look to the media for role models — singers, actors, musicians, sports figures, and other celebrities. This is normal for their stage of life, but what matters is that there be other role models in their lives — people of strong, moral character. Parents can introduce these role models through films, television programs, and books.

- **The role of parents** — As all parents know, there are no perfect parents. There are only imperfect people who learn how to be mothers and fathers by becoming parents. All parents make some mistakes along the way, but what matters most is that their commitment to their children is unconditional.

A wise parent once said, "I'm not raising children, I'm raising adults." This idea is especially relevant when thinking about character. We all want our children to grow up as happy and healthy people, to have love in their lives, and to contribute to society in some way. But what kind of people will they be? Will they be men and women of strong and good character?

Parents do make a difference in helping develop their children's character — their moral self. Here are a few areas that are especially important:

- **respect and sensitivity toward others** — When children are treated with respect, and are expected to respond in the same way, the essential foundation for moral growth is created. The underlying idea is that people are not things; they are persons and deserve to be treated as such. Our faith teaches us that each person is made in God's image.

- **the ability to consider the viewpoint and feelings of others** — Parents can encourage this ability even with very young children: "How would you feel if she took your toy?" "Would you like to be the one person who was left out of the game?" The

ability to recognize and consider another person's viewpoint and feelings takes some time to develop, but is essential for moral development.

- **a sense of responsibility** — A sense of responsibility is fundamental for good character. It often happens that parents pay attention when children don't do what they're supposed to do or don't keep their word, but rarely comment when children are dependable. Helping children to become dependable people requires a lot of support and patience from parents. Children need to hear many positive messages about the times when they are helpful and trustworthy, and experience the pleasure of being someone that mom or dad can count on.

• **The cardinal virtues** — The essential virtues for good character are four virtues, known as the *cardinal* virtues. The word *cardinal* comes from the Latin word, *cardo*, which means "hinge." All other virtues depend on these four virtues: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

- **Prudence** is the habit of making wise decisions in our daily lives, decisions that are made according to reason. In order to do this, we have to 1) keep in mind our past experience; 2) realize when we need to get advice about a decision; 3) put our knowledge into action and make the decision.

Each time parents say things like, "Use your common sense," "You know better" or "Did you forget what happened the last time you did this," they are talking about the virtue of prudence. Parents can encourage the development of prudence by giving children opportunities to make decisions, and especially by discussing what happened when a decision does not work out. Children need to know that everyone makes some mistakes when learning to make good decisions. The lesson is to learn from these mistakes and avoid them in the future. Parents can also let children know that if they're having trouble with a decision, they will be glad to help — not take over, but just offer advice.

- **Justice** is the virtue that requires we give to people what is due them — respect for their property, honesty in dealing with them, and being willing to meet our commitments to others. Justice is a social virtue because it is concerned with our responsibilities toward other people and toward the society in which we live.

Understanding justice begins at home. There are many events that happen in

families that provide an opportunity for talking about justice — a disagreement between children, creating a schedule for household tasks, a discussion of privileges related to the age of the child. One aspect of justice that children find difficult to understand is the difference between treating people fairly and treating them identically. It is for this reason that they complain about differences in bedtimes or extra attention for one child because of a special circumstance. As children mature, this issue can still be a problem for them. Arguments like “But everyone else is allowed to go,” or “Bill’s parents let him, and we’re the same age” are based on the notion that fair treatment is identical treatment.

There are also many opportunities for learning about justice toward people outside the home: respecting neighbourhood properties, being a faithful team member, or doing one’s fair share in a small group project at school. All of these situations involve the virtue of justice — to fulfill our responsibilities toward others.

- **Fortitude** is the virtue that allows us to be strong in the face of difficulties and injustices. Sometimes it is described as courage or bravery. The virtue of perseverance is an important part of fortitude — sticking to something despite setbacks and disappointments.

Another word for fortitude is *resilience*. A resilient person has the ability to recover from disappointments or failure. When parents try to shield their children from small failures and mistakes, they are working against the development of the virtue of fortitude. Of course, parents must never expose children to serious harm, but the experience of failure or the consequences of a mistake are learning opportunities, especially when parents take the time to talk with their children about what happened.

- **Temperance** is the virtue that guides our desire for pleasure. It is sometimes called self-discipline or self-control. Instead of giving in to all our temptations, we use our ability to reason to restrain ourselves. Self-indulgence is the opposite of temperance. The virtue of chastity is part of temperance, and helps us to manage our sexual impulses.

Very young children often find it almost impossible to be temperate. They want what they want when they want it. Since they find it hard to control themselves and their desires, parents have to do it for them. As children grow up, however, they have

to learn to restrain themselves. For this to happen, parents have to encourage self-discipline, and avoid indulging children, or making excuses for them when they have failed to meet their obligations. In class, the students discussed the example of a boy who was spending most of his time outside of school playing online games. The main point of the discussion was that without self-control the desire for pleasure weakens a person's ability to make good decisions about his or her life.

