

Grade 6, Theme Five

Family Letter

Dear Family,

We are ready to begin the last 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 Five

Theme Five of *Fully Alive* is called “Living in the World.” We are not simply individuals who have relationships with family members and friends. We are also members of human society, brothers and sisters within the whole human family, and caretakers of the earth.

As the students get older, they are encouraged to recognize that they have a unique contribution to make to the world, one that cannot be made by anyone else. Their participation in creating a world that reflects the goodness of God is needed.

In Theme Five we will

- analyze the human capacity to influence others and to be influenced by others.
- explore the meaning of values and virtues, and examine the influence of television, advertising, and stereotypes on values.
- discuss human influence on the natural and social environment of the world and the responsibility to be a positive influence.

Working together at school and at home

- You might ask your child about people who are a strong positive influence in his or her life. What your child has learned from these people?
- The students will be bringing home sheets about television and advertising that include questions about values. This assignment provides an opportunity to have a family discussion about the influence of these media on values and behaviour.
- You might ask your child about a quiz that the class will take about protection of the earth, and discuss your family efforts to be good stewards of the natural environment.
- We will be talking about electronic communication and its impact on the social environment. It is important to talk to children about your family’s rules that ensure their online safety, to encourage them to avoid spreading gossip online, and to report any problems they experience.

Theme Five Topics

Walk as children as light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true, and try to learn what is pleasing to the Lord.

Ephesians 5:8-9

The final theme of Grade 5 has four topics. The opening topic explores the human capacity to influence and to be influenced, a capacity that reflects the social nature of persons. In Topic 2, the students examine the meaning of values, the virtues that reflect Christian values, and the influences in their lives on those values. Topics 3 and 4 the students explore their capacity to influence the world, including both the natural environment and the social environment.

Topic 1 — We Are Social Beings

For by their innermost nature men and women are social beings; and if they do not enter into relationships with others they can neither live nor develop their gifts.

The Church in the Modern World, #12, Documents of Vatican II

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that each person has the capacity to influence other people and to be influenced by others. The teacher and students discuss this capacity as part of what it means to be a person, and to need other people in our lives. They explore some situations in which the power of human influence is evident.

Main Ideas

- God created us as social beings with the capacity to influence each other.
- Influence is the power to affect other people's thinking, feelings, and actions.
- We need to be aware of influences that affect us and of the influence we have on others.

Family Participation

- A suggested student activity for this topic is to create a list of three people who have had a strong, positive influence on them and to describe this influence. You might ask your child about his or her list and the reasons for choosing these people.
- An important idea in this topic is that the power of influence is part of being human. We are social beings, and could not live in relationship with others without this ability. Our responsibility to want what is good for other people guides us in the way we use this power.
- When the occasion arises, you may want to talk to your child about the power of influence. At this time of life, most children are very eager to fit in. If they are easily influenced by others, it can result in problems. If this has happened to your child, this topic provides a good opportunity

to talk about making decisions based on his or her understanding of what is right and wrong, not on what other people may be suggesting. On the other hand, some children have a lot of influence because of their popularity and strong personalities, and may need help in understanding the responsibility to use their influence wisely.

Topic 2 — Values and Virtues

*You never know how much you really believe anything until its truth
or falsehood becomes a matter of life and death to you.*

C. S. Lewis

Summary

This topic continues to explore the concept of influence, this time from the perspective of Christian values and virtues. The teacher and students examine some examples of values and virtues and the students then apply what they are learning about Christian values to three significant influences in our world: television, advertising, and stereotyping.

Main Ideas

- Values are the ideas we believe in; we try to do what is good and develop the virtues that reflect our Christian values.
- Our faith and our families are important influences on our values.
- Our values are also influenced by television programs, movies, video games, magazines, advertising, and by stereotypes of people presented in these media.
- We need to become more aware of these influences and how they affect our values.

Family Participation

- A suggested student activity for this topic is to complete a questionnaire about a television program or a commercial and examine the values that are being promoted. Your family members may want to participate in this activity and offer their comments.
- This topic invites the students to look at influences on their Christian values and in particular, to examine the values that are promoted in television shows and advertisements. Most parents recognize that television is a powerful influence in children's lives. You might ask about how your child sees this influence. If you have rules about what programs can be watched, this would be a good time to talk about these rules and your reasons for them. As with many other issues, refusing to let children watch certain programs takes conviction and determination. It's important

to let them know that this decision is based on their best interests. But you can still expect many arguments.

Nowadays, many children have televisions in their bedroom, which makes monitoring what they are watching almost impossible. From the perspective of the questionable values that are promoted in many programs, and the adult nature of many of the situations that are portrayed, it is not in children's best interest to watch whatever they want. At this age, they lack the maturity and life experience to evaluate the messages that are being promoted.

- Along with the power of television programs is the influence of advertising. It's important to help your child become more aware of this influence. There is no question that advertising is effective. It encourages people of all ages to want things they do not need and may not be able to afford. In late childhood and early adolescence, the focus is often on name-brand sports equipment, running shoes, items of clothing, and electronic equipment and games.

Consumerism is such a strong influence in society that is difficult for children and for many adults to step back and look at the underlying values. An important role parents can play is in helping their children distinguish between their needs and their wants and providing a clear message that the way we care for each other, especially for those who are in need, is what really matters, not our possessions.

- In class, the students also discussed stereotypes — a view of people based on a single aspect, for example, age, race, religion, sex, or disability. The example of families has a strong influence in this area. When children hear negative remarks or jokes made about people based on race, appearance, or age, they are receiving a message that is in conflict with basic Christian values. It is important to explain to children that stereotyping is both unjust and disrespectful because it ignores the uniqueness and worth of all persons.

Topic 3 — We Live in the World: The Natural Environment

The earth is entrusted to humanity like a garden that is managed but not owned.

Humans are responsible for being gardeners for the species of plants and good shepherds for the species of animals. Humanity is accountable, not only for managing the domain entrusted to it, but also for the image of God humans reflect by means of their management.

Our Relationships with the Environment: The Need for Conversion, CCCB

Summary

The students begin this topic by reflecting on the influence people have on the world, from well-known figures to ordinary people who make a positive difference by the way they live. The teacher and students examine some examples of positive influences on the natural environment and discuss the responsibility each person has to care for the earth.

Main Ideas

- God gave us the world; it is our home and we are responsible for making it a good home for all.
- Each person has a unique influence on the world. The world is the environment in which we live, and it is both a place (a natural environment) and the people with whom we live (social environment).
- We are the stewards of the natural environment. It is our responsibility to be a positive influence by protecting and caring for the earth.

Family Participation

- This topic and the following one are about the ways in which we influence the world. The impact of well-known people is obvious, but it is also true that each person has a unique influence on the world. By virtue of living in the world, we influence the world — both the natural environment and the social environment. The students discussed the contribution of a number of famous people — inventors, medical researchers, musicians, performers, visual artists, and political figures. You might ask about these people. If your child were to choose a famous person who has been a positive influence on the world, who would it be?
- An important idea in this topic and the next one is stewardship. The students discussed what it means to be a steward — a person who is responsible for managing and looking after something that belongs to someone else. This describes our relationship to the earth and to the social environment we create. God created the world and gave us the responsibility to be its stewards.
- The students explore several examples of good stewardship of the natural environment — an effort by some hockey players to offset the negative effect of air travel; a paper company that depends primarily on recycled fibre for its products; and a Grade 7 class whose students aimed to promote zero waste at their school. You might ask about these examples, and about any special projects at your child's school to protect the natural environment.

- A suggested student activity in this topic is the creation of an advertisement to encourage people to be a positive influence on the natural environment. You might ask about this activity. What topic did your child's group choose, and what was the main message of the advertisement?
- Children hear a lot about global warming, pollution, and environmental damage, and they worry. They need to believe that they can do something to make the situation better. Some positive actions include careful recycling, buying products with recycled content, reusing articles whenever possible, composting, trying not to waste food, participating in local cleanups, and walking and biking when it is possible. When families are involved these kinds of environmental efforts, it helps children recognize that they can make a difference in their own small corner of the world. It also helps them recognize the need for perseverance and commitment to be a good steward.

Topic 4 — We Live in the World: The Social Environment

If there is light in the soul, there will be beauty in the person.

If there is beauty in the person, there will be harmony in the house.

If there is harmony in the house, there will be order in the nation.

If there is order in the nation, there will be peace in the world.

Chinese Proverb

Summary

The final topic of this theme helps the students understand the nature of the social environment, an environment that is created wherever people are gathered in groups. This topic focusses on communication and the social environment, and, in particular, the impact of new communication technology on the social environment.

Main Ideas

- The world is our home and we are responsible for making it a good home for all.
- Without communication, there could be no social environment.
- Methods of communication change over time, and new communication technology has both a positive and a negative influence on the social environment.
- It is our responsibility to be a positive influence by communicating respectfully and treating others with kindness and respect.

Family Participation

- In class, the students explored a variety of communication situations — communicating in person, talking on the telephone, sending an e-mail, instant messaging, and participating in an online chat. You might ask about these communication situations. Which method of communicating does your child prefer?
- The students learned that new communication technology has both positive and negative effects on the social environment. Some of its positive effects are the ability to communicate easily and quickly, even when people live far apart; to share photos; and to make plans for group activities. Some of the negative effects include misunderstandings because of the limited nature of electronic communication; lack of privacy, since messages can be forwarded to anyone; safety issues since a person may hide his or her true identity; and a tendency to spread gossip and rumours and to engage in bullying. *Cyber-bullying* is the term for using electronic communication to spread rumours, threaten, or harm another person. In research studies about electronic communication, children admit that it is far easier to insult or bully a person online than it is face to face. When you cannot see the other person, it doesn't seem that bad.
- Children in Grade 6, as well as many students in higher grades, appear to find it very difficult to grasp the difference between private and public information. In part, this is the result of living in a society in which private matters are often made public. Also, the limited life experience and maturity of children and young people affect their judgment of what should be appropriately shared with others.

The fact that all electronic messages can easily be sent on to a wider audience suggests that great care has to be taken both in creating messages and in considering the reliability of the receiver of the message. If your child uses e-mail or instant messaging, it is important to discuss this issue, and to review it at regular intervals.

- In some families, children are far more advanced in the use of electronic communication than their parents, which makes it more difficult for adults to monitor what they are doing. It is well worth the effort for parents to educate themselves in this area. There is lot of information available for parents about safe use of electronic communication and the internet: books, articles, and websites. The government of Canada has an internet site (Safe Canada) with information for families. Another helpful organization is the Media Awareness Network, which also has an internet site. Some general guidelines for safe online communication include:

- Children should not have computers with an internet connection in their bedrooms. This is the recommendation of safety experts, including the police. Children lack the maturity and the judgement to ensure their safety.
- Children should not give out any personal information online without their parents' permission.
- When online, children should use a nickname that does not reveal whether they are a boy or girl.
- Children should never reveal their user name or password for e-mailing or instant messaging to anyone except their parents.
- Children should never agree to meet someone they met online unless their parents know about the person and will also be present.
- Children should not open e-mails, messages, files, or other links from people they do not know.
- If children receive a bullying message they should not respond, but save the message and show it to a parent or other trusted adult.
- It should be made clear to children that sending insulting or rude messages, or circulating rumours and gossip that would be hurtful to another person, is unacceptable.
- If children are using instant messaging, parents should know who is on their child's list, which should include only trusted people the child knows in the "real" world.
- In class, the students discussed the responsibility each person has to create a positive social environment, and to communicate in a respectful way. You might ask your child about this discussion and what efforts he or she is making to be a good steward.