

Grade 7, 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](http://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:

- examine the social nature of persons, which motivates us to join together in groups, both small and large.
- explore four significant reasons for gathering with others: to celebrate; to support each other in times of difficulty; to create needed changes in our society; and to work together cooperatively to accomplish goals.
- learn about our responsibilities as members of groups, including the creation of a sense of community that respects and appreciates the uniqueness of each person.

Working together at school and at home

- The experience of family celebrations is immensely important to children. Whether it’s a big occasion, like Christmas, or a special meal to mark a family member’s birthday — these are events that are remembered many years later. In school we will discuss the importance of celebrations as a way of reminding ourselves just how important our bonds with other people are. You might ask your child about this discussion.
- Another reasons people gather together is to assist each other. We will be learning about the purpose of support groups, and the help they can provide when people are facing serious difficulties. You might ask you child about support groups and what he or she learned about them.
- The students will be learning about groups that try to create necessary changes in society. Such groups appeal to idealistic young people, especially if their families are involved in social action in their communities. Ask your child about the groups that will

be discussed in class and what these groups are trying to achieve.

- We will explore the meaning of work, how it contributes to our society, and how dependent all of us are on the work of others. You might talk to your child about the work you do, what you enjoy about it, and what you find difficult.

- In Theme Five the virtue of generosity is highlighted. Ask your child to tell you about this virtue. In school we discussed generosity as the virtue that allows us to be big-hearted and to offer our time, energy, and prayers to others because, as Jesus taught us, they are our neighbours.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Theme Five Topics

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:7

The final theme of Grade 7 has three topics. The opening topic explores our social nature as persons that prompts us to join together for a variety of purposes, and takes a closer look at two of these purposes: celebration and support. In Topic 2, the focus is on coming together to create change and the communal nature of work. The final topic looks at the responsibilities of membership in groups.

Theme Five Virtue

The virtue of generosity is highlighted in this theme. This virtue is explained as the one that allows people to be big-hearted and to offer their time, energy, and prayers to others because, as Jesus taught us, they are our neighbours. This is the reflection on the virtue of generosity from the student text.

The Virtue of Generosity

“. . . You shall love your neighbour as yourself.” Matthew 22:39

Who is my neighbour? In the Gospel of Luke, a young man asks Jesus this question, and the answer he receives is the parable of the good Samaritan — the story of the one man who stopped and helped a stranger in terrible need without expecting anything in return. The good Samaritan acted with great generosity.

We often think of the virtue of generosity in terms of material things — giving money to a charity, or donating food or clothing to people in need. These are certainly acts of generosity, but not the only ones.

To be generous is to be big-hearted, ready to give ourselves to others, remembering that they are our neighbours. A generous act might be reaching out to an outsider:

- Peter was choosing a team for a game, and he happened to notice Aidan, a boy in his class looking at him. He knew that Aidan was always chosen last for all teams, but there was something about the way Aidan looked that caught his attention. It was as if Peter saw him for the first time. “Aidan, come on, you’re on the team,” he said.

A generous act might be a prayer for someone who is suffering:

- Donna saw an item on the television news about a fire that had destroyed a family’s home. A little girl and her mother had survived, but her father and brother had died. The girl looked so sad, and Donna couldn’t forget her face. That night when she went to bed, she prayed for the little girl, and months later she is still praying for her each day.

A generous act might be the gift of time for someone who is lonely:

- Ben lives next door to an elderly man whose wife died several years ago. In the nice weather, Mr. Riley often sits on his porch in the afternoon. When he sees Ben coming home from school, he usually calls to him. Ben sits on the porch with him for a while. He has heard all of Mr. Riley's stories many times, but he tries to listen as if it were for the first time.

God's love for us overflows and has no limits. This generous love, which has the power to open our eyes so that we can truly see our neighbours, is a gift that we can freely share with others.

Topic 1 — We Are Social Beings

Human societies are not structures that are built or machines that are forged.

They are plants that grow and must be tended as such.

Winston Churchill

Summary

This topic begins with a reflection on the social nature of humans, which is reflected in their instinct to come together for a number of purposes. The two purposes that are highlighted in this topic are the need to gather for celebrations of all kinds, and the desire to reach out for support from others when there are issues that need special attention.

Main Ideas

- We are social beings and our social natures prompt us to gather in groups. Some groups are part of our identity as persons and others are groups that we choose for ourselves.
- People gather together to celebrate for many reasons. We celebrate as family members, as friends, as citizens of a country, and as members of our faith community.
- People also gather to support each other when they have significant challenges in their lives. Support groups provide people with understanding and acceptance, encouragement, and new ideas about how to manage their challenges.

Family Participation

• **Celebrating together** — Birthdays, anniversaries, and major feasts like Christmas and Easter are important occasions for families. Family celebrations, with their traditions and customs, encourage a sense of belonging and of identity.

It is the same with celebrations within our faith community. Children learn by what we do; if

we do not participate in the Eucharist on Sunday, they are getting a message from us that is experience is not important to us. But if we participate in the Eucharist every Sunday, our children will know that this event is central to our lives. We want our children to grow as body/spirit persons. For this reason it is essential to feed their spirits and give them a strong sense of their identity as Catholics.

- **Importance of celebrations** — Sometimes people underestimate the importance of celebrating with others — it's a lot of work, too many other things to do, no one will miss me. But without celebrating our identity and sense of belonging, it is easy to lose sight of what is important to us. Celebrations not only express our beliefs and values, but strengthen them.

In class the students were asked about their favourite memory of a celebration. You might ask you child about his or her choice.

- **Support groups** — In class, the students discussed situations that require a special kind of support that family members or friends may not be able to provide. They read a brief passage from a biography from a man who grew up with an alcoholic father, a situation that requires help and support from outside the family.

If a member of your family or a close friend has been involved in a support group, you might tell your child about this experience, if you can do this without violating the person's privacy. It's good for children to know that there is help available when people are facing difficult situations, and that it is part of God's plan that we should care for each other in this way.

Topic 2 — We Gather: Change and Work

A hundred times a day I remind myself that my inner and outer life depends on the labour of other (people), living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give the same measure as I have received and am still receiving.

Albert Einstein

Summary

This topic continues the exploration of the social nature of humans, this time with a focus on efforts to create change and on the social nature of work. The students examine several examples of groups that are trying to create social change, and explore some cooperative enterprises of workers.

Main Ideas

- People gather together to create change. They become aware of situations that are unjust or disrespectful of human life and they resolve to do something to change these situations.
- Work is always a cooperative enterprise. We gather together to work and we depend on the work of each member of the group.
- Through our efforts to make the world a more just and caring place for people, and through the work we do to serve each other, we are helping to fulfill God's plan for creation.

Family Participation

• **Working for change** — Groups that work for change appeal to the idealism of young people. In particular, environmental issues are important to children and teen-agers, and they often have many ideas on how families can improve in this area. When parents are involved in action groups and movements (for example, pro-life work, drug-abuse prevention, or neighbourhood safety campaigns), and serve as volunteers within their communities, they provide their children with a wonderful example of involvement.

• **Students for change** — As part of this topic, the students participated in an activity about the need for change in their community. They began by discussing this question in small groups: If you could change some features of our community (town, city) to make it a good place for everyone who lives here, what would these changes be? Each group identified two or three changes, and a class list was compiled. The final step was for each group to choose one of the suggested changes, and draft a letter to the elected officials of their community. These drafts were reviewed, and final copies were prepared and sent.

Be sure to ask your child about this activity and his or her contribution. The opportunity to participate in an effort to create change helps young people understand the process of coming together, listening to each other, considering the options, and acting together as good stewards of their small part of the world.

• **Work** — On several occasions in earlier grades the students have explored the meaning of work. Work is an essential part of being human — to use our intelligence, talents, knowledge, and energy to continue God's work of creation. Each person depends on the work of others.

• **Student Group Projects** — Beyond their experience of working with family members, one of the first experiences young people have is working on a project with other people. Parents sometimes hear complaints about this experience, usually because some members of the project

group are not pulling their weight. This may be an unpleasant experience, but it does highlight the need for all members of a group to contribute their fair share of the work. It's a good idea for parents to encourage their children to accept their responsibilities when they are working with others.

• **Invisible workers** — The students discussed the work of people whose contribution is often overlooked, for example, letter carriers, garbage collectors, and public transportation workers. As is often noted, it is only when one of these groups goes on strike that people realise how essential their work is. You might ask your child about this discussion, and what she or he thinks your family could do to demonstrate its appreciation of the work of “invisible” workers.

School work — The students discussed their work as students, and their responsibility to do their homework and be prepared to contribute as a member of the classroom. This responsibility is not just a personal one; it is a responsibility as a member of a classroom. You might ask your child about this discussion, and draw a comparison with family chores. These are not personal responsibilities, they are the responsibilities of a member of the family.

Topic 3 — Belonging to the Group

Genuine love consistently requires some hard decisions.

Community neither comes naturally nor is it purchased cheaply.

Summary

In the final topic of Theme Five the students look at the responsibilities of membership in a group. They focus on the responsibilities involved in belonging to a group, essential signs of community, and the responsibility each person has to create a social environment where individuals are respected, appreciated, and welcomed.

Main Ideas

- The responsibilities involved in belonging to a group are commitment to the group, good communication, resolving conflicts fairly, active participation, sharing talents and other resources, and respect for the rules of the group.
- Two essential signs of community are: 1) the group respects and appreciates the uniqueness of each person; 2) the group is more concerned with including than with excluding.
- Discrimination based on appearance, race, religion, nationality, age, education, wealth,

or social status is wrong. When we discriminate we break the commandment of Jesus to love one another.

Family Participation

• **Responsibilities of members of groups** — Young people are often involved in a variety of groups: sports teams, music groups, clubs, and parish youth groups. These are important experiences for them. They meet a variety of people, and learn more about the responsibilities of being part of a group. By this age, young people should be sufficiently committed to their group activities so that constant reminders from parents about rehearsals or team games are unnecessary.

• **The social environment** — The idea that each person contributes to the social environment of the group to which he or she belongs, and has responsibilities toward these groups is an important one for families. As children grow up, it's good for parents to remind them about their contribution to the atmosphere of the family, and to let them know that their efforts to avoid arguments with brothers and sisters, and to be helpful and considerate are appreciated.

Parents often remark that it's easy to fall into a pattern of criticizing and nagging young adolescents. This has a negative effect not only on young people, but also on the whole family. Noticing the good things they do is an effective balance to this tendency, and builds a positive environment for all family members.

• **Prejudice and discrimination** — Respect for individuals begins in the family, and parents have a powerful influence on their children's attitudes toward differences among people. Discrimination is an important subject to discuss at home, especially at a time when young people become concerned with popularity and fitting in. There are times when they may need to be reminded that their attitudes toward different groups at school — the nerds, jocks, popular people, people who wear the right clothes, people who wear the wrong clothes, the in-group, the out-group — can become a problem.

At school the students discussed the point that when we discriminate against people, we don't just notice their differences, but we allow these differences to guide our attitudes and actions. If, as parents, our own words and actions do not reflect the values of our faith, then we cannot expect to be taken seriously by our children when we try to guide them toward respect and justice.