

Grade 8, 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

- discuss a common project, shared by all people, to build a society that reflects human dignity and value.
- examine the characteristics of just behaviour and the meaning of social justice.
- analyze two issues related to social justice: poverty and respect for life.
- explore the necessary qualities and skills to do the work of social justice.
- reflect on the virtue of solidarity, which is commitment to the common good of all people.

Working together at school and at home

- As adolescence begins, some young people become more aware of social issues. When families talk about items in the news — government decisions, controversial issues, community concerns — and encourage young people to participate in these discussions, they are helping to create awareness of what it means to be members of society.
- Ask your child to tell you about the virtue of solidarity, which is highlighted in this theme. The word *solidarity* means unity or sharing common goals. In class we will examine how we express solidarity in our classroom and then apply this understanding to the whole human family. When families volunteer their time to help others, work to create change when people are suffering, and speak out against obvious injustices, they are teaching their children important lessons about the meaning of solidarity.
- Understanding justice begins at home. There are many family events that provide an opportunity to talk about justice — disagreements between children, creating a schedule for

household tasks, or a discussion of privileges. In school we will discuss the difference between being treated fairly and being treated identically. The difference is not hard to understand, but can be difficult to accept. Arguments at home like “but everyone else is going,” are based on the idea that fair treatment means identical treatment.

- We will be discussing both absolute poverty and relative poverty. We will also examine some attitudes to those who are poor. When children hear adults, especially family members, talking about the social welfare system in a negative way, it has an impact on them. It fails to communicate the positive aspects of our common responsibility to contribute to members of society who are having difficulties.

We will also examine society’s attitude toward possessions and money. Parents often respond to children’s request for something by saying, “We can’t afford it.” This may be true, but it’s important for children to realise that money isn’t the only issue. There are other questions to think about: Do we really need this item? Are we buying it because other people have it?

- Respect for human life at all stages is a fundamental commitment of our faith. At school we will discuss abortion and euthanasia. Most young people of this age have strong pro-life attitudes. Several years later, when they may have personal contact with someone who is facing an unintended pregnancy, these attitudes can be severely challenged. For this reason, it is extremely important for parents to communicate a message of compassion for those who have resorted to abortion, even as they defend the absolute right to life of the unborn child. We all need to be reminded that it is not our place to judge people; we leave that to God.

- In the last topic of Theme Five, we will consider some of the personal qualities and skills needed to work for a more just world. These qualities are hopefulness, commitment, empathy, critical thinking skills, and creativity. The students will learn about some people who demonstrate these qualities and skills in their efforts to create greater social justice in our world. You might ask about these people and what your child found particularly interesting about their work.

Teacher: _____

Date: _____

School telephone: _____

Theme Five Topics

Theme Five is developed through four topics. It begins with the basic idea that the people of the world share a common project: to build a society that reflects the dignity and value of human life. Topic 2 examines the meaning and characteristics of justice and introduces the concept of social justice. Topic 3 focusses on two social justice issues, poverty and respect for life. In the final topic, the focus turns to the students, and explores some of the necessary personal qualities and skills for participating in the work of social justice.

Theme Five Virtue

The virtue of solidarity is highlighted in Theme Five. Solidarity is essential for the work of social justice since it is this virtue that binds people together to seek the common good for all. The following reflection on the virtue of solidarity is from the student text.

The Virtue of Solidarity

“The joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well. ... That is why they cherish a feeling of deep solidarity with the human race and its history.” (*The Church in the Modern World*, #1)

“We’re all in this together.” “One for all and all for one.” These common expressions capture the meaning of solidarity. They apply to a family, classroom, team, community, city or town, and country. They also apply to the world — the human family. What happens to one of us, happens to all.

Pope John Paul II described the virtue of solidarity as a total and ongoing commitment to the common good — the good of all people and each individual person. Solidarity is a social virtue, a virtue concerned with the dignity and rights of the entire human family.

How do we demonstrate this virtue? Within our own families, we share resources, listen to each other, and recognize our responsibilities to each other. We live in relationship with each other, and what happens to each other matters to us. We are bound together in love and solidarity.

Ideally, the whole human family reflects the love and solidarity of the smaller family. We, the people of the world, want what is good for all people and for each individual person. As we do in our families, we demonstrate our commitment to the common good by:

- **sharing resources with each other** — Those who are more fortunate have an obligation to share with those who have less.
- **listening to each other** — When we accept that we do not have all the answers and listen to the voices of those whose way of life is quite different from ours, we are practising solidarity. We have much to learn from each other.

- **being responsible for each other** — The virtue of solidarity asks us to accept our responsibility as members of the human family. When people suffer from unjust laws, corrupt governments, or lack of access to resources they need, we must find a way to create change.

Jesus didn't just suggest that we love our neighbours. He told us that we *must* love our neighbours. When Jesus was asked, "Who is my neighbour?" he told the story of the good Samaritan, who helped an injured man who was a stranger to him. In the end, however, the injured man was not a stranger — the good Samaritan understood that he was his neighbour.

The virtue of solidarity helps us to see that there are no strangers. There are only brothers and sisters in the family of God, with whom we share the world.

Topic 1 — A Common Project

You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.

Matthew 22:37-40

Summary

The opening topic of this theme sets the context for the topics that follow. The common project that the students are invited to consider is one shared by all persons: to build a society that reflects the dignity and value of our brothers and sisters around the world.

Main Ideas

- The project of being a unique, developing person is more than a private affair. We live in relationship with others and are members of human society.
- The world is our home, and we share a common project: to build a society that reflects human dignity and value.
- As Christians, we have a responsibility to continue Christ's work on earth and to care for each other, especially for those who are poor and defenceless.

Family Participation

- **A common project** — This topic begins with an imaginary want ad, which reads as follows:
Wanted: hopeful, committed and concerned Christian for a special project. Good critical thinking skills and creativity an asset. No experience necessary. No application form to be filled out. No interviews required. Begin today! Continue

your whole life.

The project is the one that each person has been given — to build a society that reflects human dignity and value. We are God’s representatives on earth and have the responsibility to work for a world filled with love and justice.

- **Creating awareness** — As adolescence begins, young people begin to be more aware of social issues. This happens earlier for some than for others. This is partly due to differences in intellectual development, but it is also related to the influence of their families. When parents talk about items on the news — government policies, court decisions, controversial issues — and encourage young people to participate in these discussions, they are helping to create awareness of belonging to a much larger group than the family, school community, or neighbourhood.
- **Encouraging idealism** — Teenagers are often described as being wrapped up in themselves, which has some truth to it. But along with self-involvement there is a great capacity for idealism. Idealism is something to be encouraged at home.

When young people see that parents are engaged in social causes, either locally or internationally, it gives them a model of involvement and hope, and strengthens their belief that individuals can make a difference. Parent involvement communicates the message that the purpose of our existence is not just to have a peaceful and secure life, but includes the effort to help those who have neither peace nor security in their lives.

Topic 2 — Understanding Justice

Without justice and love, peace will always be the great illusion.

Archbishop Hélder Pessoa Câmara

Summary

In Topic 2, the students examine aspects of justice, including its social dimension. The characteristics of just behaviour are explored and the concept of social justice is introduced.

Main Ideas

- Justice, one of the cardinal virtues, is the habit of giving to others what is due to them. Justice is a social virtue because it concerns our relationships.
- Individual justice requires that we meet our obligations to other people, that individuals be treated fairly, and that members of groups meet their responsibilities to the group.

- Social justice is concerned with our social systems and requires that our societies be organized in such a way that the rights and dignity of members are recognized and respected.

Family Participation

• **The meaning of justice** — Earlier in the program the students briefly discussed the virtue of justice as one of the four cardinal virtues. In this topic, they examine the meaning of justice in greater depth. The requirements for justice the students discussed include:

- Justice requires that we give other people what is their due.
- Justice requires that individual members of society be treated fairly.
- Justice requires the members of society carry out their responsibilities toward that society.

In class, the students were encouraged to think of examples of injustice from their own experience as individuals and as members of various groups, and how it made them feel. They also discussed some examples of their obligations to be just to others: be honest with them, respect their property, respect their reputation; and give their best efforts in the groups to which they belong — classroom, team, or small group working on a project.

When situations involving justice come up in children's lives, it's helpful to point out the connection. Children know that certain actions are wrong, for example, lying or shoplifting, but don't usually see these behaviours as an offence against justice, which they are. We owe other people the truth, and shoplifting does not respect the property of the owner and ignores his or her right to be paid for the merchandise.

• **Social justice** — This is the final form of justice the students discussed:

- Justice requires that societies be organized in such a way that the rights and dignity of all members of the human family are recognized and respected.

This aspect of justice is called *social justice*. In class, the students learned that members of human society share responsibility for the way it is organized, and they considered these questions:

Are the rights of individuals protected?

Are resources shared fairly?

How are the least powerful members of our society treated: the poor, the disabled, the very young, and the very old?

Most young people are aware of the struggle against racial discrimination and of the rights of physically disabled people to have access to buildings and to sidewalk curbs that allow them to cross a street in a wheelchair or motorized cart. These are good examples of social justice issues to discuss with young people.

Food banks — In class, the students examined the existence of food banks, and the requirement of justice to share what we have with those in need. They also considered these challenging questions: In a truly just society, would there be food banks? Why are so many unable to feed their families?

You might ask your child about this discussion. It's important to involve young people in conversations about big issues, and help them to see that there is much to be done to create a more just world.

Topic 3 — Some Issues in Social Justice

Every outcry against the oppression of some people by other people, or against what is morally hideous is the affirmation of the principle that a human being as such is not to be violated. A human being is not to be handled as a tool but is to be respected and revered.

Felix Adler

Summary

Two significant social justice issues are examined in Topic 3: poverty and respect for life. The discussion of poverty includes both absolute and relative poverty and introduces the students to the use of microcredit in the developing world. The section on respect for life focusses on the value and dignity of members of society who are vulnerable: the unborn (abortion) and those who are coming to the end of the life (euthanasia and assisted suicide).

Main Ideas

- The basic needs of all people are called rights. It is an offence against the whole human family when the rights of some people are ignored or denied.
- Absolute poverty threatens the survival and well-being of more than 20% of the world's people. Relative poverty does not threaten people's survival, but creates hardship, stress, and disadvantages.

• Respect for all human persons at all stages of life is a fundamental commitment for Christians. To end a developing human life or the life of a person who is dying is a serious offence against the dignity and value of all people.

Family Participation

• **Human rights** — The students began this topic by working in small groups and discussing this list of human rights:

- the right to life, bodily integrity (wholeness) and well-being
- the right to the means to maintain a decent standard of living — food, clothing, shelter
- the right of the elderly, children without families, and the sick to the care and assistance they need
- the right to work and develop one's personality and talents
- the right to decent working conditions and to a reasonable amount of free time
- the right of children and young people to education and to morally sound conditions of social life
- the right of women to equality with men in participating in educational, cultural, economic, social, and political life
- the right to worship according to one's beliefs without interference

The students were asked to identify which right they thought was the most important, which right was the most difficult to understand, and whether they thought any other rights should be added to the list. You might ask your child about this discussion.

• **Absolute Poverty** — The first social justice issue the students examined is poverty, both absolute poverty and relative poverty. The facts about absolute poverty — a condition in which people lack of the basic necessities of life — are horrifying, and can be overwhelming.

In the discussion of absolute poverty, the class was introduced to an interesting and positive approach to lessen absolute poverty: the idea of *microcredit*, a concept developed by Mohammad Yunus, for which he won the Nobel Prize to economics in 2006. You will find a feature describing microcredit at the end of this theme.

Donating money to create a microcredit loan has become quite common. In some places, classrooms have raised money to sponsor one of these loans. Many individuals donate money for these loans instead of buying birthday or Christmas presents for people who already have all that

they need. You might ask your child about absolute poverty, and how microcredit is helping to relieve it.

- **Relative poverty** — Relative poverty is used to describe individuals and families who are substantially worse off than others in the community in which they live. The students discussed some of the government programs designed to help people who are living in poverty and considered some ideas that would improve the situation. You might ask your child about this discussion.

- **Talking about poverty** — Young people are very influenced by their parents' attitudes about social issues. For this reason it is important for us to think about what we say and do. For example, if we talk about the welfare system only in terms of people who abuse it, we are failing to communicate the positive aspects of accepting responsibility for those in our society who are having difficulties. In the same way, it's important for young people to know that our complaints about income tax each year are not a denial of our responsibility to contribute.

Family projects related to poverty and other community needs are an important example for young people. Contributions to food banks, clothing drives, volunteer activities, adopting a family in the third world — these activities increase young people's awareness of the needs of others and of the importance of their contribution.

- **Values related to money** — An issue the students discussed in class is our society's attitude toward possessions and money. The desire to have the latest things — clothing, electronics, cars, expensive vacations — is a temptation. When possessions and money become a strong force in our lives, we can lose sight of what is really important — our relationship with God and others. You might ask your child about this discussion.

- **Respect for life** — The other social justice issue the students examined is respect for life. This issue included a discussion of abortion and of euthanasia and assisted suicide, practices that threatens two groups of people who are vulnerable: those whose lives have begun but are not yet born, and those who are coming to the end of their lives.

For both of these life issues, the students considered a number of statements of positions supporting abortion and euthanasia, and responses to these positions. You will find this material at the end of this theme.

- **Abortion** — Most young people of this age have strong pro-life attitudes. Several years later, when they may have personal contact with someone who is facing an unintended pregnancy,

these attitudes are severely challenged. For this reason it is extremely important for parents to communicate a message of compassion for those who have resorted to abortion, even as they defend the fundamental right to life of the unborn child. Young people can be quick to judge; they need to be reminded that this is a matter we leave to God.

In class, the students discussed two attitudes in our society that contribute to the incidence of abortion: 1) abortion is seen as a woman's issue and 2) widespread acceptance of intimate sexual relationships outside of marriage. These are important matters to discuss with young people. In particular, young adolescent boys need to hear that both men and women are responsible when there is a pregnancy. There is a fundamental injustice when women are left alone to face the situation.

- **Euthanasia and assisted suicide** — Most people are less familiar with this issue than they are with abortion. Euthanasia has been legalized in several countries, and some efforts to legalize it in Canada have been made. The information at the end of this theme provides an overview of this issue. Like abortion, it is a significant threat to vulnerable members of the human family.

Topic 4 — Growing Toward Social Justice

Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth.

1 John 3:18

Summary

Topic 4 offers a discussion of some of the personal qualities and skills essential for engaging in the work of social justice: hopefulness, empathy, and the ability to think and to be creative. These qualities and skills are illustrated by examples of people who are involved in the work of social justice, trying to make a difference in the world.

Main Ideas

- Many social justice issues are complex and it takes time and patience to learn about them.
- Participation in the work of social justice in the world requires commitment, hopefulness, empathy, critical thinking, and creativity.
- Learning about the challenges in the world and developing the necessary qualities and skills to work for change are part of young people's commitment to the future and to their faith.

Family Participation

Responding to social justice issues — As young people begin to learn about social issues, they can easily be overwhelmed by the problems we face. They may respond by feeling powerless, apathetic, or resentful. For this reason, it is helpful if parents encourage their young people to get involved in local projects through the school, the parish, or home. It is personal experience with people in need that builds a sense of individual and social justice, and encourages an attitude that one person can make a difference.

Preparing for the work of social justice — In class, the students explored some of the qualities and skills that are needed for the work of social justice: hopefulness, empathy, and critical thinking skills and creativity. They also learned about some people who reflect these qualities and skills, and are involved in the work of social justice. You will find descriptions of these people and the causes that motivate them at the end of this theme. You might ask your child about these people and their efforts. What do they do? What motivated them?

Prayer service — The students ended this topic with a prayer service. You will find the scripture passage from the service and a prayer of St. Teresa of Avila, “Christ has no body.”

Theme Five Resources from the Student Text

Topic 3: The students discussed poverty and respect for life in this topic. The two items below are a feature on microcredit, a concept developed by Mohammad Yunus to lessen absolute poverty, and a summary of issues related to abortion and euthanasia.

Making a Difference: Microcredit

In 2006, Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank, which he founded, won the Nobel Prize for economics. Yunus is a banker and economist who lives in Bangladesh. He and his bank won “for their efforts to create economic and social development from below.” In an interview Yunus explained it this way.

“ . . . Charity is not the way to help people in need; it is not a healthy basis for a relationship between people. If you want to solve poverty, you have to put people in a position to build their own life.”

Yunus received the prize for the concept of *microcredit*, an idea he put into action through the Grameen Bank. It works like this. People living in poverty are unable to borrow money from traditional banks. They have no jobs and don’t own anything with which they could guarantee their ability to repay the loan. Microcredit is a system of making very small loans to people that allows them to establish a small

business. A small business might be selling clothes or cooked food, raising chickens and selling the eggs, or buying a sewing machine in order to repair clothes. Often, the loans are given to a small group of people whose members guarantee each other's loans.

Microcredit is an effective way to combat poverty, especially in the developing world. The World Bank reports that 30 million microloans are made across the world each year. The Grameen Bank alone has lent more than 2 billion dollars to more than 2 million people, most of them women.

* * *

Abortion

As Christians, we are committed to the value of all human life, especially those who are most defenceless. But in order to defend the unborn child, we have to be able to respond to those who believe in a woman's right to have an abortion. These are some of their arguments and responses to these arguments:

- **A woman has the right to control her own body.** A woman does have the right to protect her own body. But her child also has rights, beginning with the right to live. From everything we know about conception and pregnancy, it is clear that the unborn child is not part of its mother's body. It has a unique genetic make-up, and although it is growing inside her uterus, it is a separate human being.

- **A woman has the right to choose whether or not to have an abortion.** People are free to make many choices, but they are not free to make a choice that denies another human being the right to life. The right to existence is so fundamental that it comes before all other rights.

When there is a conflict between the right to life and freedom of choice, we have to examine what each side must sacrifice. In order to protect the child's life, the mother must spend nine months in pregnancy. After the baby is born, she has the option of raising the child herself or offering the baby for adoption. In comparison, if the woman is free to choose abortion, the child loses, not nine months, but all the remaining years of his or her life.

- **It is better to allow abortion than to bring unwanted children into the world.** The right to life does not depend on being wanted. It is certainly not part of God's plan that a man and woman would conceive a new life but be unwilling to accept and cherish it. But, no matter what the circumstances, a new human life is always wanted and loved by God from the first moments of his or her existence. It is of priceless value.

We also have to ask the question: Who doesn't want the child? There are thousands of couples that cannot conceive and desperately want to share their love with children. Abortion is one of the reasons that there are so few babies available for adoption.

Abortion is not only an issue of personal morality and justice. It is also an issue of social justice. Here are just two of the attitudes in our society that contribute to the frequency of abortion.

- Although men and women are both involved in conceiving children, we rarely hear about the fathers of babies who are aborted. Under the old 1969 abortion law, men had no legal rights in the decision to have an abortion. When the role of fathers is ignored, the whole society suffers. Too many people think of abortion as a women's issue, and too many men are unwilling to accept the consequences of their sexual behaviour. Without a partner who accepts equal responsibility for pregnancy, women are more likely to choose abortion.

- Our society's attitude toward the gift of sexuality is far from what God intends. As more and more single people engage in intimate sexual relationships, there is a growing number of unintended pregnancies. Far too many people think that since they did not mean to become pregnant, they can correct their mistake with an abortion.

* * *

Euthanasia and Assisted Suicide

Euthanasia is the deliberate killing of someone by action or omission, with or without that person's consent, for compassionate reasons. *Assisted Suicide* is a deliberate act of helping another person to end his or her life, for example, by supplying drugs or by some other means.

Christians believe that life is a gift from God, and a gift of love. We do not control our lives as if they were things that we own, like cars or laptops. We come from God and we return to God. Each of us has great dignity and value. Our dignity and value do not lie in our accomplishments or gifts, but in our origin and our destiny.

Just as we have to be able to respond to the arguments of those who defend abortion rights, we must also learn to respond to the arguments of those who favour making euthanasia and assisted suicide legal.

- **People have the right to make private decision about their lives.** First, the rights of persons and the good of society have to be balanced. The right to kill another person, even out of a sense of compassion, or to help a person end his or her life, is not a private matter. Such decisions have an impact on medical caregivers, family members and friends, and the whole society. There is also a huge potential for abuse if euthanasia and assisted suicide are made legal. What would happen to those who are chronically ill, the disabled, and the very elderly?

- **Why should dying people have to suffer unnecessarily?** There have been great medical advances in the relief and control of physical pain. Under most circumstances, physical pain can be controlled without interfering with the person's ability to interact with family members and friends.

- **When people are no longer able to look after themselves and are a burden on others, why should they continue to live?** Our dignity as persons does not lie in our ability to look after ourselves. There are times in life when our needs are great, and we turn to our family members and close friends. Depending on others in our living and our dying is not weakness. It is a recognition that we are members of the human family and have a deep need for other people.

* * *

Topic 4: In this topic, the students discussed the activities of a number of people who reflect the qualities and skills necessary for the work of social justice. Here are their stories.

Hopefulness: Clara Hughes and Right to Play

When Clara Hughes was 13 years old, she regularly skipped school, drank beer, and tried drugs. She even ran away from home several times. Three years later, she was mesmerized as she watched the 1988 Calgary Olympics. She was looking at what she wanted to be – an Olympic speed skater. Her mother investigated and discovered that there was a spring training camp Clara could attend.

Making her dream a reality wasn't easy, but with the help of coaches she persevered. She had a goal. Instead of wandering through life doing whatever she felt like, she developed self-discipline, not only as an athlete, but also as a person.

After winning a gold medal at the 2006 Olympics, Clara donated \$10 000 to the group, Right to Play. This group works to improve the lives of children in disadvantaged areas of the world through the power of sport and play. Clara had been deeply moved by Right to Play, and especially by the spirit and joy of the children who were participating in sports. In her online journal she wrote, "I knew I had to give something back to these children after what they taught me . . ." Her generosity encouraged other Canadians to donate almost \$500 000 to Right to Play. She continues to support Right to Play and encourages other athletes to get involved.

* * *

Empathy: Sophia Gran-Ruaz and Snug as a Bug – Kids Helping Kids

When Sophia was a baby, she and her mother spent a brief time in a shelter. At the age of 10, she wrote a speech on homelessness. As part of her research, she and her father interviewed people who lived on the street. This experience led to her desire to do something for children living in shelters.

In 2004 , when she was 12 years old, Sophia created an organization called Snug as a Bug – Kids Helping Kids. Her organization makes gift packages for children and teenagers in shelters. Sophia approaches businesses and organizations to ask for donations of money or items (toys, books, clothing, make-up, school supplies, etc.). With the help of a large group of volunteers, the packages are assembled for both children and teenagers.

In 2010, Sophia won an award for her work. People often tell Sophia's mother that she must be so proud of her daughter. Her mother's response is: "But kids just want to help. If you ask a 10-year-old, 'Do you want to do something?' they say yes."

* * *

**Critical Thinking Skills and Creativity:
Ryan Hreljac and Ryan's Well Foundation**

Ryan Hreljac discovered his passion for social justice when he was in Grade 1. His teacher told the class about the lack of clean drinking water in parts of Africa. Ryan's response was to ask his parents for money to dig a well. They encouraged him to do extra chores for money, which he did. After he had saved \$70, he discovered it would take another \$2000 to dig a well.

With more chores from Ryan, donations from people who heard about the project, and a grant from the Canadian International Development Agency, the goal of \$2000 was reached. Ryan's first well was located in Uganda at the Angola Primary School.

Ryan's Well Foundation was formed in 2001. Today, the foundation has helped to build water projects in 16 countries, and has developed programs to educate students about safe water and to motivate them to get involved and make a difference in the world.

This is what Ryan said in an interview: "God puts us on earth, but he doesn't make us perfect on purpose. If God made us perfect, we wouldn't need to make the world a better place."

* * *