

Grade 1, 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.

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 all created in God’s image, and that God 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:

- explore the gifts of creation, and, especially, the gift of people.
- discover that each person is unique and has likes and dislikes.
- learn that we all have feelings and that we all grow and develop.

Working together at school and at home

- We will be sharing examples of the gifts of creation — flowers, plants, leaves, a pet fish, vegetables, or fruit. Help your child find a special gift of creation to bring to school.
- Take this opportunity to talk with your child about how special each person is, and how precious we all are to God. Encourage your child to include thanking God for the gift of people, especially family members and friends, in prayers at bedtime or before meals.
- Help your child learn more about feelings by using the names for them, for example, “happy,” “sad,” “disappointed,” “angry,” and “excited.”
- At school, the children will be talking about growing and learning. You might ask your child what he or she would especially like to learn this school year.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Theme One Topics

In Grade One, this theme is developed through six topics. The children talk about God's gift of creation, and especially about the gift of people. They learn that each person is unique with a special appearance and individual likes and dislikes. They also discuss feelings, which are part of being human, and the way we grow and change in our own way.

Topic 1 — Creation is a Gift from God

*The world is charged with the grandeur of God . . .
There lives the dearest freshness deep down things.*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, "God's Grandeur"

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that God is the Creator of everything and that God loves all of creation. The children explore some of God's many gifts — pets, flowers, fruits, vegetables — and bring some of these gifts to school. They talk about the ways they can show that they are happy God created the world.

Main Ideas

- God loves us so much he gave us the whole world.
- We thank God for the gift of the world.
- We look after everything God made.

Family Participation

- Help your child find a special gift of creation to bring to school, such as a flower, leaf, fruit, vegetable, or small rock.
- Mention God as Creator when you share a beautiful sunset, look at the colours of the leaves in the autumn, or stroke a soft animal.
- Encourage your child to thank God for all the wonderful things he has made. This could be part of bedtime prayers or a special thank you from each member of the family just before dinner for the gift of good food.
- If you have a pet, encourage your child to help care for it. You might point out that pets cannot care for themselves but depend on us. Looking after pets is one of the ways we care for God's creation.

- Children can also learn to appreciate God’s creation by helping in the garden or by learning to look after houseplants.

Topic 2 — We Are God’s Special Creation

Blessed be the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him.

Ephesians 1:3-4

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that we are all precious. This is because we are created by God in his own image, which means we are like God. The teacher and children make up riddles about the gifts of creation. These riddles include each person in the class. (“I see someone God has made; she is in this class; she has blue eyes, brown hair, and a friendly smile. Can you guess who she is?”) The children discuss some of the ways in which each person is different and one very special way in which we are all alike — God made us all.

Main Ideas

- Our lives are gifts that God gives to us.
- Each one of us is precious and special in God’s eyes.
- We thank God for the gift of our lives

Family Participation

- Ask your child to teach you the riddle game that was played at school. Play the riddle game with members of the family. Include grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends when they are visiting. Begin each riddle about a person with, “I see someone God has made.”
- Ask your child about the drawing of a special person that that the children did in class. Which person did your child choose to draw?
- It is good, as the occasion arises, to help your child understand that each person is special and precious to God. All of creation is wonderful but only people are made like God — they can love each other, they can think, they can make choices, and they are made to live forever. God promises that he will love each one of us forever. You can help

your child to understand this by asking questions like: Can rocks think? Can trees love each other? Can vegetables choose something they like? Do bugs live forever with God? (Animals are not a good example to choose because young children often believe that dogs and cats can love in the same way people do.)

- Encourage your child to thank God for the gift of people, especially family members and friends. This could be part of bedtime prayers or of grace before dinner.
- The whole family could work on the “thank you” habit. Reminders help, but one of the best ways to teach children to show appreciation to other people is by doing it yourself. When adults are careful to say thank you, children learn that this is the way people treat each other.

Topic 3 — This is Me

God looks at me.

God sees me.

God likes what he sees.

Archbishop Marcel Gervais

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that each person is unique. The children play a game with a mirror hidden inside a gift box. The teacher tells each child that there is something very precious and special in the box. When the children see their reflections in the mirror, they realize that they are the special gifts.

Main Ideas

- Each one of us is a special person made by God
- God looks at us and sees much more than the way we look
- God sees the beauty that is deep inside of us, in our hearts and minds.
- God likes what he sees.

Family Participation

- Ask your child to tell you about the special game they played at school with the mirror in the gift box.
- At school, the children talked about some of their characteristics that make them unique — the way they look and what they like to do. This is the way young children think about

themselves: “I’m a girl; I’m six years old; I have brown hair; I like to play with my friends.” You can help your child go a little deeper. As the occasion arises, you might mention other things you know about your child. For example: “When I look at you, I see deep inside you. I see a special girl who makes everybody happy because she’s happy inside. I see a little girl who’s really working at sharing her things with her sister.” It is good for children to understand that who they are is much more than what they look like or what they can do.

- The most important part of this topic is the message: *God looks at you, God sees you, God likes what he sees.* It is far easier for children to believe this when their parents are saying the same thing — I look at you, I see you, I like what I see. Children need to know that even when they have done something wrong and disappointed their parents, they are still loved. It’s important to communicate this in words: “I don’t like what you did, but I love you.” When you do this, you are helping your children understand the difference between the person and what the person does. You are also helping your child understand that God’s love is forever.

Topic 4 — Likes and Dislikes

*Christopher Robin said: “What do you like doing best in the world, Pooh?”
“What I like best in the whole world is Me and piglet going to see You, and You saying ‘What about a little something?’ And Me saying, ‘Well, I shouldn’t mind a little something, should you, Piglet,’ and it being a hummy sort of day outside, and birds singing.”*

A. A. Milne *The House of Pooh Corner*

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that our likes and dislikes are part of who we are as unique individuals. At school, the teacher and children share a funny poem, “Elephants Like Ice Cream,” about likes and dislikes. They discuss the poem and some of their individual likes and dislikes. You will find the poem at the end of this theme.

Main Ideas

- Each person is unique.
- Different people have different likes and dislikes.

- Sometimes things we don't like now become something we may like later.

Family Participation

- At school, the children completed a likes and dislikes sheet. The categories for these likes and dislikes are a colour, an animal, a food, a story, a place they like, and something they don't like. What did your child choose?
- Likes and dislikes are a very early way of expressing individuality. As you well know, children can be quite definite about what they don't like, especially when it comes to food. Keeping a balance between respecting your child's likes and dislikes and encouraging open-mindedness about new foods, experiences, and activities is not always easy. You might point out that everybody has likes and dislikes. These are different from person to person, and they change as we get older. Children also need to learn to distinguish between areas where their particular likes and dislikes can be respected (for example, eating squash because they really don't like carrots) and areas where dislikes can be acknowledged but not avoided (for example, bedtime).
- If your child dislikes a particular person, it's a good idea to try to discover why. It's hard for children to answer the question, "Why don't you like this person?" It's easier for your child if you ask: "Did the person do something you didn't like? What did he or she do? Then what happened?" It could be nothing more than an argument between children. But it could be something more serious, for example, someone is bullying your child at recess or on the way to and from school. It could also be that someone has tried to harm your child in some way and you need to take immediate action. It is always important to listen when your child expresses dislike for a babysitter, neighbour, or relative and to take the time to understand why.

Children need to know that their parents are always ready to listen to them when something or someone has made them unhappy, frightened, or worried. Most often, the problem will be a small one that can easily be resolved. It is always good to remember, however, that what seem like small problems to us are important to children. The experience of confiding and knowing that parents will pay attention and be concerned creates a climate of trust. This climate of trust becomes more and more important as

children grow older and have more complicated problems. When there is trust, problems can always be managed in some way.

Topic 5 — Our Feelings

*For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven . . .
a time to weep, and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn, and a time to dance.*

Ecclesiastes 3:1,4

Summary

The teacher and the children share a story, “Joey’s First Day,” about feelings. (You will find the story at the end of this theme.) The main goal of this topic is to help the children recognize that feelings are part of being human. They are encouraged to recognize that other people have feelings, which is the first step toward understanding that what they do or say can affect the feelings of others.

Main ideas

- Everyone has feelings — children and adults.
- Our feelings are part of being a person. They are a gift from God.
- Understanding our feelings helps us to understand ourselves and other people.

Family participation

- It is good, as the occasion arises, to encourage your child to talk about feelings. When your child tells you about something happy or sad that happened at school or at play, it is natural to ask about her or his feelings. How did you feel? Were you happy? Were you sad? Were you angry? Help your child understand that if he or she feels angry, upset or afraid it’s important to tell you about it. Part of loving people is understanding their feelings.
- Often children do not know the names for feelings other than happy and sad. You can help them by using words like “disappointed,” “angry,” “excited,” and “impatient.” For example, if your child is upset because of missing a school trip due to illness, you might say, “I know you’re disappointed. You were looking forward to the trip.”

- Children need lots of opportunities to distinguish between their feelings and what they do *because* of their feelings. They need to understand that feelings are not right or wrong, but what we do with our feelings can be right or wrong. It's all right to feel angry or resentful. It's a natural human reaction to certain things that happen to us. But it's not all right to hit someone or to say something mean to them because we're angry. You will want to teach your child that we all need help in controlling ourselves when we're angry or upset. We can't do it by ourselves. We ask God to help us.
- It helps your child to understand that other people have feelings when you mention your own and those of other people in the family. It is natural for young children to be self-centred; they need to be encouraged to understand that other people have the same feelings that they have and that these feelings have to be considered. You can help your child by pointing this out (for example, "Your brother is angry because you broke his model," "Your mom is upset because she had an argument at work," "You hurt your friend's feelings when you say that.>").
- Parents can also help their children understand feelings by the way they speak about their own feelings. It's a good idea to start a sentence about feelings with the word "I." For example, "I feel angry when you jump on the furniture," rather than "You're making me angry." It may seem like a small thing but it's important for several reasons.

First, when we say, "You make me angry" (or sad, or happy), we are making the other person responsible for our feelings. It is true that other people have a strong influence on the way we feel, but they are not responsible for our feelings. Each person has to be in charge of his or her feelings. If we get in the habit of thinking and speaking as if other people control our feelings, we may also begin to think that other people control our actions. How often have you heard children say, "Well, I couldn't help it. She made me mad so I hit her!"

Another reason for saying "I" instead of "you" when you are talking about negative feelings is that the other person is more likely to listen to what you have to say. "You make me angry" sounds like an attack. People don't listen very well when they are being attacked or insulted. But when you say, "I feel angry when you jump on the furniture," you're more likely to get some attention.

Topic 6 — We Are Growing and Changing

I wish to express the joy that we all find in children, the springtime of life, the anticipation of the future history of each of our present earthly homelands.

Pope John Paul II
Address to the United Nations, 1979

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that they are all growing and changing. They talk about some of the things they have learned to do since they were little, and about what they are learning now. They also discuss the mistakes that we all make when we are learning something new, and that we grow and learn at our own rate and in our own way.

Main ideas

- We have learned many things since we were little.
- We still have many things to learn.
- We all make mistakes when we are learning. Mistakes are part of learning.
- Each of us grows and learns in our own way.

Family participation

- Help your child accept mistakes as part of learning. Some children get frustrated more quickly than others and some children lose their confidence when they make a mistake. Acknowledge your own mistakes and let your child see that everyone makes mistakes. It is part of learning.
- Children grow and develop in different ways. Some find learning to ride a bike difficult; some find it easy. Some children learn to read or to print with little effort; others struggle with these skills. Some children seem to be born with a generous nature or happy spirit; others must work very hard to share. Within the same family there are many strengths and weaknesses. Each child is an individual and is like no other child in the family. When your child finds something difficult, it helps to recognize it by saying, “I know this is hard for you but you’re trying and that’s what’s important.”
- Children are very aware of strengths and weaknesses, especially in school and sports skills. They tend to evaluate themselves and others by what they can do. It is very important to help them to see that our value doesn’t lie in what we can do. We are

valuable because God made us, and that includes our strengths and weaknesses. Children need to know that they are loved for who they are, not for what they can do.

- When you compliment or encourage your child, remember the gifts of the spirit, such as generosity, patience, thoughtfulness, forgiveness, and truthfulness. These are more important than many other accomplishments, but children won't know this unless adults talk about it. Be sure to mention these gifts and let your child know that you notice special efforts (for example, "I was pleased to see how patient you were with your little sister.").
- Encourage your child to thank God for his or her special talents and to ask God for help to grow and change in the way that God wants. It is good to let children know that we can always talk to God about the way things are going in our lives—the happy times as well as the difficult times.

⇒ Theme One Stories and Poems

Topic 4: The children read a funny poem about likes and dislikes.

Elephants Like Ice Cream

Elephants like ice cream,
They really dislike cake.
Even when it's chocolate,
They heave it in the lake.

Crocodiles like resting;
They just refuse to run.
Even though they like to smile,
They just refuse to run.

Sally dislikes walking;
She only likes to hop.
Even when it's time for bed,
She says she cannot stop.

Timothy likes pudding;
He dislikes apple pie.
Even when you beg him,
He says, "I'd rather die."

Everyone likes something;
I'm sure that you do too.
Let's share a special secret —
What I like best is you!

* * * * *

Topic 5: The children read this story about feelings. The little boy in the story is Joey De Souza. There are more stories about Joey and his family in Theme Two and Theme Four.

Joey's First Day

When Joey walked into the classroom he felt lonely and sort of scared. His family had just moved to a new home and he didn't know anyone — not even the teacher.

From just inside the door he could see that it was a big classroom and there were lots of children.

At one table, two children were working together, but they seemed to be having an argument. They both looked angry.

At another table, most of the children were working happily together. They were smiling. But there was one girl at the table who was scowling. She was copying some words from the chalkboard, and she kept on making mistakes.

Joey saw a boy who was crying, and Joey wondered why he was sad.

He saw a boy and girl at a computer. They looked like they were working hard.

A girl from the class came up to Joey. She was smiling and Joey thought she seemed very friendly.

"Hi," the girl said. "My name is Teresa. Come and sit at my table and see what I made."

Then the teacher came to greet him. "Welcome, Joey! We've been waiting for you, and we're glad you're here."

Joey smiled at Teresa and his new teacher, and he didn't feel so scared anymore.

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