

Dear Family,

We are ready to begin Theme Three of *Fully Alive*, our family life program. Catholic schools recognize that parents or guardians are the first and most important teachers of their children. This is especially true in the areas that are introduced and explored in Family Life Education. 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.

Family Life Education, consistent with our faith, has been an integral part of the Religious Education program for many years. The goal is to present a Catholic view of human life, sexuality, marriage, and family, complementing your efforts as parents or guardians to teach your children at home. Family Life Education also incorporates content about human development and sexual health from the Ontario Health and Physical Education (HPE) Curriculum. More detailed information on the specific HPE expectations addressed in this theme of *Fully Alive* can be found on the website of the Institute for Catholic Education (www.iceont.ca).

The *Fully Alive* program is supported and approved by the Catholic Bishops of Ontario. Additional information about *Fully Alive* is available to you on the Ontario Bishops' website (www.acbo.on.ca).

About Theme Three

Theme Three of *Fully Alive* is called “Created Sexual: Male and Female.” God made us male and female, and all of God’s creation is good. In earlier grades, this theme was presented through a continuing story that emphasized God’s plan for new life as the result of the love of mothers and fathers. In later grades, the message is unchanged, but the approach is more direct. As students enter puberty, they need to know about the changes they will experience and about the responsibilities of being created male and female and following God’s plan for them.

In Theme Three we will

- explore some of the ways in which we learn about sexuality and develop our ideas about what it means to be male or female.
- review the main features of adult female and male fertility.
- learn about the first minutes and days of a new human life, the development of the new life during each trimester of a pregnancy, and the baby’s birth.
- discuss some physical, emotional, and social changes related to puberty.
- examine how both heredity and environment influence our development as persons, and learn about the choices we can make as we develop.

Working together at school and at home

- At school, the students will be completing and bringing home several sheets about human fertility, the development of a new life in the uterus, and the changes of puberty. On some of these sheets, there is a section for any questions the students still have about these topics. Be sure to ask your child about questions he or she may have. Some children are uncomfortable asking questions at school and prefer to ask at home. You will find detailed information about the topics in this theme in the Online Family Edition of *Fully Alive* (www.acbo.on.ca).

- The students will be discussing some important ideas about sexuality, and you may want to find an opportunity to discuss them with your child. These ideas include: Sexuality is not just about bodies or body parts, but about persons who are created by God as males and females. A Christian view of sexuality is that men and women are meant to respect and support each other, not use each other in casual sexual relationships.
- Media are a significant influence on growing children’s understanding of sexuality. Many parents find it helpful to join their children in watching shows and movies and discuss the messages that are promoted about sexuality and relationships between males and females.
- All children need adequate preparation for the physical changes of puberty, but they can be reluctant to discuss this. It’s often best to look for opportunities that come up naturally, rather than trying to have one long discussion. You will find detailed information about puberty in the Online Edition of *Fully Alive*.
- We will also be discussing the emotional and social changes that come with puberty, including moodiness, irritability, a desire for more privacy, and the growing importance of friendship. It’s important to talk about some of these changes with your child and how they can be handled in a way that respects all members of the family. It’s helpful to let your child know that it takes time to adjust to a new stage of life, not just for children, but also for parents.

Looking Ahead

The only new term in Grade 6 related to the male and female reproductive system and fertility is *menopause*. Other new terms related to fetal development, pregnancy, and birth include *nucleus*, *membrane*, *DNA*, *chromosome*, *gene*, *zygote*, *embryo*, *fetus*, *trimester*, and *labour*. These terms are used to explain the process through which two life-giving cells, the sperm and ovum, unite and exchange genetic information, the development of new life during nine months of pregnancy, and the birth of the baby.

This theme also introduces in a more direct way our calling to be loving and life-giving according to our state of life. Only married people are meant to express their sexuality in an intimate physical relationship. Attraction between the sexes, which begins at puberty and for many people can lead to marriage, is also discussed briefly at this grade level. These are topics that are developed more fully in Grades 7 and 8.

As parents and guardians, you are the primary teachers of your children in all areas of faith and morals, including sexuality. In keeping with the primacy of your role as parent or guardian, you retain the right to request your child be exempted from the program if you believe it is in your child’s best interest and prefer to accept the responsibility of providing an education in sexuality at home.

If you have any questions or concerns, I encourage you to contact me, or to arrange to discuss them with our school principal.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____