

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, which emphasized God’s plan for new life as the result of the love between men and women. 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:

- examine some aspects of sexuality, including sexual characteristics, sexual identity, and sexual roles.
- review the changes of puberty and the development of male and female fertility.
- explore the responsibility of caring for our health, including sexual health, and of developing a realistic body image during adolescence.
- discuss the experience of sexual attraction and feelings and examine the need for self-discipline and patience to reach the goal of becoming fully mature males and females.
- reflect on the virtue of chastity and on the attitudes and behaviours that reflect this virtue and show respect for the gift of sexuality.

Working together at school and at home

- You may find your child less open to talking about sexuality at this stage of life. Unlike younger children, young adolescents consider the topic very personal and often prefer not to discuss it. Look for natural openings — a program you watched together, an incident involving a friend that your child tells you about, or an item in the news — and try to take advantage of them.

- Young adolescents tend not to pay enough attention to nutrition, exercise, and rest. These areas of physical health are especially important when people are growing rapidly. Many young people spend a lot of time in sedentary pursuits (watching programs, playing electronic games, surfing the net). Families can make a difference by participating in a variety of physical activities and including friends of their children. The presence of friends makes a big difference for young people.
- Preoccupation with appearance and weight is normal for this age group. It is important to be patient with young people's worries or dissatisfaction about their bodies, to reassure your child that everyone is sensitive during this stage of life and that these feelings do ease. At school the students will discuss the influence of media on body image. You might ask your child about this discussion.
- Theme Three includes a reflection on the virtue of modesty. Ask your child to tell you about this virtue. In school we will discuss modesty as the virtue that protects our dignity as persons, especially that which is private and intimate, and guides the way we present ourselves and behave.
- As part of the discussion of sexual attraction, the topic of pornography will be briefly discussed. The internet has made access to pornography widely available. When young people have access to the internet in their bedrooms, there is always a risk that they will get involved in chat rooms that are inappropriate for people of their age or watch pornography. This is a topic that parents and guardians do need to talk about. At school the students discussed the harmful nature of pornography, particularly for young people who should be directing their energies toward greater maturity and self-discipline, not toward a distorted version of sexuality.

Looking Ahead

New terms introduced in Theme Three at this grade level are *primary sexual characteristic, secondary sexual characteristic, sexual role, femininity, masculinity, sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection (STBBI), homosexuality, masturbation, pornography.*

This theme introduces the experience of sexual attraction and sexual feelings, which begin after puberty, and stresses the need for self-discipline to manage these feelings. Sexual orientation is briefly discussed as part of a discussion of attractions young people may have toward people of the same sex. The virtue of chastity is highlighted in this theme, and the serious moral, physical, and emotional risks of intimate sexual relationships between unmarried people are carefully explored. The students are encouraged to recognize the value of the goal of becoming fully mature males and females who follow God's plan for them.

In Grade 8 the students will learn more about sexual orientation, natural family planning, and artificial contraception from the perspective of Catholic moral teaching.

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: _____