

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 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:

- reflect on the gift of sexuality and God’s plan for us to be loving and life-giving persons.
- explore the role of sexuality within marriage and for those who are single.
- reflect on the virtue of chastity, which helps us to honour the gift of sexuality and live according to God’s plan.
- review some aspects of adolescence — changing appearance, moodiness, stress, and sexual attraction. We will also reflect on homosexuality from the perspective of God’s plan for sexuality.
- examine some of the pressures on young people to become involved in exclusive relationships at an early age and discuss some serious abuses of sexuality.
- review basic information on sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections and their potential impact on fertility and introduce the topic of family planning from the perspective of living in harmony with the gift of fertility.
- complete Theme Three with a reflection on the meaning of true love as it is expressed in the enduring commitment of marriage.

New Topics Introduced in Theme Three

- The subject of sexual orientation and homosexuality was introduced in Grade 7. In Grade 8, some of this information is reviewed and the moral teaching of our Church on homosexuality is presented.
- Family planning is also introduced in this grade. Both natural family planning methods and some methods of artificial contraception are described, and the moral teaching of our Church on contraception is presented.

Working together at school and at home

- Most parents or guardians find their children less open at this stage of life to talking about issues related to sexuality. Many young adolescents consider this topic very personal and prefer not to discuss it. Often, an indirect approach works best. Some natural openings might be a television show you both watched; an incident involving a friend that your child tells you about; or an item in the newspaper or on television news.
- The essential message of this theme is the Christian understanding of sexuality: that male and female persons are called to build loving relationships with each other and that together they have been given the power to co-operate with God and bring new life into the world.
- If an opportunity arises, you might ask your child about the virtue of chastity, which is highlighted in this theme. It is the virtue that helps us to control our desire for sexual pleasure. At school, the students will discuss the need to be thoughtful consumers of media, ignore gossip or rumours about sexual matters, and to avoid situations that may lead to pressure for sexual intimacy. Reinforcing these values at home can make a big difference.
- We will also discuss pornography, which is widely available on the internet and is particularly damaging for young people who are forming their ideas and values about sexuality. Many experts, including the police, strongly advise that children and young adolescents should not have access to an internet connection in a private space, like a bedroom. There are simply too many temptations.
- There are many pressures for young people to become involved at an early age in exclusive relationships and to engage in sexual activity. These pressures include media, the influence of peers, and unmet personal needs that drive some young people to seek attention and love in a relationship. The best defence against these pressures on young people is the self-confidence that comes from knowing that they have the love, support, and shelter of their families.

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: _____

School telephone: _____