

*The glory of God is man and woman fully alive,
but life for them consists in seeing God revealed in God's Word.*
St. Irenaeus

Dear Families,

I would like to introduce our Family Life Education program, called *Fully Alive*. This program, which is for Grades 1–8, is the result of many years of discussion, consultation, and work by bishops, Catholic educators, Catholic school trustees, and parents. It has been approved by the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario as consistent with Catholic teachings and appropriate for use in Catholic classrooms. It is intended to complement the efforts of parents or guardians to teach their children at home.

In Catholic schools, Family Life Education has been an integral part of the Religious Education program for many years. Family Life Education also incorporates content about human development and sexual health from the Ontario Health and Physical Education (HPE) Curriculum. *Fully Alive*'s approach to human life, relationships, and sexuality is guided by our Catholic faith and by the wisdom accumulated through many years of Christian human experience.

Fully Alive is organized into five themes:

- **Theme One — Created and Loved by God:** The first theme provides the foundation of the program. We are created in the image of God, and God loves and sustains each one of us. This theme explores some of the ways in which each person is unique and irreplaceable, yet shares a common human nature with all others.
- **Theme Two — Living in Relationship:** Human beings are created to live in relationship with others. The bonds of family and friendship, which are explored in this theme, are central to our lives, and shape our identity and our development.
- **Theme Three — Created Sexual: Male and Female:** Sexuality is a fundamental dimension of our identity as children of God. In this theme, sexuality is presented as a gift from God that is intended for life and love.
Note: More detailed information on the specific HPE expectations addressed in *Fully Alive* can be found on the website of the Institute for Catholic Education (www.iceont.ca).
- **Theme Four — Growing in Commitment:** God's call to faithfulness is explored in this theme. Learning to be committed and trustworthy is a lifelong challenge that begins in childhood.
- **Theme Five — Living in the World:** Our relationships with others go beyond the circle of family and friends. In Theme Five, we examine what it means to participate in society, and to fulfill our responsibilities to care for and build God's world.

Before we begin each theme, I will send you a letter about the theme and the topics we will be discussing. Since parents or guardians are the primary teachers of their children in the area of sexuality, the family letter for Theme Three (Created Sexual: Male and Female) will provide you with details about the content in this year's program, as well as information about later years.

More detailed information about *Fully Alive* is available on the website of the Assembly of Catholic Bishops of Ontario (ACBO): www.acbo.on.ca. For each grade level, you will find:

- a summary of the main ideas in each of the topics within the themes.
- copies of stories that the teacher reads to the students in Grades 1–3
- information and suggestions for you and your child related to the topics

If you do not have access to the Internet, please let me know, and we will arrange to get a copy of the website material for you.

I look forward to working with you and your child during this school year. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions. I hope you will enjoy participating in *Fully Alive*.

Teacher _____

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. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

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: _____

Dear Family,

It's time for the second 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 Two

Theme Two of *Fully Alive* is called "Living in Relationship." We are created to live in relationship with others, and to respond to each other with love. Loving relationships begin in the family, and this will be our main focus during this theme, along with one topic on friendship. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Two we will:

- introduce our families, and talk about the activities families enjoy together.
- explore changes in families, the strength of family love, and the special place of each person in the family.
- discover more about what it means to be a friend.

Working together at school and at home

- Photos of your family members would be a wonderful addition to our class discussion about our families. Any simple games your family enjoys that you could lend to our classroom would also be appreciated.
- It's good to let your child know that God chose all of your family members. Each family member is a special gift to the others, even though we don't always feel this way. Be sure to encourage a special thank you for family members when you pray together before meals or before going to bed.
- We will be talking about the changes a new baby brings. You might tell your child about the changes in your family when he or she was born. Children may find change stressful, and they need reassurance that family love remains strong.
- Young children's friendships come and go. Since their ego is not yet fully developed, they can have difficulty understanding other ways of seeing things, which can lead to disagreements. It may take time to grow out of this stage, but you can help by mentioning the other person's feelings, or by suggesting a compromise.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Dear Family,

We are getting 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 the early grades, this theme is presented through a continuing story. The message of this story is that we begin life as a result of the love our mothers and fathers shared. No matter what happens later, nothing can change that. It is part of God’s plan that we grow and are sheltered in our mother’s body before birth. After we are born, it is our family that loves and cares for us.

In Theme Three we will:

- meet Dominic and Sara, who fall in love and decide to marry.
- discover that husbands and wives may share their love by becoming parents.
- learn about the development of babies before birth and about the care and love they need after they are born.
- learn that God made boys and girls physically different.

Working together at school and at home

- Ask your child to tell you about Dominic and Sara. What was your child’s favourite part of the story?
- Take this opportunity to talk to your child about how babies grow before they are born, and the special care they need after they are born.
- Tell your child about when he or she was welcomed into your family. Do you have an early picture of your child to lend to our classroom? We would love to see it.

Looking Ahead

In Grade 1 the amount of information given to children is age appropriate: the development of the baby in the mother's *uterus*; the introduction of the terms *penis* and *vagina* for the physical differences between boys and girls; and a brief explanation of breast feeding. In Grades 2 and 3, additional information about prenatal life is included. A very simple explanation of sexual intercourse is given in Grade 4 by the teacher, but is not included in the student book until Grade 5.

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: _____

Dear Family,

We have come to the fourth 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 Four

Theme Four of *Fully Alive* is called “Growing in Commitment.” Each one of us is challenged to grow in commitment to God and to each other. This is part of what it means to be fully human. The best way for children to learn about commitment is to grow up experiencing the unconditional love and devotion of family members and the support of a caring community around them. Knowing that they can rely on the commitment of others helps children learn to be dependable, to keep their word, and to make wise choices. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Four we will

- examine how we depend on our families, and what it means to be dependable.
- discover that *promise* is a special word that has to be used with care.
- explore how we make choices, and the meaning of consequences.

Working together at school and at home

- In our classroom, we will be learning about being dependable, and how each person makes a contribution. Even young children can contribute at home with small chores — putting away toys, helping set the table, feeding the family pet. Let your child know that you rely on her or his help.
- Children often think that *promise* is a magic word. In our classroom, we will be talking about using this word with care. At home, you can encourage your child to save the word *promise* for something he or she has thought about and is sure can be done.
- We will also be discussing choices and their consequences. Young children need lots of opportunities to make simple choices — which t-shirt, what kind of sandwich — and to experience the consequences. Learning to make choices and to be aware of possible consequences is a long process. You can help by encouraging your child to think before choosing and to consider the possible consequences.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

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.

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. We want children to become aware of how big the world is, and of the many ways in which people contribute to making it a good home for all. This awareness is the foundation for a Christian attitude of care and personal involvement in the world. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Five we will:

- explore the world as an amazing place to be and to learn about.
- learn about some of the ways people care for God’s creation.
- discover some of the kinds of work that adults do to contribute to making the world a good place to be.

Working together at school and at home

- In our classroom, we will be talking about how we learn about the world. Ask your child about his or her favourite way of learning — books, television, the Internet, talking to adults?
- If your child has a book on a topic that he or she finds especially interesting, we would be pleased if it could be loaned to our classroom.
- We will be talking about caring for our home in the world. Adults, and especially parents, are models for their children in the way they use and care for the resources of the world. You might discuss with your child some of the ways that your family reuses and recycles, and tries to reduce the use of energy.
- In class, we will be learning that all work is important and contributes to making the world a good place. Adult work is often mysterious to children, so be sure to tell your child about the kind of work you and other members of your family do.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____