

*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 in 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 this theme of *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.

Full 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

- discover some of the ways in which each of us is a unique person whom God created and loves.
- explore the children’s growth and development in the past and look ahead to the coming year.
- learn more about feelings and the choices we have in how we express them.

Working together at school and at home

- Take this opportunity to talk to your child about his or her special qualities and gifts, and also those of other members of your family. In class, we will be talking about how important it is to share our gifts with others.
- Your child will be bringing home an information sheet about growing and developing, and will need some help from you. In class, we will learn that we all grow and develop in our own way. Any photos you have of your child in earlier years would be welcome. Be sure to write your child’s name on the back.
- Learning how to manage and express feelings is a big part of growing up, and is something we will be talking about in class. Sometimes when children are overwhelmed by feelings of anger or frustration, the best time to talk to them about these feelings is after they have calmed down. It helps to let them know that everyone has these feelings, and has to learn how to manage them. You might also discuss alternatives to shouting or hitting, such as compromising or making a decision to leave a frustrating situation and find something else to do.

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 two topics on friendship. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Two we will:

- introduce our families, and talk about the uniqueness of each family.
- explore signs of love in our families, how a change (moving) affects family members, and the relationship between brothers and sisters.
- discover more about friendship, and learn about the meaning of co-operation.

Working together at school and at home

- At school we will be talking about words and actions that are signs of love in our families. Take this opportunity to talk to your child about these signs in your family. It's important for children to know that everyone in the family has difficulty being loving at times, and needs God's help to persevere.
- This year we will be reading a story about a family that experiences the change of moving to a new house. If you are planning a change like moving or are expecting a new baby, it's good to talk to your child about it. Children need reassurance that family love remains strong, even when there is a change.
- Getting along with brothers and sisters and friendship are also important topics this year. In particular, we will be talking about disagreements that occur between brothers and sisters, as well as between friends, and the importance of apologizing and forgiving. It helps to let your child know that everyone finds this difficult, but it is part of being a loving family member and a good friend.

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

In Theme Three we will:

- meet the Brunelle family, who are expecting their third child.
- discover more about the development of babies before birth and especially about how the baby breathes and receives nourishment in the uterus.
- learn about the importance of respect and care for the body, which is a gift from God.

Working together at school and at home

- Ask your child to tell you about the Brunelle family. What was your child's favourite part of the story? What did he or she find especially interesting?
- Take this opportunity to talk to your child about how babies grow before they are born, and how all their needs are met inside the uterus.

Looking Ahead

The information included in Grade 2 is age appropriate: new terms include *amniotic sac*, *umbilical cord*, and *navel*; the terms *sperm* and *ovum*, which are described as tiny cells from the father and the mother, are also introduced, and a simple explanation of birth is provided. Next

year, additional information about prenatal life and birth will be presented. In Grade 4 the teacher gives a very simple explanation of sexual intercourse. This information 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:

- learn more about being dependable by exploring the commitments of community workers.
- examine what it means to keep our word and why it is important.
- analyze situations that involve making decisions.

Working together at home and at school

- We will be discussing the many people in our community upon whom we depend, like mail carriers, bus drivers, garbage collectors, and street cleaners. You could ask your child what our community would be like without these people. What would happen?
- Last year the children learned about promises, and why *promise* is a special word. This year we will explore the importance of keeping our word. Take this opportunity to talk to your child about this topic. Sometimes, because of circumstances, family members can't keep their word. It's a good idea to explain why so that your child knows you don't break your word without a good reason.
- One of the decision-making situations that the class will explore involves a choice between right and wrong. When this kind of situation comes up at home, you might explain to your child that knowing what is right doesn't make the choice easy. But the more times people choose what is right, the easier it becomes.

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 aspects of the world that make it a good place for us.
- learn about some natural resources of the world, which are gifts of Creation.
- discover some of the work that people do to transform God’s gifts for our use.

Working together at school and at home

- In class we will be talking about what makes the world a good place for us. Because adult life is more stressful, it can be difficult to remember the joy children find in occasions like Christmas or a picnic in the park. Be sure to ask what makes the world a good place for your child, and tell him or her about what makes it a good place for you.
- Your child will be bringing home a sheet about the gifts of the Earth that your family especially appreciates. Take this opportunity to talk about the many natural resources we have — farmland, forests, abundant water, minerals — and how we use them and try to protect them.
- Children who live in the city don’t get too many chances to see the process through which workers transform raw materials into the things we need. You might like to play this game with your family: Choose an item in your home (e.g., a wool sweater) and try to identify some of the people who worked to make it (e.g., the farmer who raised the sheep, workers who prepared the wool, workers who knit the sweater, etc.).

Teacher: _____ Date: _____