

*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 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 looking ahead to 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 made in God’s image, and that God knows and 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 what it means to be known and loved by God, known so well that God calls each one of us by name.
- find out more about what it means to be a person — to be unique, but also alike in many ways; to have feelings and to make choices about the way we express them; and to have talents and gifts we need to develop.
- discover that when we share our talents and gifts with each other, we are sharing ourselves.

Working together at school and at home

- Your child will be bringing home an information sheet about his or her name and will need your help to complete it.
- We will be learning about some of the ways we are alike and different, and about our gifts and talents. Talk to your child about the gifts and talents of your family members, and the special contribution each person makes to your life together.
- The students will learn more about feelings and the choices we have in how we handle them. When you see your child making an effort to express feelings in a way that respects others, let him or her know that you appreciate it.
- One of the stories we will be reading involves bullying. If this is a concern you have, please talk to me or to our principal. Even if you have no specific concerns, it’s important to talk to your child about this topic, and to encourage them to stand up for anyone who is being bullied.

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." God created us 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 about friendship. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Two we will:

- talk about our family names, some family customs, and how family love is open to others, especially when we celebrate special occasions.
- read a story about the death of a grandmother and how it affects her family.
- explore different positions in the family (oldest, middle, youngest, only child).
- discover the importance of learning how to compromise with family and friends and of being friendly and open to others.

Working together at school and at home

- We will be researching family names, so be sure to ask your child about this. We will also be talking about favourite family customs. You might tell your child about your favourite family customs when you were growing up.
- We will be reading a story about a boy whose grandmother dies, and how sad he is. You might ask your child to tell you this story and see if he or she has any questions about death. If there has been a recent death that has touched your family, please let me know so that we can include the person and your family in our classroom prayers.
- One of our topics on friendship encourages students to think of friendliness as a quality that cannot be used up — there is always enough to share. In particular, we will be talking about being people who include others, not exclude them. You might talk about the importance of friendliness at home.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

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 the early grades, this theme is presented through a continuing story. The message of these stories 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:

- read a story about the Carson family, who have four children, and learn more about life before birth, and how all of a baby’s needs are met in the uterus.
- discover that life begins at the moment of conception as a single cell.
- explore the amazing growth and development of babies in their first year of life.

Working together at school and at home

- Ask your child to tell you about the Carson family. What was your child’s favourite part of the story? What did he or she learn?
- The children will be taking home several information sheets about important events in the life of their parents or guardians, their birth, and their first year of life. Please help your child complete these sheets as best they can.

Looking Ahead

Terms used in Grade 2 (*sperm, ovum, cell, sac, umbilical cord*) are reviewed in Grade 3, and the term *conception* is introduced. Students are also given a brief explanation of how babies are born. Next year, in Grade 4, the student book introduces the term *sexual intercourse*, but does

not include a physical description. The teacher's book has a simple explanation of sexual intercourse that may be presented by the teacher to the students, depending on the readiness of the class. 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 the commitments that all families have, and how important it is for people to keep their commitments.
- discover that we have to think before we make a decision.
- analyze a situation involving a decision, and learn that other people can help us when we are making decisions.

Working together at home and at school

- Talk to your child about your family’s commitments (at work, at home, in the community), why they are important, and how each member of the family can contribute to making sure these commitments are met.
- We will be talking about the importance of reflection — asking ourselves questions — before we make a decision. Although young children do not make major decisions, they do make small ones, and the habit of reflection is a valuable one to develop. Encourage your child to stop and reflect before acting.
- The story the children will be reading at school is about a boy named Eddie who has to make a decision involving a choice between two good things. Ask your child to tell you about Eddie’s decision. Children often need your help with their decisions, not to make the decision for them, but to clarify for them the questions they need to ask themselves in order to decide wisely.

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 some of the differences and similarities of people from all over the world, and recognize how much we have in common, no matter where we live.
- discover more about human work and its importance for human society.
- learn that doing good work requires effort and patience.

Working together at school and at home

- Did you or other members of your family come to Canada from another part of the world? The students will be doing research on the customs, games, foods, and special celebrations in another part of the world. Any help you can give your child in choosing and describing a region or country would be appreciated.
- Your child will be bringing home an interview sheet and would like to talk to someone about the work they do. The students will be sharing what they learn with the class.
- In the last topic of this theme, the students will consider work from their own perspective. They already know that work, both at school and at home, is not always easy. The lesson from this topic is that a sense of accomplishment and pride in work requires effort and commitment. Your encouragement and support as your child learns to be a good worker is very important.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____