

*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 relationships 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 next year's.

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 and students read
- 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 print 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*. If you have any questions about the program, please get in touch with me.

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:

- recognize and appreciate the gift of love God has given each person, the gift of our lives.
- explore the value of similarities and differences among people.
- learn about the early stages of human development (prenatal, infancy, and childhood), and discuss our need for other people to help us grow and develop.
- examine the impact we have on other people by our words and actions, and the importance of awareness of other people’s feelings.

Working together at school and at home

- Ask your child to tell you the story of Beatriz Perez and her special gift.
- At around this age, children often begin to want to be like everyone else. In class we will be talking about how much unique personal characteristics contribute to the fullness of life. It’s important for children to learn to respect differences and value their own uniqueness.
- We will be learning about the first stages of human development. Children love hearing about their early years: when they first walked and talked, funny things they said, and the activities they especially liked. You might share some of these stories together.
- Learning to be sensitive to the feelings of others is another topic we will be discussing. It takes time for children to learn that they have an effect on other people, even when the effect was unintended. When you take the time to explain the reasons something may be hurtful, you are helping your child to grow in sensitivity to others.

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, as well as a topic about friendship. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Two we will:

- explore the value of time together, whether enjoying an ordinary family activity or a special occasion; we will also examine some of the day-to-day signs of family love.
- read a story that explores some of the feelings children experience as a result of separation and divorce.
- learn that families have many responsibilities, and that each member has a special contribution to make.
- discover that learning to be a friend is the way to have friends.

Working together at school and at home

- Your child will be bringing home a sheet about favourite family activities and will be asking you about yours. However hectic family life is, the well-being of families does depend on sharing time together — eating a meal, watching a movie, or playing a game.
- Your child will be bringing home a prayer for families that we will be saying in class. Your family is invited to say it together.
- At school your child will be completing a sheet about his or her family responsibilities, including favourite and least favourite responsibilities. Ask your child about this.
- The students will explore the idea of friendship, and what it means to be a friend. Children are often more concerned with having friends rather than being a friend. You might ask your child about what it means to be 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. As in earlier 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:

- read a story about the Casey family, including the parents’ celebration of 30 years of married life, the promises they made when they married, and their efforts to adjust to the changes in their lives after Mr. Casey’s serious accident.
- learn that mothers and fathers participate in God’s power to create new life.
- explore some of the gifts we receive at conception; and the gift after birth of ongoing love and care from family, friends, and others.
- discover more about the development and birth of babies, and learn the difference between identical and fraternal twins.
- explore the stages of human development, including adolescence and adulthood.

Working together at school and at home

- Ask your child to tell you about the story of the Casey family. What did your child learn from their story? Does your child have any questions? You will find detailed information about the topics in this theme in the Online Family Edition of *Fully Alive* (www.acbo.on.ca).
- Although the topic of puberty is not discussed until Grade 5, some Grade 4 girls may begin to show the first signs of development. It’s important to talk to your daughter about this and to

prepare her well in advance for the beginning of menstruation. Again, you will find helpful information in the Online Family Edition of *Fully Alive*.

- Your child will be bringing home a sheet about family stories. Children like to hear about older relatives (grandparents, great-grandparents, great-aunts and uncles), and how family traits and interests are often passed on in families. Be sure to tell your child about some of the people in your family.

Looking Ahead

New terms introduced in Grade 4 are *amniotic sac*, *amniotic fluid*, *ova* (the plural of *ovum*), and *sexual intercourse*. The term *sexual intercourse* is used in the student book but does not include a physical description. The Grade 4 teacher book has a simple explanation of sexual intercourse that may be presented by the teacher, depending on the readiness of the class. This information is not included in the student book until Grade 5. In Grade 5 the students will learn about the reproductive systems of males and females, the gift of fertility, and the changes of puberty.

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 for families, please go to www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Four we will:

- read a story about a commitment that Beatriz Perez wants to make, the complications she faces, and her satisfaction in succeeding.
- explore the process of making a commitment and consider the questions that have to be answered before making a commitment.
- examine the pleasures and difficulties of keeping a commitment.

Working together at home and at school

- Ask your child to tell you about the story of Beatriz’s commitment and how it worked out.
- At this age, children are often eager to make commitments to activities, teams, or special lessons. These commitments don’t always work out, and parents or guardians are faced with a decision — should my child be allowed to drop the activity?
- At school we will be talking about the questions we need to ask before making a commitment: Do I need permission? How long will the commitment last? Are other people depending on me? Can I keep this commitment all by myself? Encourage your child to think about these questions before making a commitment.

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 the 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:

- learn to consider the world as a home and, like the homes people live in, both a place and people.
- discover the importance of being good caretakers of our earthly home.
- explore the contribution of human work and recognize that people participate in building God’s world — our home — through their work.

Working together at school and at home

- Did you or other members of your family come to Canada from another part of the world? Tell your child about the physical environment and the people in this part of the world, or come visit our class and tell us.
- Encourage your child to participate in your family’s efforts to protect the environment — reducing garbage, donating used clothing and toys, recycling, and composting.
- As part of our exploration of the work people do, the students will be finding out in what part of the world different items were made. You might point out to your child items in your house that come from other countries and discuss the work that people did to create these items.
- Be sure to tell your child about your work and the way you try to contribute to making the world a good place to live. You could also mention the work that each person does for the family. This work helps to make your home a good place for people to live.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____