

*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 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 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

- read a story about the power of love to transform people’s lives and reflect on God’s creation of us to be people of love.
- explore the presence of life-giving people in our lives.
- discuss a story about bullying and learn more about the harm it causes.
- examine some of the ways in which we can be life givers and make a difference in other people’s lives.

Working together at school and at home

- Ask your child to tell you about the story of the little girls in the orphanage and how their lives were changed.
- The students will be creating jigsaw puzzles about themselves related to their interests, talents, hobbies, feelings, friends, and plans for the future. Ask your child about his or her puzzle.
- We will be discussing what it means to be a life giver, someone who helps you to grow and develop. You could talk with your child about the life givers in his or her life and also about your child’s efforts to be a life giver and make a difference in other people’s lives.
- The story we will read about bullying includes some ideas you may want to discuss with your child: the need for adult help when there are serious problems; that friends should not keep a confidence if another person’s well-being is at risk; and how destructive bullying is, both to the victim and the bully.

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. Living in relationship begins in the family, the setting in which people first learn about love. As children grow up, friendship becomes more and more important to them. In this theme we will be exploring both important relationships — family and friendship. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Two we will

- explore the need for relationships in our lives, especially with family and friends.
- discuss the importance of family histories and customs.
- examine some day-to-day stresses that all families experience and consider strategies to manage them.
- learn about common communication problems and ways to overcome them.
- analyze how friendships change as we grow up and learn more about how to handle stressful situations with friends.

Working together at school and at home

- The students will be doing an interview about friendship. Please share with your child some memories of the friends you had as a child or young teenager.
- The students will also be asking for some information about their family histories and customs. Please tell your child about some of the people, events, and customs that are important in your family's history.
- We will be examining day-to-day stresses and communication problems in families and among friends. You might ask your child about these topics and the strategies that were discussed for handling these normal difficulties.
- In the classroom, we discussed the important idea that learning how to be a good friend is a process that takes time. You could talk to your child about his or her friends and how these relationships have changed over time.

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 earlier grades, this theme was presented through a continuing story that 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

- explore some of the ways in which we learn about sexuality and develop our ideas about what it means to be male or female.
- review the main features of adult female and male fertility.
- learn about the first minutes and days of a new human life, the development of the new life during each trimester of a pregnancy, and the baby’s birth.
- discuss some physical, emotional, and social changes related to puberty.
- examine how both heredity and environment influence our development as persons, and learn about the choices we can make as we develop.

Working together at school and at home

- At school, the students will be completing and bringing home several sheets about human fertility, the development of a new life in the uterus, and the changes of puberty. On some of these sheets, there is a section for any questions the students still have about these topics. Be sure to ask your child about questions he or she may have. Some children are uncomfortable asking questions at school and prefer to ask at home. You will find detailed information about the topics in this theme in the Online Family Edition of *Fully Alive* (www.acbo.on.ca).

- The students will be discussing some important ideas about sexuality, and you may want to find an opportunity to discuss them with your child. These ideas include: Sexuality is not just about bodies or body parts, but about persons who are created by God as males and females. A Christian view of sexuality is that men and women are meant to respect and support each other, not use each other in casual sexual relationships.
- Media are a significant influence on growing children's understanding of sexuality. Many parents find it helpful to join their children in watching shows and movies and discuss the messages that are promoted about sexuality and relationships between males and females.
- All children need adequate preparation for the physical changes of puberty, but they can be reluctant to discuss this. It's often best to look for opportunities that come up naturally, rather than trying to have one long discussion. You will find detailed information about puberty in the Online Edition of *Fully Alive*.
- We will also be discussing the emotional and social changes that come with puberty, including moodiness, irritability, a desire for more privacy, and the growing importance of friendship. It's important to talk about some of these changes with your child and how they can be handled in a way that respects all members of the family. It's helpful to let your child know that it takes time to adjust to a new stage of life, not just for children, but also for parents.

Looking Ahead

The only new term in Grade 6 related to the male and female reproductive system and fertility is *menopause*. Other new terms related to fetal development, pregnancy, and birth include *nucleus*, *membrane*, *DNA*, *chromosome*, *gene*, *zygote*, *embryo*, *fetus*, *trimester*, and *labour*. These terms are used to explain the process through which two life-giving cells, the sperm and ovum, unite and exchange genetic information, the development of new life during nine months of pregnancy, and the birth of the baby.

This theme also introduces in a more direct way our calling to be loving and life-giving according to our state of life. Only married people are meant to express their sexuality in an intimate physical relationship. Attraction between the sexes, which begins at puberty and for many people can lead to marriage, is also discussed briefly at this grade level. These are topics that are developed more fully in Grades 7 and 8.

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. Growth toward maturity is never a straight path. As children learn to make more decisions about their lives, they need to know that freedom is best understood as a freedom *for*, rather than a freedom *from*. Commitment is really the free gift of ourselves to being the best people we can be at each stage of our life. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Four we will

- explore the meaning of commitment and how we learn to be committed persons.
- examine the qualities and accomplishments of people, both famous and unrecognized, who are models of commitment.
- explore commitments in the students’ lives and reflect on the rewards and difficulties of becoming a committed person.

Working together at home and at school

- This theme includes the important idea that the task of becoming a committed person takes time and involves both rewards and difficulties. When you see that your child is making an effort to be a responsible family member, student, and friend, be sure to acknowledge these signs of growing maturity.
- We will be reading about Terry Fox as a model of commitment. You might ask your child about Terry’s qualities that he or she admires most. You could also talk about other people who inspire your child and about people who inspired you when you were growing up.
- We will be exploring areas in which the students have commitments: family, school, friends, activities, community, and themselves, to be the person God created them to be. You might ask about these commitments, what aspects your child finds rewarding and what he or she finds hard. It’s important to let your child know that adults also find some of their day-to-day commitments difficult at times.

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, brothers and sisters within the whole human family, and caretakers of the earth. As the students get older, they are encouraged to recognize that they have a unique contribution to make to the world, one that cannot be made by anyone else. Their participation in creating a world that reflects the goodness of God is needed. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Five we will

- analyze the human capacity to influence others and to be influenced by others.
- explore the meaning of values and virtues, and examine the influence of media, advertising, and stereotypes on values.
- discuss human influence on the natural and social environment of the world and the responsibility to be a positive influence.

Working together at school and at home

- You might ask your child about people who are a strong positive influence in his or her life and what your child has learned from these people.
- The students will be bringing home sheets about media and advertising that include questions about values. This assignment provides an opportunity to have a family discussion about the influence of these media on values and behaviour.
- You might ask your child about a quiz that the class will take about protection of the earth and discuss your family efforts to be good stewards of the natural environment.
- We will be talking about electronic communication and its impact on the social environment, both positive and negative. It is important to talk to children about following family rules that ensure their online safety, avoiding the temptation to spread gossip or negative comments, and reporting any problems they experience.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____