

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

In Theme One we will

- explore what it means to be a person who is made in God’s image.
- examine self-concept, personality traits, and human emotions.
- learn more about the influence of heredity and environment on individuals.
- explore some of the strengths and limitations that are part of each person and discuss the importance of self-honesty and self-discipline.
- consider the virtue of patience and its relevance to the task of growing up.

Working together at school and at home

- We will be exploring the question, “Who am I?” and the meaning of self-concept, what we know about ourselves. You might ask your child about this discussion. As children enter adolescence, the question of identity — who they are and who they will be — becomes very important to them.
- Ask your child about the virtue of patience, which is highlighted in Theme One. At school we will discuss patience as a commitment to the future — to take the necessary time to develop fully, to learn to control impulsive actions, and to recognize the great importance of patience during their stage of life.
- In the second topic of Theme One, we will be discussing three dimensions of personality: 1) introvert/extrovert; 2) emotionally reactive/calm; and 3) conscientious/impulsive. What did your child think about these dimensions, and how do they apply to him or her?
- Learning how to handle emotions is a life-long task, another subject we will explore. Since young adolescents tend to be very self-aware, they often have difficulty dealing with their feelings, a situation that will be discussed in class. You may have noticed this emotional unevenness at home. Young adolescence is a life stage that demands a lot of patience from families.
- We will examine the influence on each person of heredity, and the students will learn about a small number of traits that are the result of just two genes, one from each parent.

- We will also look at the influence of the environment, especially three aspects of the social environment — family, friends, and media. Many parents and guardians worry about the influence of media, and with good reason. It takes a lot of effort to monitor and restrict what young people are watching, listening to, and doing online, but it is worth it. It is normal for young adolescents to believe that they can monitor themselves, but, in fact, they lack the life experience and maturity to do this without guidance from their families.

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 friends. For more information, please go to www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Two we will

- explore three aspects of relationships: intimacy, choice, and quality.
- discuss the importance of communication in our relationships with family members and friends.
- examine the experience of living in a family from the perspective of family structure, the birth order of children, and challenges that are part of being a family.
- explore the relationship of friendship, including what we learn from our friendships, the qualities of healthy relationships, and the challenges that are part of all relationships.

Working together at school and at home

- Ask your child to tell you about the virtue of kindness, which is highlighted in Theme Two. At school we will explore the meaning of kindness as the virtue that reveals an attitude of care and concern for others. This attitude includes both those we know and those we do not know, because we recognize that we are all people whom God created and loves.
- In class, we will be considering three guidelines for good communication: listening to each other, avoiding unnecessary conflict, and saying what we mean in a tactful and respectful way. Ask your child about these guidelines and how they could be used in your family.
- We will be examining family structure as one of the characteristics that makes each person's experience of growing up in a family unique. The family structures considered are extended families (one including relatives other than parents and their children); nuclear families (parents and children); single-parent families; blended families (one that includes children from a previous marriage from one or both of the parents); and foster families (one in which a person or married couple provides care for one or more children whose own family is unable to look after them). You may want to discuss this topic with your child.
- We will be exploring some everyday family challenges, especially two that are related to the changes in children as they grow up. Being moody and wanting more privacy are normal behaviours during early adolescence. It takes patience from both young people and parents or guardians to handle this challenge. Ask your child about what he or she learned about dealing with moods and the need for more privacy.
- We will also be discussing some more serious challenges for families: unemployment, immigration, divorce, remarriage, and death. Please talk to your child about these challenges, especially if one of them has had an impact on your family.

- As most parents and guardians discover, friendship becomes very important during early adolescence. We will be examining the qualities of healthy relationships with friends (respect, loyalty, personal interest) and the harm caused by exploitive friendships.
- Most young people have some minor difficulties with friendship during early adolescence. More serious difficulties can occur, however, such as bullying and peer pressure. Try to find an opportunity to talk to your child about these issues, especially if you suspect that he or she is having problems with friends.

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, which emphasized God’s plan for new life as the result of the love between men and women. 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:

- examine some aspects of sexuality, including sexual characteristics, sexual identity, and sexual roles.
- review the changes of puberty and the development of male and female fertility.
- explore the responsibility of caring for our health, including sexual health, and of developing a realistic body image during adolescence.
- discuss the experience of sexual attraction and feelings and examine the need for self-discipline and patience to reach the goal of becoming fully mature males and females.
- reflect on the virtue of chastity and on the attitudes and behaviours that reflect this virtue and show respect for the gift of sexuality.

Working together at school and at home

- You may find your child less open to talking about sexuality at this stage of life. Unlike younger children, young adolescents consider the topic very personal and often prefer not to discuss it. Look for natural openings — a program you watched together, an incident involving a friend that your child tells you about, or an item in the news — and try to take advantage of them.

- Young adolescents tend not to pay enough attention to nutrition, exercise, and rest. These areas of physical health are especially important when people are growing rapidly. Many young people spend a lot of time in sedentary pursuits (watching programs, playing electronic games, surfing the net). Families can make a difference by participating in a variety of physical activities and including friends of their children. The presence of friends makes a big difference for young people.
- Preoccupation with appearance and weight is normal for this age group. It is important to be patient with young people's worries or dissatisfaction about their bodies, to reassure your child that everyone is sensitive during this stage of life and that these feelings do ease. At school the students will discuss the influence of media on body image. You might ask your child about this discussion.
- Theme Three includes a reflection on the virtue of modesty. Ask your child to tell you about this virtue. In school we will discuss modesty as the virtue that protects our dignity as persons, especially that which is private and intimate, and guides the way we present ourselves and behave.
- As part of the discussion of sexual attraction, the topic of pornography will be briefly discussed. The internet has made access to pornography widely available. When young people have access to the internet in their bedrooms, there is always a risk that they will get involved in chat rooms that are inappropriate for people of their age or watch pornography. This is a topic that parents and guardians do need to talk about. At school the students discussed the harmful nature of pornography, particularly for young people who should be directing their energies toward greater maturity and self-discipline, not toward a distorted version of sexuality.

Looking Ahead

New terms introduced in Theme Three at this grade level are *primary sexual characteristic, secondary sexual characteristic, sexual role, femininity, masculinity, sexually transmitted and blood-borne infection (STBBI), homosexuality, masturbation, pornography.*

This theme introduces the experience of sexual attraction and sexual feelings, which begin after puberty, and stresses the need for self-discipline to manage these feelings. Sexual orientation is briefly discussed as part of a discussion of attractions young people may have toward people of the same sex. The virtue of chastity is highlighted in this theme, and the serious moral, physical, and emotional risks of intimate sexual relationships between unmarried people are carefully explored. The students are encouraged to recognize the value of the goal of becoming fully mature males and females who follow God's plan for them.

In Grade 8 the students will learn more about sexual orientation, natural family planning, and artificial contraception from the perspective of Catholic moral teaching.

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

- discuss some of the feelings the students have about growing up and examine the relationship between freedom and responsibility.
- analyze and practise the process of making decisions.
- explore the connection between commitments and responsibilities and reflect on what it means to be authentic people and to create balance in their lives.

Working together at home and at school

- Growing up and becoming an adult is hard work, and young people need family support. You can show this support by encouraging your child to make more decisions and by being patient when things don’t work out as expected. Learning from small mistakes is part of growing up. Young people also need the safety of limitations in areas in which they do not have the experience or maturity to make independent decisions.
- The virtue highlighted in Theme Four is perseverance. In class we will discuss perseverance as the virtue that allows us to overcome obstacles and patiently meet the challenges in our lives. Children need encouragement to persevere, not only because it is an important habit for the rest of their lives, but also to experience the pleasure of overcoming difficulties and to develop the confidence that comes from success.
- At school the students will be learning that there are no short cuts to maturity and that trying to grow up too quickly deprives young people of the experiences and time they need to become fully mature. Our society puts a lot of pressure on children as young as 8 or 9 to assume the styles and behaviours of much older teens. It can be difficult for parents to resist this trend, but there are good reasons for doing so. It can result in preteens and young teenagers being exposed to situations that they do not have the maturity to handle.
- As children grow up they tend to be more private and share less of their day-to-day lives with their parents. There are times when they have problems that worry them, but are often hesitant to talk to an adult about their worries. This is particularly true if they have been involved in something they know their parents would disapprove of. It’s important for young people to know that their parents or guardians are always ready to listen, and that even when they get upset or angry, their love for their children is not in question.
- The students will discuss a variety of responsibilities related to their commitment to being a family member. One of these responsibilities is an effort to understand the viewpoint of other

family members. This is especially important for parents and young people, who often find themselves frustrated by arguments that seem to go nowhere. You might ask your child about this responsibility and how it applies to your family.

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

- examine the social nature of persons, which motivates us to join together in groups, both small and large.
- explore four significant reasons for gathering with others: to celebrate; to support each other in times of difficulty; to create needed changes in our society; and to work together cooperatively to accomplish goals.
- learn about our responsibilities as members of groups, including the creation of a sense of community that respects and appreciates the uniqueness of each person.

Working together at school and at home

- The experience of family celebrations is immensely important to children. Whether it’s a big occasion, like Christmas, or a special meal to mark a family member’s birthday — these are events that are remembered many years later. In school we will discuss the importance of celebrations as a way of reminding ourselves just how important our bonds with other people are. You might ask your child about this discussion.
- Another reasons people gather together is to assist each other. We will be learning about the purpose of support groups, and the help they can provide when people are facing serious difficulties. You might ask you child about support groups and what he or she learned about them.
- The students will be learning about groups that try to create necessary changes in society. Such groups appeal to idealistic young people, especially if their families are involved in social action in their communities. Ask your child about the groups that will be discussed in class and what these groups are trying to achieve.
- We will explore the meaning of work, how it contributes to our society, and how dependent all of us are on the work of others. You might talk to your child about the work you do, what you enjoy about it, and what you find difficult.
- In Theme Five the virtue of generosity is highlighted. Ask your child to tell you about this virtue. In school we discussed generosity as the virtue that allows us to be big-hearted and to offer our time, energy, and prayers to others because, as Jesus taught us, they are our neighbours.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____