

*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. 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 _____

School Phone _____

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

- consider the human person as the wonder of creation, made in the image of God and given the powers of human intelligence and free will.
- examine the human abilities to learn, to remember, to reason, to create, to feel, and to act freely.
- explore the concept of character — the moral self; and discuss the importance of the four cardinal virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) for moral growth.
- reflect on the virtue of humility in light of the limitations and weaknesses that are part of each person’s life.

Working together at school and at home

- In the opening topic, we will explore some of the wonders of the world. You might ask your child about this discussion.
- The idea of human persons as the wonder of the world is an important one in this theme. In class the students will look at the amazing powers of the human mind — to learn, to remember, to reason, to create, to feel, and to act freely.
- The development of children’s minds is always important to parents or guardians. One of the most common problems for young adolescents is a lack of good work habits — getting homework done regularly, taking time to review for tests, and learning how to balance their lives. Parents or guardians can help by encouraging, setting limits, and offering assistance when their young people are having difficulties coping with their many responsibilities.
- Making thoughtful decisions is an important focus in Theme One. The goal is to help young people become “thinking doers.” The ability to make thoughtful decisions is an essential one to develop during adolescence, and families can make a big difference by encouraging their children to
 - take on appropriate responsibility as they grow up
 - recognize that all decisions have consequences
 - review their decisions when something goes wrong
 - learn from their past mistakes.
- All young people need encouragement, especially those who are inclined to act first and then think. A parent or guardian can also contribute to the process of reviewing a decision that did not work out, by discussing the situation, and by suggesting some new ways of looking at the

problem. In order to do this, however, the intention of the parent or guardian has to be to help, not to blame or criticize.

- Ask your child about the virtue of humility, which is highlighted in Theme One. At school, the students will be encouraged to recognize that each person has limitations and weaknesses, as well as amazing abilities, and that humility is the virtue that helps us to put God and other people ahead of ourselves.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

School telephone: _____

Dear Family,

It's time for the second theme of *Fully Alive*. 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 these two important relationships — family and friends. For more information go to: www.acbo.on.ca.

In Theme Two we will

- consider the significance of human relationships and the unique contribution they make in each person's life.
- examine the importance of families and their contribution to providing children with secure roots for their lives.
- learn about some of the difficulties caused by abusive family members and how important it is for those who are affected to seek help.
- explore some of the challenges of adolescence for both parents or guardians and young people and the need to resolve conflicts in a respectful way.
- discuss the qualities of true friendship and consider some attitudes and behaviours that cause friendship difficulties.
- reflect on the virtue of mercy, which is essential for living in relationship with others.

Working together at school and at home

- The capacity for intimate relationships begins during adolescence, and parents or guardians may notice that their young adolescent's friendships are more intense. Young adolescents are no longer children, but they are not yet adults, and the changes they are experiencing have an effect on their relationships.
- We will be discussing the central role of families — to nurture their children and provide them with secure roots. We will also consider several serious family problems (alcoholism, physical abuse) that limit children's freedom to develop. The students are encouraged to understand that the cycle of family abuse can be broken and the harm it causes can be healed.
- Family relationships change as children become adolescents. We will be learning about the views of both parents or guardians and children during this time of life. The main concern of parents or guardians is the safety of their young people; most often the main concern of young people is their relationships with peers. This difference of perspective often leads to stress, and the result can be conflict. It is helpful if both young people and parents or guardians make an effort to understand each other's perspective — to listen with open minds and to try to solve problems cooperatively. There are times, of course, when it is not possible to solve problems cooperatively, and parents or guardians must make a decision based on the wellbeing of their children.
- The focus on friendships is very strong in early adolescence. Their friendships tend to involve sharing feelings and confidences, which can result in feelings of betrayal if a friend is

disloyal. Because loyalty is so important to most young people, parents or guardians have to be cautious in expressing negative comments about friends. In general, however, it is important for parents or guardians to be open to listening to their children's concerns and to respond to them.

- We will be talking about causes of stress in friendship, some of which are simply part of the process of growing up. Other causes, however, are avoidable. We will discuss exploitation, spreading gossip and rumours, being jealous or envious of others, exclusive friendship groups that exclude certain people, and peer pressure. These have the potential to cause serious harm to young people at a time when they are very concerned to be accepted. It's important for parents or guardians to talk to their children about this harm. In particular, electronic communication — instant messaging, e-mail, social networking — provides many new opportunities for these behaviours. It is essential for parents or guardians to monitor young people's use of electronic communication and to have clear guidelines for what is acceptable online.
- Ask your child to tell you about the virtue of mercy, which is highlighted in Theme Two. We will be discussing how this virtue guides us to have compassionate hearts in our relationships with other people — to forgive, to avoid conflict if possible, and to be gracious to people. Young people often get so caught up in their relationships with peers that they lose sight of the harm they can cause when they retaliate because of hurt feelings or anger. Parents or guardians can't remove all of the challenges of growing up, but they can remind their children to be faithful to the word of God in their behaviour: "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love." (Psalm 145:8)

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

School telephone: _____

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 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:

- reflect on the gift of sexuality and God’s plan for us to be loving and life-giving persons.
- explore the role of sexuality within marriage and for those who are single.
- reflect on the virtue of chastity, which helps us to honour the gift of sexuality and live according to God’s plan.
- review some aspects of adolescence — changing appearance, moodiness, stress, and sexual attraction. We will also reflect on homosexuality from the perspective of God’s plan for sexuality.
- examine some of the pressures on young people to become involved in exclusive relationships at an early age and discuss some serious abuses of sexuality.
- review basic information on sexually transmitted and blood-borne infections and their potential impact on fertility and introduce the topic of family planning from the perspective of living in harmony with the gift of fertility.
- complete Theme Three with a reflection on the meaning of true love as it is expressed in the enduring commitment of marriage.

New Topics Introduced in Theme Three

- The subject of sexual orientation and homosexuality was introduced in Grade 7. In Grade 8, some of this information is reviewed and the moral teaching of our Church on homosexuality is presented.
- Family planning is also introduced in this grade. Both natural family planning methods and some methods of artificial contraception are described, and the moral teaching of our Church on contraception is presented.

Working together at school and at home

- Most parents or guardians find their children less open at this stage of life to talking about issues related to sexuality. Many young adolescents consider this topic very personal and prefer not to discuss it. Often, an indirect approach works best. Some natural openings might be a television show you both watched; an incident involving a friend that your child tells you about; or an item in the newspaper or on television news.
- The essential message of this theme is the Christian understanding of sexuality: that male and female persons are called to build loving relationships with each other and that together they have been given the power to co-operate with God and bring new life into the world.
- If an opportunity arises, you might ask your child about the virtue of chastity, which is highlighted in this theme. It is the virtue that helps us to control our desire for sexual pleasure. At school, the students will discuss the need to be thoughtful consumers of media, ignore gossip or rumours about sexual matters, and to avoid situations that may lead to pressure for sexual intimacy. Reinforcing these values at home can make a big difference.
- We will also discuss pornography, which is widely available on the internet and is particularly damaging for young people who are forming their ideas and values about sexuality. Many experts, including the police, strongly advise that children and young adolescents should not have access to an internet connection in a private space, like a bedroom. There are simply too many temptations.
- There are many pressures for young people to become involved at an early age in exclusive relationships and to engage in sexual activity. These pressures include media, the influence of peers, and unmet personal needs that drive some young people to seek attention and love in a relationship. The best defence against these pressures on young people is the self-confidence that comes from knowing that they have the love, support, and shelter of their families.

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: _____

School telephone: _____

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

- examine the meaning of commitment as a choice to be involved, to give ourselves to other people and to our activities.
- explore the commitment we have to ourselves, which is a commitment to be the people God created us to be.
- look at our commitments to others, especially family members and friends.
- discuss a story about the death of a family member and the importance of family commitment when facing difficult challenges.
- consider the meaning of a commitment to the future and the significance of moral development as we grow up.
- reflect on the virtue of temperance and its importance as developing people learn to accept more responsibility for themselves.

Working together at home and at school

- At school, the students will reflect on what it means to be committed to themselves. An important idea in this theme is that for young adolescents a commitment to themselves is a commitment to develop and grow toward maturity. For this to happen, they need the support, guidance, and commitment of their families.
- A commitment to oneself during adolescence has unique challenges because of the many changes that occur during this life stage. The students will discuss the need to be patient with themselves, not to give up on themselves, to find a balance between being too easy and too hard on themselves, to stay involved, and to pay attention to their relationship with God. These are also good ideas for parents or guardians of young people. Parents or guardians need patience, since maturity doesn't happen overnight. The early years of adolescence can be difficult for young people and their families. Both need the help and guidance of daily prayer.
- You might ask your child about the virtue of temperance, which is highlighted in this theme. Temperance is the virtue that guides and helps us control our desire for pleasure. This virtue is particularly significant for adolescents, since it is in this stage of life that they begin to assume more responsibility for their decisions, activities, and behaviour. Parents or guardians can help their young people understand that their desire to assume more control of their lives requires the ability to discipline themselves.

- We will be reading and discussing a story about a family death. This story, part of a topic on commitment to others, reflects the power of unconditional commitment among family members when facing serious challenges, like the death of a loved one. The experience of loss is universal, but it has particular challenges for adolescents. They experience their emotions very powerfully, but often have difficulty effectively communicating their feelings. This is particularly true of young adolescents. When young people experience the death of someone important to them, they need opportunities to talk about their loss and share their memories. Parents or guardians can provide these opportunities by sharing some of their own feelings and by talking about the experience of grief. At school, the students will learn that there is no correct way to grieve. Some people find it easy to talk about their feelings; others do not. But no matter how a person grieves, as time passes, feelings of deep sadness usually ease. For some young people, however, a significant loss can lead to depression and require help from a specialist in adolescent depression.
- We will be examining the meaning of a commitment to the future. An important idea in this topic is that the price of moving from childhood to adolescence is to give up living only in the present. Adults look after the future for children, but adolescents assume more responsibility for themselves and need to pay attention to their hopes and dreams for the future. Some young adolescents are drawn toward risky behaviours that threaten their future — underage drinking, drug use, shoplifting, and early sexual activity. Parents or guardians should try to help their young adolescent have a sense of the consequences of his or her behaviour. It is certainly true that many adolescents make some mistakes in the process of growing up, but most also learn from the experience.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

School telephone: _____

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

- discuss a common project, shared by all people, to build a society that reflects human dignity and value.
- examine the characteristics of just behaviour and the meaning of social justice.
- analyze two issues related to social justice: poverty and respect for life.
- explore the necessary qualities and skills to do the work of social justice.
- reflect on the virtue of solidarity, which is commitment to the common good of all people.

Working together at school and at home

- As adolescence begins, some young people become more aware of social issues. When families talk about items in the news — government decisions, controversial issues, community concerns — and encourage young people to participate in these discussions, they are helping to create awareness of what it means to be members of society.
- Ask your child to tell you about the virtue of solidarity, which is highlighted in this theme. The word *solidarity* means unity or sharing common goals. In class, we will examine how we express solidarity in our classroom and then apply this understanding to the whole human family. When families volunteer their time to help others, work to create change when people are suffering, and speak out against obvious injustices, they are teaching their children important lessons about the meaning of solidarity.
- Understanding justice begins at home. There are many family events that provide an opportunity to talk about justice — disagreements between children, creating a schedule for household tasks, or a discussion of privileges. In school, we will discuss the difference between being treated fairly and being treated identically. The difference is not hard to understand, but can be difficult to accept. Arguments at home like “but everyone else is going,” are based on the idea that fair treatment means identical treatment.
- We will be discussing both absolute poverty and relative poverty. We will also examine some attitudes to those who struggle economically. When children hear adults, especially family members, talking about the social welfare system in a negative way, it has an impact on them. It fails to communicate the positive aspects of our common responsibility to contribute to members of society who are having difficulties. We will also examine society’s attitude toward possessions and money. Parents or guardians often respond to children’s request for something by saying, “We can’t afford it.” This may be true, but it’s important for

children to realise that money isn't the only issue. There are other questions to think about: Do we really need this item? Are we buying it because other people have it?

- Respect for human life at all stages is a fundamental commitment of our faith. At school we will discuss abortion and euthanasia. Most young people of this age have strong pro-life attitudes. Several years later, when they may have personal contact with someone who is facing an unintended pregnancy, these attitudes can be severely challenged. For this reason, it is extremely important for parents or guardians to communicate a message of compassion for those who have resorted to abortion, even as they defend the fundamental right to life of the unborn child. We all need to be reminded that it is not our place to judge people; we leave that to God.
- In the last topic of Theme Five, we will consider some of the personal qualities and skills needed to work for a more just world. These qualities are hopefulness, commitment, empathy, critical thinking skills, and creativity. The students will learn about some people who demonstrate these qualities and skills in their efforts to create greater social justice in our world. You might ask about these people and what your child found particularly interesting about their work.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

School telephone: _____