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 information is provided to you to let you know what we will be discussing 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 and guardians to teach your children at home. Family Life Education also incorporates content about human development and sexual health along with healthy living, mental health literacy, and many of the social emotional learning skills 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 onthe website of the Institute for Catholic Education [(www.iceont.ca)](http://www.iceont.ca/).

The *Fully Alive* program is supported and approved by the Catholic Bishops of Ontario.

# About Theme Three

Theme Three of *Fully Alive* is called “Created Sexual: Male and Female.” God creates us 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 in the image of God 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 persons.
* 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 or on social media — 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 television, online gaming, social media). 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 both in-person and online.
* As part of the discussion of sexual attraction, the topic of pornography will be briefly discussed. Social networking sites and electronic communication has made access to pornography and sexually explicit messages widely available and accessible for young people. This is a topic that parents and guardians do need to talk about. At school students will discuss 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.

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*), *sexual attraction*, *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 persons who follow God’s plan for them.

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 this theme of 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: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_