

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](http://www.iceont.ca)).

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### **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 the early 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:**

- meet Dominic and Sara, who fall in love and decide to marry.
- discover that husbands and wives may share their love by becoming parents.
- learn about the development of babies before birth and about the care and love they need after they are born.
- learn that God made boys and girls physically different.

### **Working together at school and at home**

- Ask your child to tell you about Dominic and Sara. What was your child's favourite part of the story?
- Take this opportunity to talk to your child about how babies grow before they are born, and the special care they need after they are born.
- Tell your child about when he or she was welcomed into your family. Do you have an early picture of your child to lend to our classroom? We would love to see it.

### **Looking Ahead**

In Grade 1 the amount of information given to children is age appropriate: the development of the baby in the mother's *uterus*; the introduction of the terms *penis* and *vagina* for the physical differences between boys and girls; and a brief explanation of breast feeding. In Grades 2 and 3, additional information about prenatal life is included. A very simple explanation of sexual intercourse is given in Grade 4 by the teacher, but is not included in the student book until Grade 5.

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.

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### **In Theme Three we will:**

- meet the Brunelle family, who are expecting their third child.
- discover more about the development of babies before birth and especially about how the baby breathes and receives nourishment in the uterus.
- learn about the importance of respect and care for the body, which is a gift from God.

### **Working together at school and at home**

- Ask your child to tell you about the Brunelle family. What was your child's favourite part of the story? What did he or she find especially interesting?
- Take this opportunity to talk to your child about how babies grow before they are born, and how all their needs are met inside the uterus.

### **Looking Ahead**

The information included in Grade 2 is age appropriate: new terms include *amniotic sac*, *umbilical cord*, and *navel*; the terms *sperm* and *ovum*, which are described as tiny cells from the father and the mother, are also introduced, and a simple explanation of birth is provided. Next

year, additional information about prenatal life and birth will be presented. In Grade 4 the teacher gives a very simple explanation of sexual intercourse. This information is not included in the student book until Grade 5.

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### **In Theme Three we will:**

- read a story about the Carson family, who have four children, and learn more about life before birth, and how all of a baby’s needs are met in the uterus.
- discover that life begins at the moment of conception as a single cell.
- explore the amazing growth and development of babies in their first year of life.

### **Working together at school and at home**

- Ask your child to tell you about the Carson family. What was your child’s favourite part of the story? What did he or she learn?
- The children will be taking home several information sheets about important events in the life of their parents or guardians, their birth, and their first year of life. Please help your child complete these sheets as best they can.

### **Looking Ahead**

Terms used in Grade 2 (*sperm, ovum, cell, sac, umbilical cord*) are reviewed in Grade 3, and the term *conception* is introduced. Students are also given a brief explanation of how babies are born. Next year, in Grade 4, the student book introduces the term *sexual intercourse*, but does

not include a physical description. The teacher's book has a simple explanation of sexual intercourse that may be presented by the teacher to the students, depending on the readiness of the class. This information is not included in the student book until Grade 5.

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.

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### **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](http://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.

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### **In Theme Three we will:**

- explore the idea that we do not *have* bodies, we *are* bodies; God created us as body/spirit persons.
- consider the major systems of the body, and learn that the reproductive system has unique characteristics.
- learn about the adult female and male reproductive systems and about human fertility in adult women and men.
- discuss the physical changes of puberty, as well as some of the emotional and social changes.

### **Working together at school and at home**

- At school, the students will be completing several sheets about the adult reproductive systems, human fertility, and the changes of puberty, and will bring these sheets home. One section of these sheets asks the students to list any questions they still have about these topics. Be sure to ask your child about the questions he or she may have. Some children are not comfortable asking questions in front of other students, 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](http://www.acbo.on.ca)).

- Girls need to know about changes of puberty and be prepared well in advance of the beginning of menstruation. Again, you will find helpful information in the Online Family Edition of *Fully Alive*. You should also be aware that girls who develop early can experience teasing by peers. It is difficult to be among the first people going through the changes of puberty, and equally difficult to be among the last. Parents or guardians can help ease the situation by being present, listening to their child, and discussing their concerns.
- At school, the students will be discussing modesty and the importance of respect for the gift of sexuality by the way they speak, dress, and act. Unfortunately, they are also exposed to many examples of disrespect for sexuality, especially in the media. When the opportunity comes up, such as watching together television programs and commercials, it's important to discuss this issue with your child, and emphasize the need for respect for oneself as a girl or boy, and for others.

### **Looking Ahead**

New terms in Grade 5 that are related to the female reproductive system and have not appeared previously in the student book are *vulva*, *cervix*, *ovaries*, and *fallopian tubes*. New terms related to the male reproductive system are *urethra*, *scrotum*, *testicles*, and *vas deferens*. The only new term related to female fertility is *menstruation*, and new terms related to male fertility are *semen*, *ejaculation*, and *erection*. Other new terms introduced in Grade 5 are *fertilization* and *implantation*. In Grade 6, the students review human reproduction and the changes of puberty, and study the development of a new human life from conception and implantation through the three trimesters of pregnancy.

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### **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](http://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.

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### **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.

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### **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: \_\_\_\_\_