

The Five Themes of *Fully Alive*

Fully Alive is organized around five themes. At each grade level, the themes are presented through a series of topics appropriate to the children's stage of development.

Together, the five themes offer an exploration of what it means to be human within the context of our Catholic faith.

• Theme One – Created and Loved by God

What does it mean to be human? To be human is to be part of God's gift of creation. It means to love and be loved, to live in family, to have friends, to be male or female, to make choices and promises, to be happy and sad, to work, to succeed and to fail, to participate in society. The list is endless. All these human experiences are explored in *Fully Alive*.

Created and Loved by God" is the opening theme of *Fully Alive*, and it is like the foundation of a house. Everything else depends on it. As Christians, we believe that God creates, loves, and sustains each one of us. To be human is to be created in the image of a loving God. This image is revealed to us in Jesus Christ.

God made and loves each one of us, yet we are different from one another. These differences are discussed in Theme One. It is important for children to know that it is good to

be who they are. It is also important for them to know how much they share with all people. Like them, other people have feelings, opinions, talents, needs, strengths, and weaknesses. And, like them, other people are worthy of respect.

Everything that happens to children, whether at home or at school, has an effect on the way they see themselves and on the way they treat others. Self-acceptance and respect for others begin at home with loving parents. And it is through loving parents that children come to know and accept God's love. Theme One of *Fully Alive* is designed to complement the efforts of parents so that both the home and the school are places where each child can flourish.

• **Theme Two – Living in Relationship**

We are born needing other people and this need remains throughout our lives. We describe ourselves as brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, parents, aunts and uncles, cousins, and friends. These words tell us something about ourselves, but they also indicate how important our relationships with other people are. To be human is to live in relationship with others.

Pope John Paul II said that the special vocation of

each human person is to love. This is because we are made in God's image. The mystery of the Trinity tells us that relationship and community are at the very heart of God. To be an image of God is to be an image of love.

Loving relationships begin in the family. It is here that we first learn what it means to be loved and to love. It is in the family that we learn how to be fully human. As children grow beyond the small world of home, they begin to learn about another essential relationship – friendship. These two relationships, family and friendship, are the core of Theme Two.

There is no substitute for families. From the first moment of life when parents cuddle a new baby, learning to live in relationship with others begins. Family life is a mixture of joy, satisfaction, sacrifice, happiness, hard work, worry and, at times, disappointment. Some families have experienced the serious disruption of separation or divorce. Others have been affected by illness, poverty, or unemployment. These families need the support of the whole Christian community.

But whatever the circumstances, it remains the role of the family to teach its children how to be fully human. And every family needs God in its daily life to fulfill this

great responsibility.

- **Theme Three—Created Sexual: Male and Female**

Theme Three builds on the previous themes, and continues to explore the question of what it means to be human. Each person is precious; each is made in the image and likeness of God. Created out of love, our true meaning is found in love, in living our lives in relationship with others. We are spouses, family members, friends, neighbours, members of communities, and participants in human society.

We are also, as the title of this theme indicates, sexual; God created us male and female. Human love encompasses the body in its maleness and femaleness. Within the vocation of marriage, this love is expressed in the sexual relationship of husband and wife who give themselves to each other and welcome new human persons into their community of love. Ideally, it is on this foundation of the fruitful love of wife and husband, which is an image of the love of God, that children's early understanding of the meaning of sexuality is developed.

Before children begin school, they often ask their parents about where babies come from and about the differences between boys and girls' bodies. These are natural questions and parents are the very best people to

answer them. No one else has such a special relationship with the child or knows the child as well as parents.

In the early grades of *Fully Alive*, the focus of Theme Three is on the life-giving (procreational) dimension of sexuality – life before birth, birth, and the needs of new babies. The context for this information is a series of stories that focus on marriage and family, new life as a gift from God, the need to care for new life, and the body as part of the gift of the person. In later grades, topics such as development during puberty, the relational dimension of sexuality, fertility, and chastity are presented.

Sexuality, of course, is not just about bodies, and how babies are born. It is mainly about people, who are male and female. Parents teach their children a great deal about what it means to be men and women. It isn't something they talk about, or at least not often, but something that they do and are. The way a person feels about herself as a woman and the way a person feels about himself as a man are communicated to children. When parents respect each other, and the work that each parent does, children are learning about sexuality.

- **Theme Four – Growing in Commitment**

Theme Four continues the exploration of what it means to be human: To be human is to be faithful to God and to others, and to use the gift of freedom wisely. This theme is concerned with the truth of our lives as persons. Our choices, decisions, and promises reflect and create the persons we are. Are we the persons we say we are?

Each one of us is challenged to grow in commitment to God and to others. Whether we are wives, husbands, priests, religious, or single people, God calls us to be faithful. Childhood and adolescence are a time for learning how to be dependable, to keep one's word, and to make wise choices. As adults, we know how our important choices, decisions, and commitments are. They are part of who we are.

Theme Four explores the meaning of commitment in a variety of ways. In the earliest grades, the children examine the meaning of the word *promise* and the process of making choices. In later grades, topics such as learning how to make and keep commitments, the example of people who are models of commitments, free will, and personal responsibility are presented.

The best way for children to learn about commitment is to grow up in a loving and committed family. When children can depend on their families, when parents keep their word,

honour their promises, and are faithful to their responsibilities, children learn to trust and to rely on other people. The example of love and commitment that children see and experience at home has a strong impact on their lives.

- **Theme Five – Living in the World**

Theme Five continues the exploration of what it means to be human, but its focus turns to the human society into which each person is born. Within this society, each one of us is called to serve God and others. To be human is to live in the world – to be a member of society and to live in relationship with all creation.

In the early grades, Theme Five introduces the idea of the world as a home and our responsibility to care for our home. The contribution of human work and our dependence on the work of others is also introduced. In later grades, the children explore the qualities of a good community, the concept of the social environment, and social justice issues such as poverty, the environment, and abortion.

The primary goal of Theme Five is to increase awareness of the goodness of creation, of the value of human work, and of the responsibility we all share to do our best to make the world a good home for all. This awareness is the

foundation for a Christian attitude of care and personal involvement in the world, and above all, of hope.

One of the many gifts children, especially in the early years of school, offer to adults is their enthusiasm. There is so much to be discovered about the world, so many questions to ask, and so much to be learned. When families nourish this enthusiasm and communicate their belief that individuals can make a difference in the world, they are preparing children to participate whole-heartedly in the human society to which they belong.