

Grade 1, Theme Two

Family Letter

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." We are created to live in relationship with others, and to respond to each other with love. Loving relationships begin in the family, and this will be our main focus during this theme, along with one topic on friendship.

In Theme Two we will:

- introduce our families, and talk about the activities families enjoy together.
- explore changes in families, the strength of family love, and the special place of each person in the family.
- discover more about what it means to be a friend.

Working together at school and at home

- Photos of your family members would be a wonderful addition to our class discussion about our families. Any simple games your family enjoys that you could lend to our classroom would also be appreciated.
- It's good to let your child know that God chose all of your family members to be together. Each family member is a special gift to the others, even though we don't always feel this way. Be sure to encourage a special thank you for family members when you pray together before meals or before going to bed.
- In the classroom we will be talking about the changes a new baby brings to a family. You might tell your child about the changes in your family when he or she was born. Like adults, children find change stressful, and they need reassurance that family love remains strong.
- Young children's friendships come and go. Since children are still naturally self-centred, they have difficulty understanding other ways of seeing things, which can lead to disagreements. It takes time to grow out of this stage, but you can help by mentioning the other person's feelings, or by suggesting a compromise.

Teacher: _____ Date: _____

Theme Two Topics

In Grade One, this theme is developed through five topics. The first four topics are about the family. It is natural for children to talk about their family members when they are at school. They begin this theme by drawing a picture and using it to introduce their families. Then they discuss shared family activities, the changes a new baby brings, and the special relationship of brothers and sisters. The theme ends with a topic about friendship. As children grow, this relationship becomes more and more important to them.

Topic 1 — Meet My Family

There are few rewards for parents which exceed those they experience when they hear their child say, with pride and loyalty, "I'd like you to meet my family."

Joseph and Lois Bird, *To Live as Family*

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that everyone has a family. The children draw a family portrait and introduce the special people in their lives.

Main ideas

- Each of us has a family.
- Families enjoy doing things together.

Family participation

- If you have time, this topic provides a good opportunity to look at family photographs together, or family movies.
- Children are very proud of their families. Even when they are at school, they see themselves primarily as a member of a family. Teachers want to encourage a sense of family pride and invite the children to share their special family experiences at school. Even though teachers are careful not to ask questions that violate family privacy, children do sometimes mention private family matters. When they are young, there is little you can do about this other than to be careful what you discuss in front of them. As they mature, you can help them develop an appropriate sense of family privacy.

- Children from single-parent families are sometimes self-conscious about their situation. If you are a single parent, this topic provides you with an opportunity to assure your child of your love and to let him or her know how special your family is. Depending on their experiences, children from homes with both parents may begin to become aware that not all children live in the same situation as they do. They may ask questions, which should be answered simply. A question they may ask is whether their parents are going to get divorced. They need reassurance that this is not going to happen. In situations where divorce is likely or has recently occurred, children are particularly in need of reassurance. It is important to let them know frequently that they are loved, that they will continue to be loved, and that they are not responsible for their parents' difficulties.
- It's good to let your child know that God chose all of your family members to be together. Each family member is a special gift to the others, even though we don't always feel this way. Be sure to encourage your child to include a special thank you for the family in his or her night prayers.

Topic 2 — Families Are for Love

*One must build family; it is not enough to bear it.
And it is built out of constant loyalty and steadfast love.*

Paul Connolly, *Building Family: An Act of Faith*

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that families share love in many different ways. At school, the teacher puts a heart on each family portrait that the children drew to symbolize the love that families share. The children talk about the activities their families enjoy doing together.

Main ideas

- Families like to do things together and have fun.
- Families share love when they do special things together.
- Families also share love each day when they talk together, pray together, eat together, and when they help one another.

Family participation

- The times when the whole family has fun together mean a great deal to children. It doesn't have to be an elaborate or expensive occasion. It's the ordinary times — playing a game together, a walk in the park, a trip to the beach — that children remember. What is important is taking the time to be together and to enjoy each other when there are no other pressing obligations. If you think back to your own childhood, the family times you likely remember are these ordinary events.
- Another important family time is at meals. With both parents working and children involved in outside activities, it takes a real commitment to make sure that the whole family is together frequently for a meal. Whether it's hamburgers at a restaurant, frozen dinners, or a home-cooked meal — being together is what is important. It's worth the effort to make sure that meals are a happy time without arguments or discussion of big problems.
- Family prayer is a special way in which families share love. Not too many years ago, it was the usual practice for many families to pray together. Saying the family rosary is a distinct memory for some adults. Families who continue this practice say that the family rosary bonds the members of their family together in a very special way.

Many families would like to begin some kind of family prayer, but aren't sure how to start. Grace before meals is a natural place to begin. In some families, grace is followed by a thank-you prayer from each family member, or a special petition. Seasons like Lent and Advent are another good time to start. Children enjoy taking turns lighting the candles on an Advent wreath, and reading the story of how Joseph and Mary prepared for the birth of Jesus. During Lent, a short prayer could be said just before meals.

The prayers that the children are learning at school can also be said together at home. You may have a special prayer that you learned when you were young. Why not teach it to your children? The prayers that we learn when we are little stay with us for the rest of our lives.

Another important way that families pray together is at Mass. Children are dependent on their parents to introduce them to this special way in which the Christian community worships. Some parishes have children's liturgies or a Sunday mass that is intended especially for families.

Topic 3 — A New Baby in the Family

If we wonder at the uniqueness of a snowflake, how much more must we stand in awe of the infinite variety we find in human beings? Each child is more than an addition to the family. Through the gifts he or she brings, all family members are enriched. In a loving family, they all win. No one loses.

Joseph and Lois Bird, *To Live as Family*

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that families change with the birth of a new baby, and that family changes result in many feelings. The teacher and children read a story, “Joey’s New Baby,” and discuss the feelings Joey had. They also talk about their own experiences with new babies. You will find the story about Joey at the end of this theme.

Main ideas

- New babies bring changes to a family.
- We may feel a little sad or angry when things change in our families.
- Families are still a special place of love even when there are changes.

Family participation

- Children love to hear about when they were babies. Tell your child about what it was like when she or he arrived in the family. What changes happened? This would also be a wonderful time to look at your child’s baby pictures together.
- Preparing for a new baby in the family is exciting. If this is happening in your family, be sure to include your child in the preparation. Children need to know that it is wonderful to have a new person to love and how much they can help and participate. (“We’ll do things together for the baby.”) At the same time, they need to know that you still love them and will have time for them. Most young children have some negative feelings about the new baby. It helps if they are allowed to talk about those feelings.
- Any change in the family can be stressful for children. Just as they like the same stories read over and over, they also like things to remain the same in the family. If you are planning a change—for example, moving—it’s a good idea to begin to talk about it well before the change happens. Let your child know what’s going to happen and reassure him or her that there is still the same family love.

Topic 4 — Each Child Has a Place

Each member brings to the family unique gifts of personality, intellect, and creativity. And each brings something of even greater value, the opportunity to love and to share.

Joseph and Lois Bird, *To Live as Family*

Summary

This topic helps the children understand that each child has a special place in the family, and that brothers and sisters are important to each other. The teacher and children read and discuss a story, “Joey’s Bad Day,” and talk about the special relationship of brothers and sisters. You will find this story at the end of this theme.

Main ideas

- Brothers and sisters are very special people in our lives.
- Even when we get mad at them, we know we couldn’t do without them.
- Each child has a special place in the family.

Family participation

- You could ask your child to tell you about the story of Joey and his bad day. Why did he get mad? What are the special things about Donny, Loretta, and Katy that Joey likes? You might also ask about the special things your child likes about a brother or sister and the things that make your child upset with a brother or sister. If your child is an only child, choose a cousin or close friend to talk about.
- At times, every child gets frustrated with brothers and sisters. It helps when you talk about the difficulties. Let your child know that it is hard to live together sometimes and that you understand how he or she feels. You might tell your child about some of the difficulties you had with brothers and sisters as you were growing up.
- At some time or other, almost every young child threatens to run away. If this happens to you, you might want to say, “I hope you don’t. I would miss you, because we all love you.”
- It’s important for children to know how special each one of them is. No one in the family can be replaced. The family wouldn’t be the same without each of its members. As parents, we don’t always say these things as often as we should.

- Children bring out generosity in their parents. As parents, we need to help them bring out generosity in each other. They need your encouragement and recognition when they are helpful and generous with each other. (“That was good of you to help your brother.” “I’m glad you shared your treat with your sister.”)
- Every family is special, whether there are ten children or just one. Only children often wish that they had brothers and sisters. It can help if you acknowledge their feelings. You might say, “Yes, it would be nice to have a brother or a sister, but this is the family God has given us. We’ll have to be even more special to each other. And we can share our love with others who may need us.”

Topic 5 — Being Friends

Friendship is not a reward for our discrimination and good taste in finding one another out. It is the instrument by which God reveals to each the beauties of all the others.

C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*

Summary

This topic helps the children understand what a wonderful gift friendship is. The teacher and children discuss the kinds of things friends like to do together and the pleasures of friendship.

Main ideas

- Friends are people who like one another and enjoy being together.
- Friends like to do things together.
- Friends make one another feel special.

Family participation

- Young children’s friendships come and go. Since they are still naturally self-centred, they have difficulty understanding another person’s way of seeing things. This means that disagreements and arguments are fairly frequent. It takes time to grow out of this stage, but you can help by mentioning the other person’s feelings or by suggesting a compromise. (“Why don’t you take turns choosing the game?”) As you well know, however, there are times when you will have to insist on a compromise. (For example, “In this house, we share.”)
- Even though young friendships are unpredictable, they are an important experience for children. If there are no children living close by or if your child is an only child, you will

need to make a special effort to make sure that your child has opportunities to play with others.

- Some children find it harder to make friends than others. They may be shy and find it easier to play with one person than in a group. Other children are more successful at friendship when they are a little older and friendships are based on having the same interests. This is a natural difference in personality.
- Children also learn about friendship from their parents' friendships. When we value our friends, help them in times of need, make an effort to spend time together and enjoy each other's company, make up and forgive each other after disagreements, children come to see that friendship is important to us.
- It is very important to let children know that Jesus is a special friend. He wants to be part of their lives. In the good times and the bad times, they can always talk to Jesus.

Theme Two Stories and Poems

Topic 3: This story is about Joey De Souza and his family. Mr. and Mrs. De Souza have four children: Donny (age 11), Loretta (age 9), Joey (age 6) and Katy (age). The story takes place just after Katy was born and Joey was just four years old.

Joey's New Baby

Two years ago, when Joey De Souza was only four years old, something very special happened in his family.

Joey woke up in the morning feeling very excited. He shouted, "Mom comes home today!"

His mother was coming home from the hospital and she was bringing a new baby with her. The baby's name was Katherine, but the family called her Katy.

Joey's big brother Donny and his sister Loretta were also excited. They couldn't wait for their dad to bring their mom and baby Katy home.

"I hear Dad's car!" Donny shouted. "They're here!"

The three children rushed out the door to hug their mom. Joey hugged her so hard she could hardly breathe, and he said, "Don't go away again!"

"Would you like to say hello to your new sister?" Dad asked. He put the

baby on the couch.

“Boy, she’s little!” Donny exclaimed.

“Can I hold her?” Loretta said.

Joey touched Katy’s cheek with his finger, and said, “Hi, baby Katy. You’re so small!”

Then Joey looked at his mom and said, “She’s kind of funny looking. Why doesn’t she have any hair?”

Joey’s mom laughed. “She’ll change a lot in the next few weeks. Sometimes babies don’t have much hair.”

“I had lots of hair when I was a baby,” Joey said.

Later that day when Joey was getting ready for bed, and his mom was going to read him a story, the baby began to cry. Joey made a face, and said, “That baby is very loud!”

“Well, she’s hungry, honey,” his mom said. “That’s what babies sound like when they’re hungry. I have to feed her.”

Joey sighed. He really didn’t want to share his mom with the new baby. And he really did want her to read to him. He asked, “Will you read to me?”

“Sure,” his mom said. “I can read to you and feed Katy at the same time. OK?”

“OK,” he said quietly, but he didn’t look very happy.

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As the days went by, Joey discovered that it was a big change having a new baby in the house. His mom didn’t have as much time to play with him and sometimes she was tired. His dad was tired, too, because he helped look after Katy when she cried in the middle of the night. Sometimes Joey didn’t like the baby too much.

But there were times he really did like her, especially when she smiled at him. “Hello, you funny bald baby,” he would say and she would open her eyes wide and smile. And it was fun helping Dad give her a bath, especially when she

splashed. Joey said to his dad, “Katy is giving us a bath, too!”

His dad laughed.

“Mom,” said Joey one day. “I wish I were a baby again.”

“Why, honey?” Mom replied. “You’re such a big boy now. You can do all sorts of things Katy can’t do.”

His mom sat down in the rocking chair. “Joey,” she said, “come here.” And he snuggled up on her lap.

“I know you feel sad sometimes and angry, too,” Mom said. “I spend a lot of time with the baby. It’s a big change for our family. We used to be just five people—you, me, Daddy, Donny, and Loretta. Now we’re six people. Daddy and I still love you so much. There’s plenty of love for six people.”

Joey smiled.

Then his mom said, “You know something? In a few months when Katy starts crawling, guess who she’s going to follow around?”

“Me?” said Joey.

“You bet. She’s going to think you’re the best person in the whole world.”

And Joey’s mom was right. As the months went by, first Katy crawled, then she walked, and then she ran after her brother Joey. Sometimes she made him mad because she got into his toys and ripped his books. But mostly he thought she was pretty nice. And she thought he was wonderful. “Katy thinks I’m great!” he told his mom.

Joey really couldn’t imagine their family without her. There were six special people in his family—Mom, Dad, Donny, Loretta, Joey, and Katy.

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Topic 4: In this story Joey De Souza is having a problem with his sisters and brother.

Joey’s Bad Day

There are four children in the De Souza family—eleven-year-old Donny, Loretta who is nine, Joey who is six, and Katy, who is just two years old.

It is a busy household. Sometimes the De Souza children have lots of fun

together. Other times, things don't go quite so well. Last Saturday was one of those days.

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Joey De Souza sighed. Today was no fun. His big brother Donny was playing soccer with his friends and he wouldn't let Joey play with them. Loretta was mad at him because he made a big mess in her room. He was only trying to find his shoes. And Katy was too little to play with.

Joey pulled out his big bucket of little plastic bricks. Maybe he'd build something. Maybe he'd build a great enormous skyscraper.

Katy toddled over and sat down right next to him.

"Me too," she said.

"OK," Joey said, "but you have to put the bricks where I tell you."

They sat next to each other, working on the skyscraper. When Katy couldn't reach the top, she stood up. And that's when it happened. She gave the skyscraper a push. Down it went.

"Ka-boom," she shrieked.

"Mom!" shouted Joey. "She knocked my skyscraper over."

"Oh, Katy," Mom said, as she looked at the little bricks scattered all over the living room. "That wasn't very nice. You'd better help Joey pick everything up."

"Mom," Joey said, "I'm not going to pick up the bricks. It's not fair. I didn't make the mess. It's just not fair."

And with that he marched out of the living room, through the kitchen, and out the door. He sat on the porch steps.

He heard the door open behind him but he didn't look around. He was too mad.

"Not a great day for you, is it, Joey?" Mom said as she sat down next to him.

"I don't like any of those guys," Joey said. "Donny won't let me play soccer,

Loretta's mad at me 'cause I messed her room up, and Katy broke my building. I wish they'd all go away and I could be the only child."

His mom waited a minute and then said, "Oh, I think you'd miss them after a while. Sometimes they're nice, aren't they?"

Joey thought and thought. Donny really was a pretty good big brother. He read all the newspaper comics to Joey every weekend. And his sister Loretta wasn't always mad at him. Sometimes she threw baseballs for him so he could practise batting.

"Well?" his mom asked, and she tickled his back. "Are you still mad at everybody? Do you still want to be the only child?"

"I guess not," Joey said and he smiled. "I don't really want Donny and Loretta to go away."

"I know you don't," his mom answered. "You were just feeling cross. What about funny old Katy? I know she wrecks your buildings, but she really thinks you're pretty special. She wants to do everything you do."

"If she stays out of my toys, I won't be mad at her," Joey said.

His mom gave him a hug. "You know," she said, "this family couldn't get along without everybody—Donny, Loretta, Katy, and you. Each one of you has your own special place."

"Do I really have a special place?" Joey asked.

"You sure do. It even has a name. It's called Joey De Souza's place. Nobody else can fill it."

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