

Grade 8, Theme Four

Family Letter

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. For more information, please go to [www. acbo.on.ca](http://www.acbo.on.ca).

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.

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 of young people. Parents

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 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 has particular challenges for adolescents. They experience their emotions very powerfully, but often have difficulty 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 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 ease. For a small number of 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. It is certainly true that many adolescents make some mistakes in the process of growing up, but most also learn from the experience. Parents need to be concerned, however, when their young adolescent appears to have no sense of the consequences of his or her behaviour.

Teacher: _____

Date: _____

School telephone: _____

Theme Four Topics

In Grade 8 Theme Four is developed in three topics. In Topic 1 the students discuss commitment as a choice to give themselves to their activities and relationships, and then they examine the meaning of a commitment to themselves. Topic 2 examines commitment to others, and highlights the importance of commitment to family through a story about a death in a family. The final topic considers the meaning of a commitment to the future from the perspective of the moral challenges young people face as they grow up.

Theme Four Virtue

The virtue of temperance is highlighted in Theme Four. The development of this virtue is especially important for adolescents as they become more responsible for their lives. The habits of restraint and self-discipline, which are part of the virtue of temperance, contribute greatly to thoughtful decision-making and to an understanding of the true meaning of freedom. This reflection on the virtue of temperance is from the student text.

The Virtue of Temperance

“. . . the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” (Galatians 5:22)

- Kyle, age 13, is obsessed with online games. His teacher describes him as living in another world. His homework is never done and he isn't getting enough sleep.

- Rita, age 14, is preoccupied with gossip, especially about her classmates — who broke up, who's popular, who has a really bad reputation. In person and online, she circulates everything that's going on.

St. Paul, who reminded the Galatians about the importance of self-control, and the famous Greek philosopher, Aristotle, who advised moderation in all things, would be concerned about Kyle and Rita. They are in need of the virtue of temperance.

Temperance is the virtue that guides and helps control our desire for pleasure. When we fail to manage our desire for pleasure, we are no longer free. Instead of being in charge of our lives, we are governed by our desires, like Kyle and Rita are.

The virtue of temperance also helps us control our emotions. This doesn't mean repressing them, but being in charge of the way we express them. Uncontrolled anger, for example, can lead to serious consequences. When people are not in charge of their emotions, their freedom to make good decisions is limited.

Small children know nothing about the virtue of temperance. They want what they want when they want it. Since their ability to reason and be responsible for themselves has not yet developed, other people have to do it for them. As they grow up and assume more control of their lives, they begin to discipline themselves. Adolescence is an important time of life for developing the virtue of temperance. This virtue can be helpful with handling stress. There are some stresses in life that are unavoidable. But there are others, like ignoring work that has to be done in order to do something more enjoyable, that are the result of not controlling the desire for immediate pleasure. At some point this happens to almost everyone, and creates stress. It takes time to realize that there are a limited number of hours in a day, and if most of those hours are spent online or hanging out with friends, other parts of life will suffer.

Denying ourselves what we want is not a popular idea these days. But God created us for much more than a life of comfort and pleasure. We are created to use the gifts of reason and freedom to make choices that lead us to a life of goodness and self-giving.

Topic 1 — Commitment

True and honest commitment, in all its degrees, is a condition of spiritual maturity; it allows the seeds of spiritual aspiration to grow by providing them with appropriate soil, support, and nourishment — and by doing necessary weeding.

Rosemary Haughton

Summary

In the opening topic, the students explore commitment as a choice to be involved, to give themselves to their activities and relationships. The main focus of the topic is on their commitment to themselves, which means to be deeply involved in the task of being the unique persons God created them to be.

Main Ideas

- In order to be happy, we need to challenge ourselves. We need to give ourselves to what we are doing and to the people who are part of our lives.
- Commitment is a choice, a choice to be deeply involved and dedicated to our responsibilities and our relationships.
- We also have a commitment to ourselves to develop and become the people God wants us to be.

Family Participation

• **Happiness** — At the beginning of this topic, the students work in small groups and discuss this question: What makes people happy? You might ask your child about her or his ideas about what leads to happiness. What did other students in the class think?

The students discussed a list of happiness habits based on research conducted by people who investigate happiness. You will find a list of these happiness habits at the end of this theme. An important idea that comes out of this research is that people are most happy when they deeply involved in what they are doing and are committed to their relationships and activities.

• **Many commitments** — Young people have many commitments. The list includes the role of daughter or son, friend, student, member of a class, member of a parish community, and, often, member of a team or club. It is at this age that young people often discover that it can be difficult to meet all of these commitments, especially when some of these commitments are far more appealing than others.

One of the reasons young people seem to have difficulty with commitments at this stage in their lives is that they are beginning to understand that a commitment is something personal. They have to make the decision to be faithful people; parents cannot do it for them. Since young adolescents are at the beginning of this process, however, parents continue to play an important role by encouraging them, by making sure they do not take on unrealistic or inappropriate commitments, and by insisting that certain responsibilities be met.

• **Commitment to self** — In class, the students discussed the meaning of a famous quotation from Shakespeare: “This above all, to thine own self be true.” They learned that this commitment means to be the people God created them to be:

- persons who are thinking doers
- persons who live in relationship with others and are capable of love
- unique persons, each with strengths and weaknesses
- persons who are faithful to their values and beliefs.

At this age children are still very much dependent on the support, guidance, and commitment of their families to meet their commitment to themselves. This is especially true at the beginning of adolescence when children are unsure of themselves, and can easily make mistakes that might harm their future.

In class, the students discussed some suggestions that can help them to be true to themselves at this stage in their lives. These ideas are also useful for parents:

- **Be patient with yourself** — Parents can encourage this attitude by being patient themselves. Maturity doesn't happen overnight; it's a long process. Growing up is a serious business, but a sense of humour is important both for young people and their parents.
- **Don't give up on yourself** — There are times when it is hard for parents to recognize progress. During early adolescence, most young people take two steps forward toward maturity, and then one step back toward childhood. This is completely normal.
- **Find a balance between being too easy and too hard on yourself.** This is also important advice for parents. When parents find themselves criticizing their children constantly or expecting them to be perfect, they are losing sight of what's important. But if parents find themselves making excuses for their children when daily responsibilities are ignored, they are probably are not expecting enough.
- **Stay involved** — When young people are just going through the motions, the confusions and uncertainties of early adolescence are only made worse. Teenagers need real challenges and worthwhile activities in which to invest their energies, and families to encourage them.

Topic 2 — Commitment to Others

To look forward and not back,

to look out and not in,

and to lend a hand.

Edward Everett Hale

Summary

In Topic 2, the students continue to examine commitment, this time from the perspective of their responsibilities to others. Commitment to family is the main focus, and is explored through a story about the death of Michael's Aunt Elly. The story reflects the

value of family commitment in the face of difficult challenges. Commitment to friends and the duty to treat all people with respect are also part of this topic.

Main Ideas

- When family members face difficult challenges, like the death of a family member, their commitment to each other gives them the strength to face these challenges together. Death and grief are part of life, but our trust and hope in God and the support of other people help us to persevere.
- Friendship is very important during adolescence, but this stage of life is also a time of change. Not all friendships survive these changes. Commitment to friends can be difficult to maintain in some circumstances
- As Christians, we share a commitment to treat other people with respect. Basic respect is not something people have to earn. We have a responsibility to treat others as we want to be treated.

Family Participation

• **Commitment to others** — This topic begins with Shakespeare’s famous quote about being true to oneself, this time with the addition of the next two lines:

“This above all, to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.”

Today, we might express this idea by saying: “If you are true to yourself, you can be sure that you will be true to other people.”

Our closest relationships are, in a sense, part of who we are: mother, father, son, daughter, sister, brother, and friend. To be faithful to these roles in our lives is to be true to ourselves. Even our closest relationships, however, change over time, and this is especially relevant during adolescence. Adolescence has an impact on family relationships and on friendship.

• **Commitment to family** — Changing relationships within families as children grow up cause some stress, but do not ordinarily threaten the fundamental commitment of family members to each other. Many parents discover that raising adolescents can be demanding at times. Their young people are caught up in their friendships and activities, and their attachment to family seems weaker. The best advice from parents who have been through

this phase of family life is to be patient. Almost overnight, it seems, and to parents' surprise, adolescents become thoughtful young adults, and a new phase of family life begins.

• **Families face challenges together** — This topic features a story about the death of Michael's Aunt Elly. As well as reflecting on death and grief, the story also highlights how essential commitment to family is in the face of the loss of a family member. You will find this story at the end of this theme, and may want to discuss it with your child. The story provides an opportunity to discover what questions and concerns your child has about the subject of death.

Like all bereaved persons, both young and older adolescents need opportunities to talk about their loss and share memories of the person with their families and friends. In general, however, most adolescents have difficulties communicating their feelings. Older adolescents are likely to receive support from their friends, but this is not usually the case during early adolescence. For this reason, if there has been a death that has affected your family, it can be helpful to tell your child something about your feelings and memories. This gives your child an opportunity to express some of his or her feelings, and sends a message that painful feelings after a death are normal and can be shared with others. It also helps for children to know that over time the sadness does ease.

For a small number of young people, however, a significant loss can lead to depression and require help from a specialist in adolescent depression. Some common symptoms of depression include withdrawing from friends and families, feeling tired all the time, quitting activities that were once important, and a general lack of enthusiasm for anything. If these behaviours continue for some time, parents are advised to seek a referral to a specialist from their family doctor.

• **Questions about death** — Young adolescents often have questions about death and the customs that surround it. Some young people have had the experience of visiting a funeral home and attending a funeral, but others have not. These answers to questions about death are from the Teacher Guide:

When someone young dies, why does God let that happen?

God is not a puppet master, who controls everything that happens in this world.

Diseases, accidents, and events like tornados, floods, and earthquakes are *natural*

evils. They exist in our world. God does not cause them or prevent them. There are other evils in our world called *moral* evils. For example, if a young person dies in an accident involving a drunk driver, the cause of the accident is the evil choice of a person to drive while intoxicated.

Human beings, like all other living creatures, are mortal. Everything that lives eventually dies. Most often people do not die until they're quite old, but a small number of younger people die because of a serious illness or accident. After death, God offers us the beginning of a new life. We know this because Jesus promised us. We miss those who have died, but we can be sure that we will see them again.

What is a funeral home (funeral parlour)?

A funeral home offers services such as preparing for burial the bodies of those who have died, and providing a place where people can gather to visit the family of the deceased person. Most people in North America use the services of funeral homes. (Other cultures have different customs when people die.) Once the body is prepared, it is placed in a coffin and moved to a room where people can gather to begin the process of saying goodbye. Visiting the funeral home (a visitation) gives people who knew the person an opportunity to express their sympathy to the family and to share memories of the person. The people who have gathered also pray for the person and the family. A gathering before a funeral is sometimes called a wake or a prayer vigil.

What is a funeral mass?

When people die, there is almost always a special ceremony for them called a funeral. Catholics have a funeral mass or a liturgy of the word, and we pray for the person who has died and for the family members and friends of that person. Above all, a funeral is a celebration of faith. We gather together to express our faith in the promise of Jesus that death is not the end for us, and our hope in the beginning of a new life. We ask God to welcome the person who has died and to comfort those who are left behind. At the end of the funeral mass, the coffin is taken to the cemetery, where the body in the coffin is buried in the ground. Instead of burial of the body, some people wish to be cremated, which means the body is burned. In the Catholic tradition, the remaining ashes are to be buried in a cemetery.

How can you help people when they're sad because someone they love has died?

You can pray for them and for the person who died. You can spend time with them and, most of all, listen to them. Some people may not want to talk about their feelings, but that doesn't mean that they don't need good friends. You might tell the person that you are thinking about and praying for him or her, which is a way of letting the person know that you care. If you find it hard to say the right thing in person, you could write a letter.

- **Caring for the dying** — This topic includes a feature about a community chaplain who is part of the support team for people who are sick and dying. You will find this feature at the end of this theme.

- **Praying for those who have died** — At the end of this topic, the students gather for a prayer service. They were invited to record the names of those who have died (family member, other significant persons in their lives) on a small piece of paper. After the scripture reading and a prayer for the dead, the students were invited to read the names on their paper if they wished to, and to place the papers on the prayer table. You will find the scripture passage and a prayer for the dead in Grade 8 *Fully Alive Prayers*.

- **Commitment to friends** — Changing commitments in friendship is a common experience during early adolescence. As children mature, their interests change and some close childhood friendships come to an end. It can be difficult if one person wants to maintain the friendship, and the other doesn't. Parents cannot solve this problem for their children, but they can listen, offer suggestions (e.g., be honest, be tactful, try not to hurt the other person's feelings), sympathy, and reassurances.

- **Commitment to respect others** — In class, the students discussed the meaning of a commitment to respect all of the people who are part of their lives: classmates, students from other grades, neighbours, people who work in the community, and complete strangers — customers in a store, passengers on a bus, or people just walking down the street.

The influence of families is critical when it comes to the commitment to respect others. When parents provide a clear message that respect is not something that people have to earn — it is a human right and a Christian duty — they are offering their children a great gift, a gift that is the foundation of moral behaviour. This message is especially important for young people, who are often very hard on each other.

Topic 3 — Commitment to the Future

*Promises are the uniquely human way of ordering the future,
making it predictable and reliable to the extent that this is humanly possible.*

Hannah Arendt

Summary

The final topic of Theme Four explores the meaning of a commitment to the future from the perspective of the challenges that adolescents face as they grow up. This topic features a story about Jeff's troubles with the law, and a discussion of moral choices.

Main Ideas

- Unlike physical maturity, full personal maturity is an achievement. To achieve this maturity, young people must use their growing freedom wisely and accept more responsibility for themselves: see to know what is right and good so that they make thoughtful and good decisions, and keep in mind their hopes for the future.
- Moral choices are decisions concerning our thoughts, words, and actions that involve right and wrong. To make good moral choices, we have to form our conscience, to be humble in seeking the truth, to be open to guidance and develop the virtuous habits that guide us toward goodness.
- A commitment to the future for adolescents is a commitment to prepare for maturity. They do this by giving themselves to being who they are now — developing persons, students, friends, family members, and young Catholics.

Family Participation

- An important idea in this topic is that full maturity is an achievement. The students discussed this idea, and explored some of the requirements for becoming a fully mature person. These requirements include:
 - personal effort and perseverance
 - growth in knowledge of themselves
 - experiencing relationships with God and others
 - accepting guidance from the Church, parents, and others who are fully mature
 - being open to the Holy Spirit and the grace of God.

Parents have a primary role to play in assisting their young people to become thoughtful, responsible, good adults. During the stage of young adolescence, it is especially important for parents to encourage young people to make thoughtful decisions and to take on reasonable responsibilities. This stage represents the first step toward maturity, and young adolescents are still in need of monitoring, especially those who are inclined to be impulsive.

• **Jeff's story** — The students read a story about Jeff, one of the imaginary students in the Grade 8 student text. Jeff was arrested along with some other older boys for selling stolen property. You will find this story at the end of this theme, and may find it helpful to discuss it with your child

• **Moral Choices** — Jeff's story led to a discussion of moral choices. The students considered these questions: What is a moral choice? How do we learn to make moral choices? What is conscience? Why is it hard sometimes to choose what is right? You will find this material on moral choices at the end of this theme.

Parents are the first teachers of morality, and their influence is significant. They are the first people to:

- teach the importance of self-control
- explain the meaning and importance of honesty and fairness
- insist on respect towards others
- encourage sensitivity and empathy toward others
- talk about right and wrong, and awaken their child's conscience

And most important, they are the first people to communicate the message to their children that they are loved and cherished for who they are, and to introduce them to the infinite love of God.

All parents make mistakes: being unreasonable, losing their temper, blaming a child unfairly, or failing to listen. These actions, which parents regret, are also an opportunity for moral education. A sincere apology from a parent when it is warranted, followed by a hug, provides children with a model of accepting responsibility for the wrong, asking forgiveness, and finding peace through reconciliation. This is a lesson of great value for moral growth.

• **Poem** — As part of this topic, the students read a poem by Portia Nelson, “Autobiography in Five Short Chapters.” You may want to read it and discuss it with your child. The poem captures the issue of human actions, excuses for these actions, and finally a recognition of the need to change.

Theme Four Resources from the Student Text

Topic 1: The students discussed this list of happiness habits, which is based on research on what makes people happy.

Happiness Habits

- **Take pleasure in everyday moments** — Instead of hurrying through the events of each day, we need to take time to enjoy the ordinary moments of life.
- **Don’t try to keep up with other people** — Comparing ourselves to others leads to dissatisfaction. Counting our blessings is much more satisfying.
- **Value people, not money** — Trying to find happiness in money and what money can buy doesn’t work.
- **Have meaningful goals** — We all need purpose in our lives. We are happiest when we are engaged in achieving goals that matter to us.
- **Be involved in whatever you do** — Whether it’s chores, a job, or homework, if we immerse ourselves in what we are doing, it becomes more rewarding. Doing our best makes us feel good.
- **Spend time with family and friends** — Relationships with people we can depend on make a big difference in our lives and are a source of true happiness.
- **Try to have a positive outlook** — If we make it a habit to focus on everything that has gone wrong or could go wrong, we end up miserable. A better habit is to think about what went well and look forward to future possibilities.
- **Be grateful** — When we communicate how grateful we are for the good things we have, we increase our happiness. Some people keep a “gratitude journal” to remind themselves of the positive role others play in their lives.
- **Don’t hold grudges** — Grudges are heavy to carry and cause misery. Forgiveness eases this burden and brings a sense of happiness.
- **Be generous** — Giving to others, for example, volunteering, listening to a friend, donating money, or helping a neighbour contributes to happiness. Being concerned with the well-being of others has a positive effect on our lives.

Topic 2: There are two items from this topic of Theme Four. The first is the story of Elly’s death, and the second is a feature about a community chaplain who supports people who are in last stage of their lives.

Michael and Aunt Elly

Friday afternoon

When Michael got home from school, his mother was still visiting Elly in the hospice. When he heard his mom come in, he called to her. She smiled at him as she came into his room, but he could tell it wasn't a real smile.

"How's Aunt Elly today?" he asked.

"Very weak," his mother said. "But she asked about you and sent you a message."

"What did she say?"

"That she loved you and wanted you to grow up to be a good man. And there was something else. She said to tell you this was an order, not a suggestion: smell the flowers, don't be too hard on yourself, and laugh at yourself once a day."

Michael smiled. "She likes giving orders. She should have been a general."

"Your dad and I are going back again this evening, Michael. It's not going to be long and I want to be with her."

"Can I come?" Michael asked.

"Of course," his mother said. "I thought you didn't like going to the hospice."

"I don't," Michael said, "but I want to see her."

Saturday morning

Michael woke up and looked at his clock. Almost noon. He never slept that late. Why did he feel as if he hadn't slept at all?

He lay in bed thinking about last night. *Aunt Elly died last night. Mom and I were holding her hands and I said goodbye, even though I didn't want to. I wasn't scared, although I thought I would be. I wanted to tell her not to go, but I didn't. Father Rossi was there, and he said that she would always be with me and watch over me. I sure hope he's right.*

Monday

Over the weekend the family was busy making arrangements for Elly's funeral. They met with Father Rossi, the pastor, and chose the readings and the music for the mass. Father Rossi asked Michael if he wanted to be one of the readers. His parents worried that it might be too difficult for him, but to their surprise Michael said he wanted to do it. His brother Paul asked to read the intentions for the prayer of the faithful.

The family spent the afternoon and evening at the funeral home. Many friends came to visit and express their sympathy. One of Elly's childhood friends, Christine, travelled a long way to be there. She told stories about the fun they had together when they were young women, how fearless Elly was, and how easily she laughed or cried.

To Michael's surprise, Mr. Sato made a visit in the evening.

"Michael, I know from your mother how important your aunt was to you," Mr. Sato said. "I will pray for her and for your family. Keep her in your heart, Michael, and you will never lose her."

Fr. Rossi led the prayers for Elly and for her family and friends. He asked everyone there to remember Elly and her family members in their prayers and to offer support to those who are grieving.

Tuesday morning

Elly's funeral was the first one that Michael and Paul had attended. Their parents prepared them by explaining what would happen in the church and later in the cemetery.

When it was time for the funeral, the family stood in the back of the church with the coffin that held Elly's body. Michael was shaking and his dad put his arm around him. Fr. Rossi came up the aisle with the altar servers to welcome Elly and her family. The coffin was moved to the front of the church and the funeral mass began.

Michael read Psalm 23, The Lord is my Shepherd, and in his homily Fr. Rossi reflected on the words from the psalm, "I shall dwell in the house of the Lord my whole life long." He spoke of Elly's great faith in God and her lack of fear in her last weeks of life. "I know," he said, "that she would want all of you to rejoice in her life and in her release from suffering and to pray that the Lord will welcome her to the peace of his house."

• • •

"Into your hands, Father of mercies, we commend our sister Elly, in the sure and certain hope that, together with all who have died in Christ, she will rise with him on the last day."

• • •

The weeks after Elly died were difficult for Michael. Since she had been at the hospice for several months before her death, he was used to not seeing her at

home. But he would often think of something he wanted to tell her. Once he actually picked up the phone before he remembered. So he had long conversations with her in his mind and told her he was trying to do what she asked — smell flowers, tell a joke, laugh at himself. Fr. Rossi was right. She would always be with him, but what he longed for, and could not have, was to see her and hear her voice.

• • •

Grief is part of life. The only way to avoid it is by refusing to give our hearts to others, refusing to love. But a life without love is not a fully human existence. We are created for love, and both happiness and sorrow are part of life.

There is no correct way to grieve after a death. Some people keep their feelings to themselves and seldom speak of the person who died. Others express their sadness openly and want to share memories. Friends often feel that they don't know what to say to someone who is grieving. A few words like, "I am so sorry for your loss. Is there anything I can do for you?" can make a difference. But the most important thing we can do for the living and the dead is to pray. Praying for those who have died and for those who are grieving is part of our commitment as members of the body of Christ.

Susan Morgan

My name is Susan Morgan and I am a community chaplain with Saint Elizabeth Health Care. Instead of visiting patients in hospitals or men and women in prison, as most chaplains do, I spend time with people who are sick and dying in their homes.

The visiting nurses giving medical care ask me to add my support to their own when they find individuals who are isolated, afraid, depressed, anxious or discouraged. Often I am also asked to offer encouragement to family members who are trying their best under difficult circumstances to take care of their loved one. My role is to give emotional and spiritual support and religious care. When a person is very sick or approaching death, it is not only care of the body that is needed but also care of the heart and spirit.

My friends and family members sometimes ask me if I find my work sad or depressing or even frightening. I assure them that I have never been so fulfilled or happy in my work. I think this is because I have the opportunity many times each day to meet people who are vulnerable and also courageous, grateful, and wanting to receive and offer forgiveness. People facing tremendous challenges and losses are wonderful teachers. With loving attention people who are dying continue to grow and experience their dignity. They inspire me to live my own life with greater appreciation and with as much love and awareness as possible.