

Grade 4, 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. For more information for families, please go to www.occb.on.ca.

About Theme Two

Theme Two of *Fully Alive* is called "Living in Relationship." God created us 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, as well as a topic about friendship.

In Theme Two we will:

- explore the value of time together, whether enjoying an ordinary family activity or a special occasion; we will also examine some of the day-to-day signs of family love.
- read a story that explores some of the feelings children experience as a result of separation and divorce.
- learn that families have many responsibilities, and that each member has a special contribution to make.
- discover that learning to be a friend is the way to have friends.

Working together at school and at home

- Your child will be bringing home a sheet about favourite family activities, and will be asking you about yours. However hectic family life is, the well-being of families does depend on sharing time together — eating a meal, watching a movie, or playing a game.
- Your child will be bringing home a prayer for families that we will be saying in class. Your family could say it together.
- At school your child completed a sheet about his or her family responsibilities, including favourite and least favorite responsibilities. Ask your child about this.
- The students will explore the idea of friendship, and what it means to be a friend. Children are often more concerned with having friends rather than being a friend. You might ask your child about what it means to be a good friend.

Teacher: _____

Theme Two Topics

This theme about relationships is developed through five topics. The first four topics offer an opportunity to explore family relationships, and the last topic is about friendship. The students begin this theme by discussing the importance of family members being together, whether it is for a regular family activity, like a meal, or a special occasion, like a birthday. The next three topics on the family focus on day-to-day signs of love in families, the feelings of people within a family that is experiencing a difficult and unhappy change, and the need for each person in a family to contribute to fulfilling family responsibilities. The final topic on friendship invites the students to recognize that they have to learn to be a friend in order to have a friend.

Topic 1 — Families Spend Time together

A happy family life is neither a static situation nor a smooth and direct progression; it is an angular progress, the endless improvisation of love to correct that which it has created.

W. H. Vanstone *Love's Endeavour, Love's Expense*

Summary

This topic helps the students understand the value of time spent with their families. The teacher and students discuss regular and special family activities, and the many different ways in which families spend time together.

Main Ideas

- Each family has its own way of being a family and of doing things together.
- Spending time together as a family is important, whether it is a special celebration, or a day-to-day event like eating a meal together or playing a game.

Family Participation

- At school, the students completed a sheet about their favourite ordinary family activities and their special activities. You could ask your child about his or her choices. Be sure to complete the sheet with your choices of favourite family activities. You might also ask about something that your child would enjoy doing that the family has rarely or perhaps never done. The answer could be something that's not possible (a trip to

Disneyland!), but it might be something simple and easy to arrange.

- The whole family could plan an activity that involves all family members and that everyone would enjoy. This could be as simple as a trip to the park, a family card game, or a board game. Many families find that television and electronic games interfere with these kinds of family activities. You might want to plan a special family game time each week for card games, board games, or crafts that everyone can enjoy together.
- It is important for brothers and sisters to spend time together. As they get older and each has special friends, it may take a deliberate effort to see that this happens. Often, a parent's participation in an activity encourages all of the children to join in.
- Families today can find it difficult to spend time together. Between the work that parents do and the activities in which children are involved, there seems to be little opportunity to be together. Difficult as it may be to arrange, a regular evening meal together is an important way to encourage a sense of family solidarity. It is a time for family members to gather, to talk about their day, and to take some time to remember that they belong together in a very special way. It is important that the atmosphere be pleasant and positive, and that a meal together does not become a time for a scolding or other negative events.

Topic 2 — Families Show Love

*The love within the family can also serve to reveal the nature
of Our Creator and the life He offers us. If God is love,
where better to find His presence than within the circle of the family?*

Joseph and Lois Bird

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that family love is shown in many ways. The teacher and students discuss a story about Tim Casey and his family, and identify some of the signs of love in his family. You will find this story, "A Day in the Life of Tim Casey," at the end of this theme.

Main Ideas

- There are many signs of love in families. Sometimes we don't notice them because they

happen so often.

- We don't always appreciate signs of love, like being scolded or told to do our homework, but they are still important signs of love.
- Each member of the family contributes to family love.

Family Participation

- You and your child may enjoy reading the story, "A Day in the Life of Tim Casey," together, and identifying some of the signs of love.
- Each family member could talk about signs of love that happened today in your family. Be sure to tell your children how they contribute to making the family a place of love. You could mention chores that were done without complaints or reminders, or a helpful act for a sister or brother. It's good for children to understand that contributing to the family through our work is an important sign of family love.
- This topic has a connection to Topic 5 (Theme One), which is about the way our actions and words affect others. When what we do and say is unselfish and loving, we can have a wonderful effect on other people. Within the family, we can bring out the best in each other by the way we treat each other.
- No child likes to be scolded or told that homework comes before playing a game or watching television. As they get older, children do recognize that these are signs of love, however unwanted. It is easier for them to see the need for rules and discipline when parents make an effort to notice and compliment them on the occasions when no reminders are needed or when their behaviour has been especially cooperative and helpful.
- At the end of this topic, the students read a list of examples of family love. This list, "Family Love is . . ." can be found at the end of this theme.

Topic 3 — A Difficult Time for the Family

None knows the weight of another's burden.

George Herbert

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that when people have a difficult and unhappy change in their family, they have a special need for support and friendship from others. The teacher and students discuss a story about a friend of Beatriz Perez, Andrea, whose parents are separating. They talk about how Beatriz can be a good friend to Andrea, and what they can do when people they know are upset and unhappy.

Main Ideas

- All families change, but there are some changes that are very difficult for the whole family: being out of work, a serious illness, or a death in the family.
- Another difficult change is the separation of parents. When this happens, it is hard for every member of the family.
- It is important to be aware of people's feelings and to try to be a good friend to those whose parents have recently separated or who have had other difficult family changes.

Family Participation

- This topic touches on the sensitive issue of the separation of parents. The end of a marriage, which begins in love and the desire to honour the promises that are made, is always a source of pain for both the adults and children involved. The purpose of the topic is not to discuss the moral implications of separation and divorce, but to help all of the students understand a little bit more about the feelings of children involved in this situation.
- You and your child may want to read together the story, "Beatriz and Andrea," which is at the end of this theme. If your child has a friend who has had a difficult change in the family, you could refer to this situation. If there has been a separation in your family, or another major and difficult change, this topic may provide an opportunity for you and your child to talk about the change and the feelings that are involved. You should be aware that children often feel guilty when their parents separate or when there are other

unhappy changes in the family involving parents. It's important to reassure children that they are not responsible for adult difficulties.

- The main purpose of this topic is to help the students understand the need for friends who are patient and understanding when people are in the middle of very difficult situations. You might remind your child of what she or he has learned in earlier topics. Part of growing up is becoming more aware of and sensitive to other people's feelings.
- At the end of this topic, the students said a prayer for families. You will find "A Prayer for Families" in Prayers: Grade 4. Your family could say this prayer together.
- It is not uncommon for children to ask if their parents will ever get a divorce. Since children are much more aware of divorce than they were in the past, it is a natural concern. Even in the least troubled families, children may ask because they are aware that a friend's parents have separated. But especially when parents have a disagreement or argument, children can think that this means that their parents will separate. They need to be reassured that people can disagree or even be very angry at each other, but still find a way to settle their differences and forgive each other.
- You may find that this topic raises a number of other questions about separation and divorce. Here are some of the questions that children this age often ask and some suggested answers that you may find helpful.

- **What is a separation?**

Sometimes parents make a very serious decision not to live together any more. They decide to separate and live apart. This is a difficult decision, and it affects all of the family members.

- **If people are separated, do they get divorced?**

After people are separated for a while, they sometimes get a divorce. But sometimes they may decide to live together again.

- **Why do parents stop loving each other?**

Everybody has difficulty being loving sometimes. People aren't perfect; they make mistakes and they fail. We all need God's help to be loving people. When people live together and can't get along with each other and find a way to settle their differences, it's a very unhappy situation. After a while, it seems as if all the love they had for each other is gone. But in one way, no matter what happens, the love is never really

gone. Children are a sign of the love parents had for each other. And even when parents no longer live together, they continue to love their children.

• Do parents sometimes separate because of something their children did that made them unhappy or made life difficult for them?

Children sometimes believe this, but it's not true. When parents separate, it is for reasons between them, not because of anything children did or didn't do. It is very difficult for children to understand grown-up problems, which is why they sometimes feel guilty. They think they must be the problem that caused their parents to separate. Children aren't the problem, and they shouldn't feel guilty.

• If you pray really hard, will God make your parents get back together again?

God doesn't *make* us do things. God created us to be free. We are responsible for what we do. But parents always need our prayers, especially if they are having difficulties. We can ask God to guide them, and help them do what is right.

Topic 4 — We Share Responsibilities

*To maintain a joyful family requires much from both the parents and the children.
Each member of the family has to become, in a special way,
the servant of the others and share their burdens.*

Pope John Paul II

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that successful family life requires co-operation and assistance from every family member. The teacher and students discuss the meaning of responsibility, identify responsibilities that all families have, and consider the importance of the contribution of each family member.

Main Ideas

- A responsibility is something that you are expected to do.
- Being a family member means sharing responsibilities. Each person has a contribution to make.
- Sometimes a change in the family, like a new job or an illness, means new responsibilities for everyone.

Family Participation

- At school the students completed a sheet about their regular family responsibilities, including the one they like best and the one they like least. You might ask your child how he or she responded.
- It's a good idea to explain to your child that each family divides up responsibilities in its own way. What is important is that each person contributes and does some of the jobs that help the family run smoothly. When parents approach the work they do for the family in a cheerful way, they provide a wonderful model for their children.
- In some families children receive a weekly allowance. Most parents believe that this small amount of money should not be considered payment for doing regular family chores. Their reason is that regular family jobs are part of the child's normal responsibilities, and not something for which she or he should be paid. For a special, big job, however, you might want to give your child a small payment or present to show your appreciation.
- Children should be encouraged to recognize that family responsibilities are not just housekeeping chores. For example, spending time playing with a younger brother or sister, or helping a younger sibling with homework is also a family responsibility. It is important for older children to feel a sense of responsibility toward the younger children in the family. In this way both younger and older children have the opportunity to experience a sense of pride and pleasure in their growth together.
- Be sure to let your child know that you depend on his or her help. Taking on more family responsibilities and becoming more aware of special circumstances that require extra help is part of growing up. Accepting responsibility for some of the work of the family is an important way for children to learn that they are capable people. Just as children need to be loved, they also need opportunities to be of service to the people they love.

Topic 5 — Making Friends

There is nothing so precious as a faithful friend.

Sirach 6:15

Summary

This topic helps the students understand that there are both positive and negative ways of making friends. The teacher and students discuss some of the different ways people their age often behave with others, and how these behaviours affect friendships.

Main Ideas

- Everyone wants to have friends. That is the way God made us.
- To have friends, you have to be a good friend. Good friends are people who are fun to be with, loyal, and open to others.
- Good friends don't try to own people, talk behind their backs, or tease them in a mean way.

Family Participation

- At school, the students discussed scenes of friendship in their books that illustrated some problems people may have with friends. At the end of the topic, each student chose one of the people in the scenes, and wrote a letter, giving advice on what the person could do to be a better friend. You might ask about this letter. What was your child's advice?
- If the opportunity comes up, you might ask your child to imagine a perfect friend. What would that person be like? This may lead you into a deeper discussion of friendship. At school, the children have been learning that to have a friend, you have to be a friend. You might ask your child what this means. This is particularly important to discuss if your child is having difficulty making friends. You could talk about being a friend and how a real friend acts. You might also encourage your child to look around and see if there aren't other children in the classroom who need a friend.
- Children enjoy talking about their friends. You might ask about some of your child's friendships. Why does your child enjoy being with certain people? Why do these friends enjoy being with him or her?
- Most children have the experience of being excluded by a group of children who have formed a team or club. There is a great deal of interest in such groups at this age. Often, it

seems that the purpose of these groups is to include some people and exclude others. Sometimes, children discover that they can solve this problem by starting their own clubs, from which they then exclude certain people. Generally, children work out these situations for themselves, but it's a good idea to find an opportunity to talk about the experience of including and excluding people from activities. Children need to be encouraged to include others and to be reminded about the way they feel when they are excluded from an activity or group.

- Children learn a lot about friendship from the way their parents act with their friends. It's good to let your child know how important your friendships are to you.
- Many parents find that family activities like card games or board games are a good opportunity for children to learn about compromising, winning, losing, taking turns, deciding who goes first, and playing fairly. When parents participate they provide an example for the children of how to play fairly, and win or lose gracefully. By contrast, electronic games offer less opportunity for group interaction and learning to participate in a social activity.

Theme Two Stories and Poems

Topic 2: The teacher and students read this story about signs of love in Tim's family. They also read and discussed a list of examples of family love.

A Day in the Life of Tim Casey

Tim got up late and couldn't find his shoes. His dad told him to look under his bed. There they were! Then his mom said that he could have a ride to school if he hurried.

By the time Tim ran out the door, his mom was already in the car. He was in such a rush that he forgot his math book, his math homework, and his lunch. His mom told him to check his backpack again, but he couldn't find them.

"I'm sorry, Tim," his mom said. "We have to go now or I'm going to be late for work."

“But, Mom, my teacher will be really mad, and I’ll starve without lunch!”

“My lunch is in my bag,” his mom said. “Take half my sandwich and the apple. Okay?”

“Okay,” Tim muttered.

When Mrs. Casey dropped Tim off at school, she said, “Come right home after school. I finish work at four today, and we need to get you a new winter jacket.”

Tim rushed into school. Everything went fine until it came time for math. No book. Tim promised he would bring it the next day. His teacher said he had better stay after school and do the math homework he forgot.

Tim ran all the way home. He knew it was too late to buy a jacket. When he got inside he found a very annoyed mother. Tim tried to tell her why he was late, but she wouldn’t listen. So he went to his room and sat on his bed.

His brother Frank looked in and asked, “What’s the matter?”

Tim told him what had happened. Then later his mom came and sat beside him. She said she was sorry for not listening and Tim said he was sorry too. They agreed he would call her the next time he was going to be so late.

Tim felt better, and joined his mom and dad and Frank in the kitchen. Frank was helping his mother make dinner, and Mr. Casey chatted with Tim. He suggested Tim put his math book in his bag as soon as he finished his homework.

After dinner, Tim and his dad cleaned up the kitchen. Then Tim went into the living room to watch television with Frank.

“Homework?” his dad said, pointing at Tim’s knapsack.

Tim groaned. “How come Frank can watch? He probably has a lot more work than I do.”

“Frank’s seventeen, you’re nine,” his dad answered. “It’s up to Frank to figure out when he’s going to do his work.”

“I can’t wait be seventeen,” Tim said.

Tim didn’t have a lot of homework, but one math problem gave him trouble, so he asked his mom for help. She was the best math person in the family.

When he went into the kitchen to get a snack before bed, he noticed a new sign on the refrigerator. It said, “TIM — LUNCH!!!”

Then it was bedtime. Tim gave his mom and dad a hug and went to his room. Frank was in his room doing homework, but he took a break to play a quick game of checkers with Tim. When Mrs. Casey came to say good-night, Tim was still getting ready for bed.”

“I’m hurrying,” he said.

“I hope so,” she answered, but she smiled. “You need to get to bed. Don’t forget your prayers. Good-night, Tim.”

* * * * *

Family Love is . . .

making meals, cleaning, and doing laundry.
remembering that clothes don’t belong on the floor.
having fun together.
confiding in each other.
listening to each other.
keeping promises.
depending on each other.
forgiveness when we disappoint each other.
rules that help us learn to be good people.
reminders about the things we always seem to forget.
trying to be helpful to each other.
saying, “I’m sorry.”

praying for each other.
hugs, and kisses, and saying "I love you."

* * * * *

Topic 3: The teacher and students read this story about Beatriz Perez and her friend Andrea.

Beatriz and Andrea

One Sunday evening, Beatriz closed her books. "I've finished my homework," she said.

"So have I," her mother said, as she folded the last piece of laundry. She looked at Beatriz. "You're quiet tonight," she said. "Did you and Andrea have a fight today?"

"No-o-o," Beatriz answered, "but she told me something. Her dad isn't going to live with them anymore."

"Her parents are separating? That's very sad. Why didn't you tell me when you came home?"

"It made me feel bad," Beatriz said. "And Andrea's mad at me all the time, and I didn't do anything."

Mrs. Perez put her hand on Beatriz's arm. "Do you remember how you felt when Papa died? That's how Andrea is feeling. She's sad and scared and angry, but not at you."

Beatriz listened to what her mother was saying. She remembered how she felt when her father died. She was so sad and missed him so much.

"Why do they have to separate?" Beatriz asked. "Don't they love each other any more?"

"I don't know what went wrong," Mrs. Perez answered. "Only God knows what is deep in our hearts. But I know that everyone in Andrea's family must be very upset."

Beatriz sighed. "I wish it weren't happening," she said.

"I do too," Mrs. Perez said. "But I know that Andrea's parents love her and her brother very much, and they want to do the best they can for their children. Even if they don't live together, they are still Andrea's parents."

"What can I do?" Beatriz asked.

"You can try to be a very good friend to Andrea. If you think about how she's feeling, it will help you to be patient. And we can both pray for Andrea and her family."

"I will," Beatriz said. "And I'll ask Papa to look after them."

Mrs. Perez smiled. "That's a good idea," she said.

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