

Deciding as a Christian



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To my wife, Betty, my most faithful supporter and a wonderful first-draft editor



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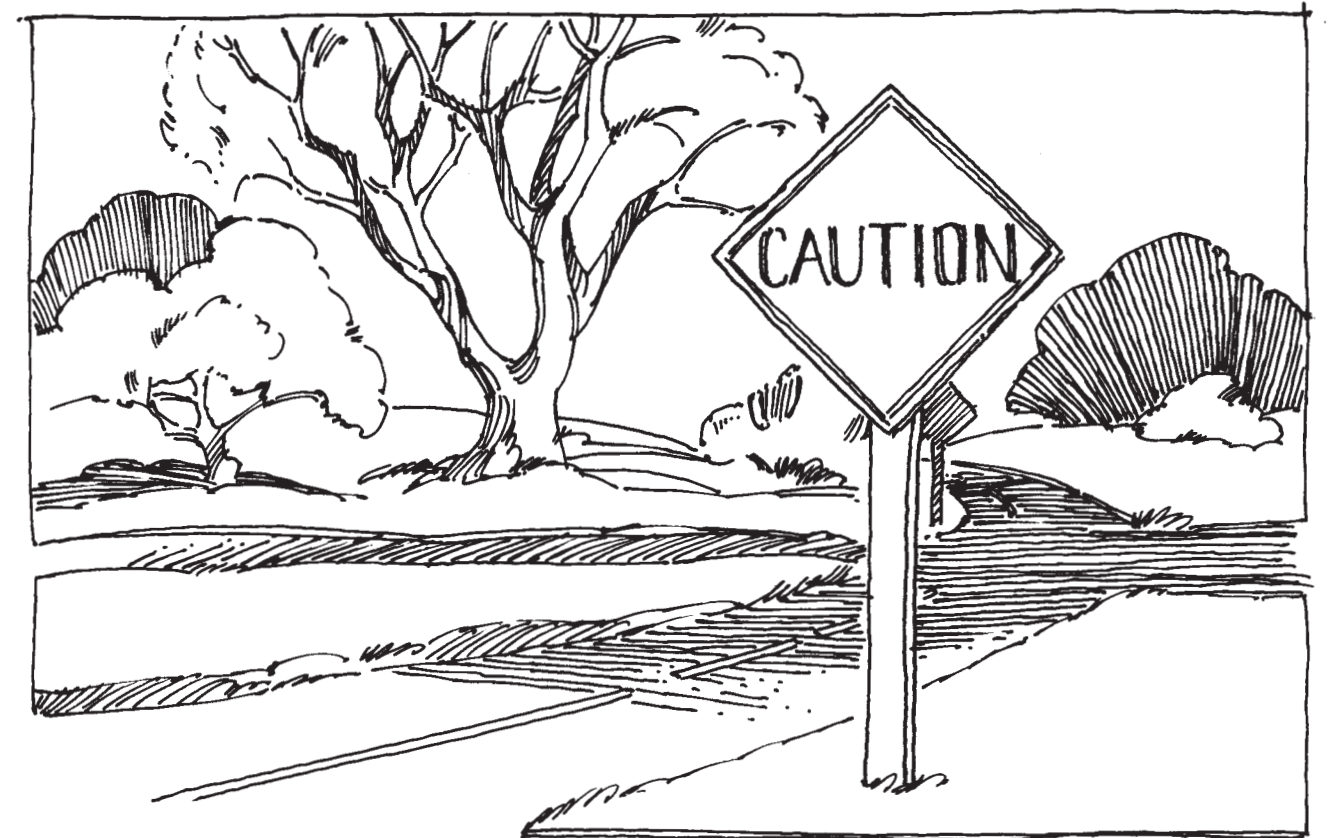
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Introduction



An Overview of This Course

The challenge of making good moral decisions has never been greater than it is today. At one time family, local community, church, and society presented a united front in answering many moral questions. Now this is no longer true. When wrestling with moral questions, we are presented with many different options from many different voices. Making moral decisions based on our faith, using deliberate and careful reflection, is a critical skill that we all need.

Deciding as a Christian allows young people to apply their moral decision-making skills to moral situations they are likely to encounter or may be cu-

rious about. As part of the process, it presents the Christian faith response to these situations, based on the Catholic understanding of the Scriptures and on our church's moral teachings.

Deciding as a Christian assumes that participants have completed the core course *Called to Live the Gospel*. It builds upon the material in the core course by allowing additional opportunities to explore moral situations and issues. Like the other minicourses in the Horizons Program, *Deciding as a Christian* is designed to be presented in three 2-hour sessions with a group of about ten participants. If the number of young people in your group differs considerably from that, you may have to make minor adjustments in the session plans. If you need assistance with this task, consult your program coordinator.

In the first session, “Looking at Moral Issues,” the moral decision-making process is reviewed. Then the participants choose from among eight prepared case studies on moral situations. They apply the moral decision-making process to these case studies, first in pairs, then as part of a larger group. Finally, they compare their understanding of the Catholic faith response for these situations to a sample response.

The second session is entitled “Responding to Moral Situations.” In this session a “moral guide” is introduced. You recruit this person in advance. During the session the teens develop moral situations they have chosen themselves. Teams of two or three participants work each on a different moral situation. The teams are asked to make their situation as real as possible, stopping at the point of decision, and then present it to the rest of the group. After each team presentation, the whole group discusses the options available. Then the moral guide presents the Catholic faith response, drawing from the Scriptures and Catholic teaching. At the end of the session, the teams have an opportunity to create an ending for their moral situation and to pray for people who find themselves in this type of situation.

The third session, “Living Morally,” is an examination of what inspires us to live out good moral decisions. The session begins with a look at how the moral decision-making process can be used in daily life. Then a story is told, which leads into a discussion and presentation on the ultimate motivation for living as moral people. Following this the young people are challenged to make a commitment to living morally through a personal moral manifesto. Drawing from the participants’ manifestos, a set of beatitudes that represent the group’s beliefs is also created. The closing prayer service is an affirmation of each participant’s gifts for living the moral life.

The moral situations in this minicourse were chosen with great care. A conscious choice was made to avoid building each session around a specific moral issue—three such sessions would not have allowed us to do justice to the wide range of moral issues that confront people today. Instead the structure of this course allows the young people to help choose the issues that most concern and interest them. Indeed the case studies for the first session were chosen and prepared in consultation with groups of young people, based on their interests.

Other minicourses in the Horizons Program relate to moral issues. In fact all the courses have implicit moral content. In one sense the entire program is a “course in morality,” because its ultimate goal is to

help form Catholics who are committed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In particular Horizons’ courses on sexuality, dating and love, media, peacemaking, justice, living the Christian life, and Christian lifestyles deal with specific moral issues. You might rest a little more easily if you understand that other courses besides *Deciding as a Christian* address some of the wide variety of moral concerns in today’s world.

In 1995 the Catholic bishops of the United States issued *A Message to Youth*. In it they made this encouraging statement to young people:

You can make a difference *now* and some of you already do—at home, in school, with your friends and at after-school jobs. You can do this by treating all people justly and with respect; by being a voice for the voiceless, especially the unborn; by being a peaceful person in your language and actions; by sharing your time, talent, and money with your family and those in need; by being a friend to those who are lonely or shunned; by being a healer and reconciler when conflicts arise; by helping friends do the right thing; and by valuing people who are different from you. (National Conference of Catholic Bishops)

This is what *Deciding as a Christian* is all about: helping young people see the many choices in their life as opportunities to live the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Background for This Course

The Adolescent and This Course

The following paragraph from the introduction of *Called to Live the Gospel* summarizes our experience of young people, which undergirds both courses:

In a sense, morality is an easy topic to tackle with adolescents. Any discussion of morality—as long as it is a true discussion and not a lecture—usually piques the interest of young people. Perhaps it is because they are subconsciously aware of the fundamental importance of moral questions. Perhaps it is because they are desperate for answers. Perhaps it is because they are simply confused by the variety of moralities that seem to coexist, though not peacefully, in their world. Perhaps it is because they are at an age where

the challenges of thought take on a new dimension, and they are eager to try out their new-found skills. More likely it is some combination of the above “perhapses” as well as many others. (Kielbasa, p. 9)

We wrote *Deciding as a Christian* with the following presumptions in mind about the young people you will lead through the course. Some of these presumptions were also considered in preparing the core course *Called to Live the Gospel* (p. 9).

They want to be good. We were created by God to be good, and it is a natural human desire to pursue goodness. Because we were also created with a free will, we sometimes get in our own way. Young people need to hear about ways to live “the good life”—that is, a life rooted in the Gospel—and get to know adults who model that lifestyle.

They want to live life fully. Adolescents are no different from adults or children in that they want to get the most out of life. However, the young people in your group—like all of us—are occasionally misguided about what will make them truly happy.

They are able to engage in meaningful discussion. If your parish is offering the Horizons curriculum in its logical sequence, your group will primarily consist of tenth graders. *Deciding as a Christian* was written with second-semester sophomores in mind. The learning strategies, reflections, and discussion activities are appropriate for someone with a tenth-grade maturity level.

However, defining specifically what a tenth-grade maturity level looks like is difficult. Adolescence is an exciting and critical stage in human development from all perspectives: intellectual, spiritual, emotional, moral, and physical. Not all adolescents navigate the changes at the same speed. Development in adolescent boys generally lags behind that in girls of the same age. The difference may be particularly pronounced in the tenth grade. The lag is temporary, however; by the eleventh and twelfth grades, the gap is closed.

Also, young people at this age are beginning to develop personality styles that will characterize them throughout life. Some of the teens in your group will be strong extroverts. They may be eager to talk about moral questions out loud—as long as group peer pressure does not inhibit them—in order to clarify their understanding and point of view.

Others will be introverts who need quiet and space to clarify, inside themselves, what they think and believe. You will need to balance active discussion and quiet reflection in a way that respects the needs of all the members of your group.

They want to live high ideals. Young people have an innate attraction to what is noble, what is beautiful, what is courageous. Too often contemporary society shortchanges them by presenting them with mediocrity rather than the challenge of what is truly great. They will respond to the greatness and nobility of Gospel values if these are presented without apology and with enthusiasm.

In fact some young people are so attached to their ideals that they temporarily become morally scrupulous. They have no room and no compassion for people with different values or people who fail to live out their ideals. These rigid young people can make group discussion difficult as they shoot down anyone with an opinion different from their own. Great patience will be needed with these individuals in your group!

On the other hand, some young people are already aware of their own failings in living out their ideals. Tragically some of your group members may have already given up their idealism. These young people may have little experience of living in a nurturing or supportive environment. They must be encouraged to trust in God’s mercy and forgiveness. You must remind them that true discipleship is a series of small steps and new beginnings.

They will question and challenge. An important developmental task for young people this age is to try out new ideas and question the principles and values with which they have been raised. Sometimes their questions may imply that they are losing their faith or doubting a basic Christian moral principle. You should not be threatened by such questions. You should even welcome them as a sign that the young people’s faith is alive and growing! Assure the young people that these questions are important ones to wrestle with and, at the same time, clearly and positively explain the Catholic position.

The Theology of This Course

Catholic moral theology has a rich tradition. Some of this theology is philosophical, academic, and technical. Some of it is the cause of much debate. In our media world, which thrives on controversy, you may sometimes get the impression that Catholics today agree about little having to do with morality. The truth is that the vast bulk of Catholic moral teaching is agreed upon and lived faithfully—at least by Catholics whose faith is central in their life. This is an important thing to remember and to pass on to the young people in your group.

The depth of Catholic moral theology is far too great to be explored in an introductory essay. You may wish to expand your knowledge of it by reading some of the materials listed in the Suggested Resources section at the end of this introduction. In particular part 3 of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* deals with morality and was written as a resource for people in catechetical ministry.

Some of the moral principles that guided the development of this minicourse are the following:

We must reclaim the true meaning of love. For all its complexity, the moral life has a quite simple essence: The measure of the moral life is love. All the teachings of Jesus were summed up in one great commandment: “Love one another as I have loved you” (John 15:12). For this reason one of the key questions asked in the moral decision-making process is What does love look like in this situation?

If you feel a little hesitant using love as the standard for making moral decisions, you are not alone. Today the common understanding has reduced love to a personal, and often romantic, feeling. Love is viewed as the answer to the question, What would make me feel good right now? It is not seen as involving the mind or will, long-term consequences, or a connection to the community one is a part of.

This was not so in Jesus’ time. The Greek language in which the Christian Testament was written had three distinct words for love. One was *philia*, which is fraternal love, the love that people share in friendship. Another was *eros*, or erotic love. These are important kinds of love in their proper place. But the writers of the Gospels used neither of these words when Jesus talked about love. The word they used then was *agape*, which is unconditional love for another. It is a love that does not count the costs of loving. It is a love that turns the other cheek (see Matt. 5:39), that conquers evil with good (see Rom. 12:21), that encompasses your enemies

(see Matt. 5:44). Jesus described agape when he said, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13).

We must help our young people reclaim an understanding of love as agape. Then when we say that love is the measure of the moral life, what we mean will be clear. They will understand that Christian morality involves the head, heart, and will; that Christian morality looks to the good of others over what is pleasurable for me; that Christian morality is challenging and courageous as well as compassionate and understanding.

God’s revelation is paramount to the Christian community. God’s revelation in the Scriptures does not contain a blueprint for all our moral decisions today. The moral situations we face now could not have been conceived of in biblical times. But this does not leave us without direction. The vision and values of Jesus in the Scriptures continue to give direction to our Christian faith response. We must look at our moral situations through the lens of Jesus’ vision and values as we make our moral decisions today.

There is a great danger, though, in relying on our own interpretation of what Jesus’ vision and values call us to do. We are too easily blinded by our own biases. Scripture scholars and theologians point out the importance the community of believers has always played in understanding and interpreting God’s ongoing revelation. Ultimately we are saved as part of a community, not as isolated individuals.

As Catholics we believe that God’s revelation in Christ is passed on in the Scriptures and in Tradition, lived in the ongoing experience of the Christian community, and articulated through the hierarchy of the church and the successors of Peter. We rely on the Holy Spirit to guide the community and bring us to salvation. We do not rely only on our own wisdom or on the wisdom of a close-knit circle of friends. As our young people strive to know the truth, we must help them see the importance of an ongoing understanding of God’s revelation, which comes to us through the community of the faithful and is taught by the leadership of the church.

We must recognize the preferential option for the poor. As American Catholics we may find it difficult to accept the teaching that we should show preferential love for those who are needy and outcast. We have been told that you get what you are willing to work for. We like to think that all people start with a level playing field. If things do not

Teaching This Course

A Video Resource for Teachers

The information presented in this section identifies the elements requiring special consideration when leading *Deciding as a Christian*. The creators of Horizons developed an informative video to prepare teachers to lead any of the courses in the program. The video is accompanied by a guide that summarizes the content of the tape, offers additional tips for teaching adolescents, and invites the teacher to track her or his experience with the program.

Both the video for teachers and its companion guide are included in the resources developed for coordinators of the Horizons Program. Contact the program coordinator in your parish for further information.

Preparing Yourself

Many catechists and youth ministers feel that they are not adequately prepared to discuss morality. The combination of the importance of the subject, their own personal sinfulness, and the seeming complexity of the church’s moral teaching makes this seem like a topic for the “expert.” If you feel like this, take heart! Humility is the beginning of wisdom. You probably know more than you give yourself credit for. The development of Catholic moral teaching can be very complex, but our responses to specific questions are easy to find and are built on consistent principles. If you are familiar with the theological content of this course and of the core course *Called to Live the Gospel*, and have access to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, you will be able to deal with most of the questions that come your way. Your parish staff are also resources to help you better understand and teach the church’s moral wisdom.

Preparing the Learning Environment

The effectiveness of a course such as *Deciding as a Christian* depends, in part, on the physical surroundings of and community climate among the members of the group. Young high school students are likely to respond more positively if the space is comfortable and somewhat different from a typical school setting and the atmosphere is conducive to sharing. Here are two suggestions for creating that type of environment:

turn out well for someone, that person must have messed up somewhere along the way.

Yet, this is not Jesus’ vision. He welcomes lepers. He calls the poor blessed. He tells the rich man he will suffer in torment because he ignored the beggar, Lazarus, at his doorstep. In our time many prophetic voices and leaders in the church have challenged us to make this vision of Jesus’ our own. As we struggle with it, so will our young people.

This Course and Evangelization

In *The Challenge of Catholic Youth Evangelization*, evangelization is described as “the initial effort by the faith community as a whole to proclaim through word and witness the Good News of the Gospel to those who have not yet heard or seen it, and then to invite those persons into a relationship with Jesus Christ and the community of believers” (National Federation for Catholic Youth Ministry, p. 3). Evangelization is also the ongoing witness of the community of believers and, as such, the basis and energizing core of all the ministries in the church.

The Horizons Program is grounded in a commitment to evangelize young people effectively. Each course reflects that commitment in both content and methodology. All the courses, even those on topics that do not appear overtly “religious,” explore the connection between the lived experience of the young person and Jesus’ proclamation of the Good News. All the courses employ strategies that actively engage the whole person, demonstrating that religious education can be not only informative but life-giving and even fun! In other words the Horizons Program tries to *be* “good news” not just proclaim the Good News.

Each session in this course applies the wisdom teaching of the Catholic church to specific moral situations. We hope that youth will accept the values presented in these sessions and make them their own. We cannot hope in these few sessions to change the values of the young people completely or to have the young people adopt totally new values. But we can and do hope that this exposure to the moral wisdom of the Catholic community will affirm participants who already hold the values addressed and will plant a seed of change in the heart of participants who do not. Our role as Catholic educators is to witness to our own values and the values of the Catholic community. We make the offer; the young people make the decision.

Create a good physical atmosphere. You will need a physically comfortable space with sufficient room for the participants to move around. Some sessions require the participants to spend reflection time alone. It will be easier for them to resist the temptation to visit with other participants if they have enough room to separate from one another. Comfortable furniture and living-room lighting will help create a homey feeling. A flip chart or an easel with a pad of newsprint will be helpful for many of the activities. The traditional classroom is the least desirable situation. If such a room is your only option, try using music, candles, icons, or other sensory devices to create a more inviting environment.

Clarify expectations. At the beginning of the course, establish among the participants an atmosphere of mutual respect. Stress the importance of listening to one another and of refraining from hurtful remarks, judgments, or put-downs. When necessary remind the participants of these rules. Connect these expectations to the course by emphasizing that respect for others is a critical element in living a moral life.

Preparing the Material

Before each session read through the session plan and try to picture the processes happening in your group. You may need to make some adjustments based on your knowledge of the participants and the physical setting. Some of the activities require preparation. This could range from copying a simple list onto newsprint to creating game pieces or finding pictures. Allow yourself adequate time to get ready.

All the sessions for this course include brief periods of teacher input. Some of these presentations are informational, but most are intended to bring closure to a part of the session so that the participants might understand the connections between life and faith, between themselves and God. The session plans offer guidelines for these brief talks. Spend time putting these presentations together so that they are clear and hold the attention of the participants. Where it is helpful and appropriate, do not be afraid to share parts of your own story with the young people.

Sharing Your Own Story

Every course in Horizons connects elements of the Christian faith with the life experiences of young people. As an adult you have much to share from your own life that will be of value to the young people. Your willingness to share your experiences will enrich this course. It will also send the message that telling one's personal story in the group is okay. When you share your experiences with the young people, you show that you trust them enough to speak from your heart. And without saying it you also invite them to do the same.

Some commonsense guidelines can help you share your story in a way that adds to the understanding of the participants but does not distract them from their own life story:

- Be brief and to the point. Remember, the young people are there to reflect on their own life story, not yours.
- Talk about your experiences as a teenager without preaching or moving into the fatal "When I was your age . . ." mode.
- Share only the things that young adolescents are emotionally prepared to handle.
- Be realistic. Talk about your struggles, triumphs, and growth over the years. This will let the participants know that self-knowledge is indeed a process. Do not mislead them into thinking that adults have all the answers. It is also unfair to suggest or imply that adolescents have no answers.
- Be honest and sincere. The young people will see through you if you are not, and your effectiveness as a teacher will be diminished.

Using Journals

Keeping a journal, or simply writing an occasional journal exercise, is a good way for young people to internalize learning, record the events of their life, keep track of feelings, or explore a topic further. Most of the courses in the Horizons Program offer suggestions for including an optional journal component. Because of the amount of reflection material in its sessions, *Deciding as a Christian* does not.

You may, for good reasons, decide to offer a journal-keeping component in this minicourse. If you do, consult the program coordinator and the teachers of other courses, and consider the following options:

- Substitute journal-writing time at the beginning of each session in place of the opening activity.

- Build a time for journal writing into the closing prayer of each session. This time could be used for a reflection based on the suggested Scripture passage.
- Assign journal writing as a take-home activity between the sessions.
- Assign these journal questions each week: What moral issues have I faced in the past week? How did I respond to them? Have I made a moral decision that makes me feel uncomfortable or confused? If so, why do I feel that way?

Using the Bible

The Scriptures are used throughout *Deciding as a Christian* as a primary source for the vision and values of Jesus. Other courses in the Horizons Program have already introduced Bible skills. This course contains no actual Scripture search activities. However, you may want to ask participants to look up passages that are referred to in the sessions, for practice.

Care has been taken to avoid using the Bible as a "proof-text" in *Deciding as a Christian*. Using the Bible as a proof-text means inferring from it a specific answer to an issue or question without regard for (a) the historical context of the particular passage referenced, and (b) the Christian community's interpretation of that passage, particularly as mediated through the leadership of the church. We must also take care not to use the Bible as a proof-text when applying the Scriptures to contemporary moral concerns.

Using Music

Some of the activities in *Deciding as a Christian* suggest using music. No activities in this course *require* music or suggest specific pieces of music, because cultural preferences and individual tastes differ and specific tapes, CDs, or needed equipment may not be available. But music is a central part of the world of most adolescents, and you are thus encouraged to use it in the suggested places as well as in other activities where you think that it might be appropriate. The circumstances in which music can be used effectively include the following:

Popular music for prayer. Depending on the character of the group, the community environment, or even the area of the country, different types of music will be popular among young peo-

ple. If you are not certain about what might work in activities for your group, ask a few young people for their advice; ask them well in advance of the session, so that they can listen for songs that will be useful. Besides helping you, this experience can be affirming for young people, who are usually thought of as learners and are not usually consulted for their expertise.

You might even consider forming a music advisory group of class participants, whose job is to listen to popular music and point out some things that pertain to your topic. Each week this group of young people can suggest to the rest of the participants selections that can be used for prayer—and also for reflection or as a starting point for journal writing.

Background music for reflection. Some groups are easily distracted by the sounds around them. If your group has a hard time concentrating in silence, consider using background music to help the participants focus. Even for those who do not have trouble concentrating, music can alter the mood and contribute to a sense of peace and inner silence. For background music use slow, soothing instrumental selections, preferably something that is unrecognizable to the group. Labels such as Windham Hill and Narada, which are known for their alternative adult-contemporary recordings, are particularly useful for this purpose. Some classical music can also help to create the type of environment you need. Or use recordings of natural sounds, such as those produced by an ocean surf, rain forests, or running streams.

Contemporary Christian music for discussion starter or prayer. Contemporary Christian music is produced by Christian artists and comes in styles for all tastes: rock, hard rock, country, alternative, rap, and easy listening. By using contemporary Christian music, you expose young people to an inspirational spiritual message in a form to which they may easily relate.

If you are familiar with contemporary Christian music, you probably can think of songs to introduce a discussion or to enhance a prayer service. If you are not familiar with contemporary Christian music, ask the young people in your group to help choose appropriate songs. Or visit a Christian bookstore. Many of them have an extensive music collection and a previewing area. Often their sales staff can point you in the right direction if you tell them what you are looking for.

Using This Course as a Retreat

Using *Deciding as a Christian* as an overnight retreat is an appropriate alternative to offering it in three weekly sessions. The material covered and the variety of activities lend themselves well to a retreat format. In addition you can enjoy the following advantages:

- The added time will allow the young people to become immersed in the topic of exploring moral issues. You can present more of the case studies and alternatives suggested in each session plan, and you can allow for more input from the moral guide and more group discussion on the moral situations in session 2.
- You will have the opportunity to view and discuss a video profiling a person, past or present, who is a witness to courageous moral decision making.
- You can arrange for the celebration of sacramental reconciliation or the Eucharist, or both. Done creatively, sacramental celebrations can be powerful reminders of the communal nature of our moral life, and of our need for God's mercy.

If you would like to offer *Deciding as a Christian* as an overnight retreat, consult your program coordinator. If you are not familiar with retreat planning, ask someone who has experience in retreats to help you adapt the course material. An overall schedule might look like this:

Day 1 (evening)

Icebreakers

Session 1: "Looking at Moral Issues"

Sacrament of reconciliation or evening prayer
Video

Day 2 (morning)

Morning prayer

Session 2: "Responding to Moral Situations"

Day 2 (afternoon)

Free time

Session 3: "Living Morally"

Eucharistic celebration

Special Preparation Needs

The most important preparation for this course is to recruit a person to be your moral guide for session 2. The role of the moral guide is to provide the Catholic faith response to moral situations the young people develop and present. If at all possible, the moral guide should be someone other than yourself.

Look for someone who is very familiar with the moral teachings of the Scriptures and the church and who is comfortable with and relates well to young people. The following people are all possibilities:

- the pastor or pastoral coordinator of your parish
- the parochial vicar of your parish
- the director or coordinator of religious education for your parish
- the program coordinator for your parish
- the coordinator of youth ministry for your parish
- other professional staff members at your parish
- any of the above from a neighboring parish
- a deacon
- an experienced catechist with advanced training in morality
- a theology teacher from a Catholic high school or college
- a diocesan staff member

You probably want to start your recruitment effort a month or more before the minicourse begins, because of these people's busy calendars—the earlier the better in most cases.

When someone has accepted your invitation to be your moral guide, give her or him a copy of resource 2–A, "Suggestions for the Moral Guide," to look over. Discuss whether the person will be comfortable not knowing the issues before arriving for the session, or will need advance notice of what issues will be covered. Encourage the moral guide to prepare to discuss a variety of issues rather than only specific ones selected in advance, so that you can allow the young people maximum flexibility in choosing situations to develop.

If you are unable to recruit someone else, you will have to be the moral guide for this course. You can do this with careful preparation. As soon as possible after session 1, choose four or five moral situations to develop. Try to select from the situations brainstormed at the first session but also use your own knowledge of what is affecting the youth in your community. Then read resource 2–A for an overview of your role and responsibilities, paying

particular attention to the steps for preparing responses. Do not be afraid to ask members of your parish staff for help!

In addition to recruiting a moral guide or preparing yourself to be the guide, you may wish to complete these tasks before the course begins:

- Read part 3, "Life in Christ" in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- Session 1 contains eight case studies on moral issues, and the Catholic response for each. Read these over carefully. Consider what questions the young people might have about them, and how you would respond.
- If other case studies would be more timely or appropriate for your group, prepare these before session 1 and research the Catholic response.

This Course and Total Youth Ministry

Additional Youth Ministry Program Suggestions

The Horizons Program includes a manual entitled *Youth Ministry Strategies: Creative Activities to Complement the Horizons Curriculum*. It contains a variety of activities and strategies organized into thematic categories and cross-referenced according to the courses in the curriculum. It includes suggestions for shortened and extended programs, off-site events, intergenerational gatherings, parish involvement, and prayer and liturgical celebrations.

This valuable resource can enhance the young people's experience of the Horizons Program and help your parish fulfill a commitment to total youth ministry. Contact your program coordinator about the availability of the manual.

Parish Program Connections

A religious education curriculum is, ideally, just one component of a total parish program in which all those responsible for the formation of young people work together with the entire parish to meet the holistic needs of its youth. *Deciding as a Christian* can be a springboard for connections with other youth ministry experiences. You might develop these connections by doing the following:

- Ask the young people to read the local newspaper for human interest stories that highlight people making good moral choices. Suggest that they cut out any such stories and hang them on a parish bulletin board for other parish members to see.
- Encourage the young people to identify parish members who are making good moral choices by serving the needs of the wider community. These could be people who volunteer in soup kitchens, homeless shelters, counseling centers, pregnancy services, or Habitat for Humanity projects. Have the young people interview these parish members about their motivation for living morally. The young people can report on their interviews at a future meeting for that purpose.
- Help the young people sponsor a moral decision-making session for parents and other parish members. The young people can explain the moral decision-making process and invite the session participants to apply it to case studies.
- Poll the young people for their favorite television shows. Tape episodes from several of these shows. Watch the episodes as a group, stopping the tapes at any point where a moral decision has to be made. Use the moral decision-making process to analyze each situation and select the Catholic faith response.
- Bring in guests who can witness about an important moral decision they have made, their motivation for doing so, and the decision's effect upon their faith. For example, you might schedule presentations by someone who was or is a conscientious objector, someone who has chosen not to engage in sexual intercourse until marriage, someone who struggled with the decision to have an abortion, and so on.
- Sponsor an issues night for all the members of the parish. Invite an informed moral guide to present an analysis and Catholic response on a topic of current interest, such as capital punishment, the right to die, health care reform, or domestic violence.

- Just before or after the first session of this course, write the name and address of each participant, together with a short description of the mini-course, on a separate slip of paper. Distribute these papers to parish members at a gathering of seniors; at a meeting of a women's or men's group; or by hanging them in an envelope in the parish gathering space, with a written invitation to take a slip after Mass. Encourage the parishioners who accept a slip of paper to pray for the young person named on it for the duration of the course. They may also send notes of support to the young person.
- Help the course participants develop a questionnaire on the moral issues faced by young people. Have them distribute copies of the questionnaire to peers to be filled out and returned anonymously. After the copies are returned, tabulate the results to get a profile of the moral issues young people face most frequently in your community. Write an article on your survey for the local paper.
- Sponsor a movie night for the parish. Show a film such as *Gandhi*, *Roses in December*, *A Man for All Seasons*, *Romero*, or *Joan of Arc*. Discuss the film from the perspective of the moral decision-making process.
- Ask the parish to sponsor a National Issues Forum discussion. The National Issues Forum promotes informed discussion in local communities on moral issues of national concern. It has excellent resources, including one that gives the Catholic perspective on various issues. (For the address and telephone numbers of the National Issues Forum, see the Suggested Resources section at the end of this introduction.)
- Offer a moral decision-making seminar for other parish youth, using a videotape of the presentations prepared by the participants in session 2 of this course. You may include the moral guide's responses on the videotape, or meet with the guide after session 2 and together develop a faith response for each situation, with references to applicable Scripture passages and church documents.

Use the videotaped presentations and the videotaped or prepared Catholic responses to prompt and illustrate a discussion of the moral decision-making process, similar to the one conducted in step D of session 2. Then either show a videotape of the conclusions prepared by the

course participants or ask the seminar participants to suggest their own based on the information presented.

Family Connections

Parents are interested in knowing what their child is learning. They are entitled to know what is going on in the program and how they can be involved if they choose to be. All the sessions for this course include suggestions for families. Also, the preceding list, under Parish Program Connections, contains many suggestions that might involve parents. Before the start of the course, consider putting together a flyer or letter that includes the following information, and sending it home to the participants' families:

- an outline of *Deciding as a Christian*, including the session titles, content of each session, goals, and objectives
- copies of the handouts on the moral decision-making process, Scripture quotes, and the personal moral manifesto
- an invitation to attend any session, as long as their son or daughter is aware of the visit and not opposed to it
- a request to keep you and the young people in their prayers

Goals and Objectives in This Course

Why Use Goals and Objectives?

Curriculums take on greater clarity, direction, and purpose if they are described in terms of their goals and objectives. This observation is based on a commonsense principle: We have a difficult time getting somewhere if we do not know where we are going. Educators who design learning experiences must identify their destination as a first step in determining how to get there. The statement of goals and objectives is a practical way to identify the desired outcomes for a program.

In the Horizons Program, goals and objectives are used in the following ways:

Goals. Goals are broad statements of what we wish to accomplish—learning outcomes we hope to achieve. The coordinator's manual for the Horizons Program provides the goals for the entire curriculum. Each course within the total program also includes a statement of its goals. The goals often have an idealistic quality, inviting the teacher to reflect on how the course relates to the personal and faith development of the young people. At the same time, the course goals are realistic, measurable, and attainable. As a teacher, at the end of the course, you should be able to look back and determine if you have in fact achieved the course goals.

Objectives. Objectives are statements that define how to get to the goals. They name the specific tasks that must be accomplished if the goals are to be achieved. Each course supplies a clear statement of objectives for each session in the course.

The Goals and Objectives of *Deciding as a Christian*

Goals

This course has three goals:

- That the young people identify and explore moral situations that they encounter personally and that exist in contemporary society
- That they apply the principles of Christian morality and the process of making moral decisions to some of the moral situations they have identified and explored
- That they understand the faith response—from the Scriptures and from Catholic teaching—to the moral situations they have identified and explored

Objectives

Each session has its own objectives, which help realize the goals of *Deciding as a Christian*:

- Session 1: "Looking at Moral Issues"*
- To help the young people apply the moral decision-making process to issues and situations that they encounter or have questions about
 - To explain how Catholic moral teaching applies to issues of concern to young people

Session 2: "Responding to Moral Situations"

- To provide the young people with an opportunity to identify moral situations they may face
- To explain the Catholic moral teaching on these situations
- To help the young people identify the Christian faith response to these situations

Session 3: "Living Morally"

- To provide an opportunity for the young people to identify how the moral decision-making process can be applied in daily life
- To help them commit to making good moral decisions and living out those decisions
- To affirm each young person's gifts for living out the vision and values of Jesus

Suggested Resources

Church Documents

- John Paul II. *The Gospel of Life (Evangelium Vitae)*. Encyclical letter, 25 March 1995.
- . *The Splendor of Truth (Veritatis Splendor)*. Encyclical letter, 6 August 1993.
- Libreria Editrice Vaticana. "Life in Christ." Pt. 3 in *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Trans. United States Catholic Conference (USCC). Washington, DC: USCC, 1994.
- Nolan, Hugh J., ed. *Pastoral Letters of the United States Catholic Bishops*. 6 vols. Washington, DC: USCC.

Resources for Adults

- Bolte, Chuck, and Paul McCusker. *Quick Skits and Discussion Starters*. Loveland, CO: Group Books, 1989.
- . *Short Skits for Youth Ministry*. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1993.
- Clark, Chap, Duffy Robbins, and Mike Yaconelli. *Option Plays*. Ed. Noel Becchetti. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, Youth Specialties, 1990.
- Hanigan, James P. *As I Have Loved You: The Challenge of Christian Ethics*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1986.
- Lynn, David, and Mike Yaconelli. *Tension Getters Two*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing, Youth Specialties, 1985.
- McBrien, Richard P. *Catholicism*. Rev. ed. [San Francisco]: HarperCollins, HarperSanFrancisco, 1994.

Video Resources

Edge TV. Navpress; and Zondervan Publishing, Youth Specialties. A series that is updated quarterly. Each edition consists of a leader's guide and a video on a topic such as sexual choices or addictive behavior. Available from Youth Specialties, P.O. Box 4406, Spartanburg, SC 29305-4406; phone 800-776-8008.

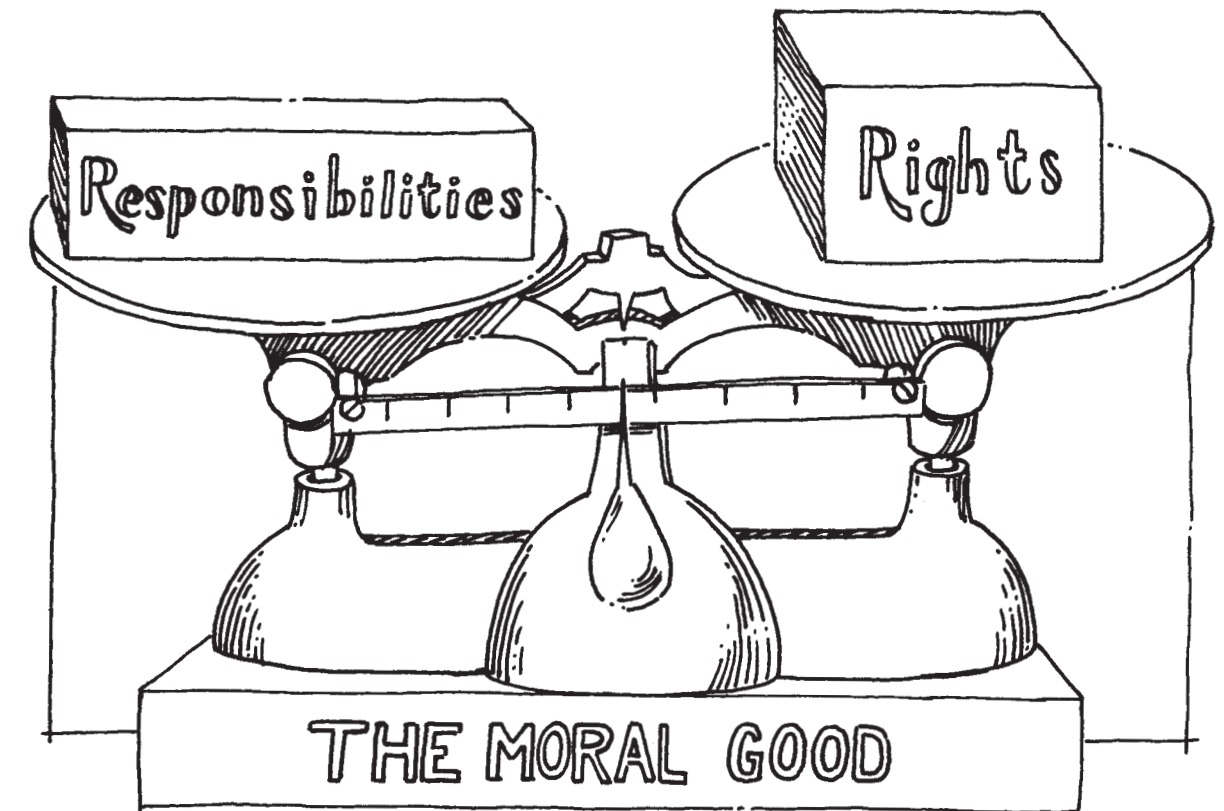
Hot Talk-Starter Video. Series 1 and 2. Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1993. Each series consists of a leader's guide and a video on several moral issues that concern adolescents. Available from Group Publishing, P.O. Box 485, Loveland, CO 80539; phone 800-447-1070; fax 303-669-1994.

Other Resources

National Issues Forum, 100 Commons Road, Dayton, OH 45459. Call 800-433-7834 for more information, 800-228-0818 to order resources.

SESSION 1

Looking at Moral Issues



Objectives

- To help the young people apply the moral decision-making process to issues and situations that they encounter or have questions about
- To explain how Catholic moral teaching applies to issues of concern to young people

Session Steps

- an introduction and an icebreaker (15 minutes)
- a review of the moral decision-making process (10 minutes)
- a discussion about case studies in morality (40 minutes)
- a break (10 minutes)
- a presentation and reflection on the Catholic faith response (20 minutes)
- a preparation for session 2 (10 minutes)
- a closing prayer (15 minutes)

Background for the Teacher

Young people, just like adults, wish to live a holy, happy, and healthy life. Each of us faces moral decisions that can move us closer to or further from that goal. This first session of *Deciding as a Christian* provides an opportunity for the young people in your group to apply the moral decision-making process from the core course *Called to Live the Gospel* to real-life situations. It also presents the Catholic faith response for those situations.

By modeling a thorough and consistent decision-making process, you can encourage an attitude toward moral decision making that is reflective and deliberate. And you can offer the young people in your group a lifelong skill for Christian living.

At the beginning of the session, you lead the young people in a community-building activity that also introduces some moral situations. The activity is designed to get the participants thinking about the many moral situations young people find themselves in. Following this you give a presentation reviewing the steps of the moral decision-making process.

The next activity is the heart of this session. You invite the young people to pair up and apply the first four steps of the moral decision-making process to one of several case studies. The pairs then share their applications in circles of six to eight participants, asking for a response from each member of their circle.

After a break you make a short presentation on how faith affects moral decision making. Each pair from the previous activity then reads and discusses a written faith response for its case study. Finally, the participants come together and share with one another their own responses and the prepared Catholic responses.

Next, you spend a few minutes preparing the group for session 2 by brainstorming moral situations that the participants have faced or are curious about.

To close the session, you lead the group in a prayer for people who are facing important decisions. You also invite the participants to continue to pray for those people until the next session.

This session requires a fair amount of preparation. You will want to be familiar with the case studies and the Catholic responses that are provided. Getting your materials gathered early will help you avoid a last-minute panic.

The activities in this session have been developed for a group of ten participants. If your group is much larger or smaller than that, see the Alternative Approaches section at the end of this session plan for some suggested modifications.

Preparation

✓ Materials Needed

- poster board and markers
- tape
- copies of handout 1–A, “Getting to the Heart of the Matter,” one for each participant (optional)
- pens or pencils
- position markers, one for each pair of participants
- copies of resource 1–A, “Case Studies of Moral Situations,” as needed
- snacks
- items for the prayer space (a table covering, a Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, a candle and matches, etc.)
- copies of resource 1–B, “Catholic Responses to the Case Studies,” as needed
- a scissors
- newsprint
- index cards, at least one for each participant

✓ Other Necessary Preparations

Prepare to lead this session by doing the following things and checking them off as you accomplish them:

- For step A.* Arrange the meeting space as described in step A.
- For step A.* Prepare the “What if . . . ?” questions for step A as directed.
- For step B.* Make a poster as described in step B and prepare to present the material for part 2 of step B in your own words.
- For step C.* Prepare the moral decision-making, Beatitudes, and Ten Commandments posters as explained in step C.
- For step E.* Prepare the prayer space as directed in step E.
- For step G.* Ask a group member to prepare to read Col. 3:3–15.

- As additional preparation for this session, you may wish to review the sections at the ends of articles 1 to 10, on the Ten Commandments, in chapters 1 and 2, part 3, of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*.
- Determine if you wish to change this session by using one or more of the alternative approaches described at the end of this session plan.

🕯️ Opening Teacher Prayer

Adolescents often have to deal with many people telling them what to do and what not to do. Many young people experience this as a lack of trust or as a threat to their personal freedom. It is understandable that many of them react in frustration or with negative behavior when yet another adult tells them what to do.

As catechists we walk a line between being trusted friends and out-of-touch adults, between being nonjudgmental companions and authority figures. Working with young people struggling to develop their Catholic conscience, we may be tempted to one of two extremes—either to let them figure it out all by themselves or to tell them what to believe and why. In struggling for balance, we have a model in Jesus. He combined unconditional love for every person with a strong vision of how we must live to bring about God’s Reign.

As you prepare for this session, it may help to consider a Gospel story that illustrates this combination. Begin by centering yourself in a place of inner silence, a place where you can experience God’s presence. Then read the following Scripture passage:

Scripture

But early in the morning he arrived again in the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?” They said this to test him, so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” Again he

bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left alone with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She replied, “No one, sir.” Then Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you. Go, [and] from now on do not sin any more.” (John 8:2–11, NAB)

Reflection. Consider the following questions and bring them to the Lord in prayer. If you keep a journal, you may want to spend some time writing your answers.

- In what ways are you tempted to be judgmental of others? In what ways are you tempted to be judgmental of teens?
- What challenges do you face in accepting and encouraging young people’s moral questioning as a necessary step on their journey to full, adult faith?
- How will you present the moral visions of Jesus and the church enthusiastically and without apology?

A Prayer for Openness

Jesus, you said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life.” If we honestly seek the truth, eventually we must find you.

Please motivate me always to seek the truth. Help me to encourage others to ask their questions, and grace me with the openness to accept those whose journey to truth is different from my own.

Procedure

📖 Introduction and Icebreaker: “What If . . . ?” (15 minutes)

Before the session. Arrange the room so that your group can stand and form two concentric circles in the space that you have.

Read through the “What if . . . ?” questions in part 3 of this step and identify the ones that you feel will work for your group. Add your own questions to the list or modify the existing questions, if you wish. Decide what order to ask the questions in, beginning with the questions that best suit your group.

1. Welcome the young people to the first session of *Deciding as a Christian*. If some of the participants do not know you through previous contacts, briefly introduce yourself. You may want to describe your family, your work, and why you are involved in the Horizons Program. Also invite the participants to share their name, and the name of the school they attend if appropriate.

Even though the participants may be familiar with group rules or guidelines that have been established in other courses of the Horizons Program, you might want to review some of them as well as make some general comments about your hopes and expectations in this course.

Explain that in this minicourse, the young people will be exploring moral issues that they are facing now or may face in the future. The first activity will help everyone to get acquainted (or reacquainted) with one another and to begin looking at what some of these moral issues might be. This activity takes the form of what is sometimes called a wagon wheel discussion.

2. Ask the participants to select partners, and include yourself in this process. If you have an odd number of participants, pair yourself up with one young person; if you have an even number of participants, join a pair and complete the exercise with those two young people as a team.

Direct the pairs to stand up and form two circles, one inside the other, with one partner in each circle. Ask the partners in the inner circle to face out, and the partners in the outer circle to face in.

3. Announce that you will read a number of “What if . . . ?” questions, each describing a situation the participants may or may not have experienced. After each question the group members will share their response to the question with their partner, giving reasons for the response. After 45 to 60 seconds, you will ask the outer circle to move one person to the right and you will then read another “What if . . . ?” question. You will repeat this process, with a new question for each round, until time is up.

Use the following “What if . . . ?” questions, with your own additions or changes as appropriate:

- What if a friend has asked you to read her English paper, and it is not very good. You know she will be hurt if you tell her the truth, but she will not get a good grade if she does not make some changes. What do you say to her?

- What if you are buying some new clothes at the mall, and the clerk gives you ten dollars too much in change. What do you do? What if the clerk gives you only one dollar too much?
- What if you are with a group of friends, and they begin to put down someone you know. Do you participate? What if they are putting down someone you really like?
- What if your parents are gone, and an elderly neighbor calls and asks you to drive her to the hospital emergency room. She’s feeling very ill and cannot afford a cab or ambulance. Your family’s second car is in the driveway, and you have your driver’s license, but you have strict orders never to use either of the family cars without your parents’ permission. What do you do?
- What if a friend confides that she has been involved in some vandalism at your school. You later hear that the police have accused another person who you know was not involved. What do you do?
- What if you have had a bad fight with someone at school. Rumor has it that the person is going to bring a knife to school and pay you back. You have a knife you can bring, and you also know where to get a handgun. What do you do?
- What if a group at your school likes to cluster around a person of the other sex and make lewd comments and sexual suggestions, and even grope the person. Most of the people targeted put up with this because they feel that the attention gives them status. One day the group targets you. What do you do?
- What if you’ve found the perfect part-time job as an office assistant, with great pay. One day your boss gives you some papers to shred. The papers show that the company has been releasing poisonous chemicals into the local river. What do you do?

B Review: Moral Decision-Making Process (10 minutes)

Before the session. Reproduce handout 1–A, “Getting to the Heart of the Matter,” on a piece of poster board. Hang the poster so that it will be visible to the group. You may also want to make a copy of handout 1–A for each participant so that the young people can follow along and take notes.

1. Right after you finish the “What if . . . ?” activity, have everyone sit down where they can see the “Getting to the Heart of the Matter” poster. Explain that this minicourse builds upon the moral decision-making process covered in the core course *Called to Live the Gospel*. To refresh everyone’s memory, you are going to review the process briefly. In the next activity, the participants will apply the moral decision-making process to several sample situations.

2. Review the steps in the moral decision-making process as follows, using your own words. If the participants have not gone through the core course *Called to Live the Gospel*, use an example of a true-to-life situation in your review. You might refer to a work situation where employees routinely “help themselves” to food or supplies even though doing so violates company policy.

- *Step 1: Look at the situation.* Explain that the first step of the moral decision-making process is to take time to make sure we have all the facts straight and that we are not missing any crucial details. Good moral decisions involve the head and the heart; by using our head at this point, we can avoid making mistaken decisions later on. In this step we ask questions like these:
 - What exactly is happening?
 - Why is it happening?
 - Who is involved? What are their motives?
 - How is it happening, that is, by what means or method?
 - When and where is it happening?
- *Step 2: Identify possible cultural responses and effects.* Note that in the second step of the decision-making process, we look at all the possible ways to respond to the situation and ask what influences we might be under to choose particular solutions. These influences might be positive or negative. In this step we answer the following questions:
 - What are the options?
 - What would my family say I should do? If I choose their option, who benefits? who gets hurt?
 - What would my friends and peers say I should do? If I choose their option, who benefits? who gets hurt?
 - What would society say I should do? If I choose society’s option, who benefits? who gets hurt?

- *Step 3: Identify the faith response.* Explain that in the third step of the moral decision-making process, we look to our faith to help us choose responses that best reflect the values of Jesus. We rely on the wisdom of the church to give us answers and to help us sort out the many confusing messages we receive. In this step we move closer to the heart of the matter, the response of real love, but do not yet determine our particular response to this unique situation. The questions we consider here are as follows:

- How do the values of Jesus apply in this situation?
- What do the Scriptures say? the Ten Commandments? the Beatitudes?
- What is the teaching of the church on this matter?
- What do I want to ask the faith community to pray with me for and about?
- *Step 4: Make a personal decision.* Recall that in the fourth step of the moral decision-making process, we are called to make a concrete, personal decision about how we respond to this situation. We want to make a decision that best lives out the Catholic faith response determined in the previous step. Failure to do so means that we will not be successful in our goal of living a holy, healthy, and happy life. The questions we need to struggle with in this step are as follows:
 - What do the vision and values of Jesus—assuming I agree with and accept them—lead me to in this particular moral situation or dilemma?
 - What does love look like in this situation?
 - If I choose the Catholic response, who benefits? who gets hurt?
 - If I am to be true to my call to be holy, healthy, and happy, what must I choose?
 - In the long run, what kind of person will I become if I choose the Catholic faith response?
- *Step 5: Act on the decision.* Point out that a moral decision made and acted upon in love is truly the heart of the matter. Living a Christian moral life is not easy. To make a moral decision and not act on it is itself a sin—because it is in acting that we are in union with God and are a light to the world. Thus, we pray for the strength and courage to act on our moral decisions. The final questions in the moral decision-making process are these:
 - What are the steps I need to take to act on this decision?
 - What is the first thing I will do?

C Discussion Exercise: Case Studies in Morality (40 minutes)

Before the session. The moral decision-making poster from the previous presentation is used as a visual aid for this activity. Bring some things to use as position markers for the poster, one marker for every pair of participants. Buttons or tokens from a board game will do, or you may wish to use larger figures such as the toys that come with children's meals at fast-food restaurants.

Write the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments on poster board and hang them somewhere in the room so that they can easily be seen. (The Beatitudes are in Matt. 5:3–12 or number 1716 in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and the Ten Commandments precede number 2052 in the *Catechism*.)

Read through resource 1–A, “Case Studies of Moral Situations”; choose the case studies you will use for your group; and make copies of the case studies you select. You will need at least one case study copy for every two participants.

1. Start by placing the moral decision-making poster from the previous activity on the table or floor. Tell the group members that they will be putting part of the decision-making process into action through an activity called Getting to the Heart of the Matter. They will work with a partner, and their task will be to read a case study and then answer a set of questions about the case for each of the first four steps in the decision-making process. Explain that throughout the remainder of this session and in session 2, they will use the first four steps of the process to make and examine responses to different moral situations. In session 3 they will focus on the fifth step of the process, living out those responses.

Pair up the group members or allow them to choose their own partners. If you have an odd number of participants, suggest that three work together and the rest pair up. Read to the group the titles of the case studies you have selected. Allow each pair to choose a case study. Ask the pairs to each choose a different case study so that a variety of issues can be discussed. Let each pair also choose a position marker. Explain that the pairs will place their marker on the poster to keep track of which step of the decision-making process they are addressing.

2. Ask the pairs to spend a few minutes reading their case study and writing their answers to the questions that follow it. They should refer to the Beatitudes and the Ten Commandments displayed on posters, when answering the questions for step 3 of the moral decision-making process. If it seems necessary, provide an example by going through a case study that was not chosen by any pair and answering the questions yourself.

Give the pairs 10 minutes to discuss their case study and the questions provided.

3. Gather the pairs into a circle and place the decision-making process poster in the center. Instruct the pairs to put their markers in the outer circle of the poster. Ask one pair to start by reading its case study or telling the story in the partners' own words, and then reading and answering the questions for step 1 of the process. Next, go around the circle and ask each person whether he or she agrees or disagrees with the pair's answers. Anyone who disagrees must give a reason. When everyone has given their opinion, tell the first pair to move its marker to the next circle on the poster. Then ask the next pair to read or summarize its case study and to read and answer the first set of questions. Again, ask each person in the circle to agree or disagree. (You will probably find that almost everyone agrees, but soliciting individual responses helps keep people involved.) You may also respond to the questions; this will help you to understand your group and also to give some input and direction.

4. When all the pairs have read and responded to the first set of questions, proceed in the same way with the second, third, and fourth sets of questions. Remind each pair to move its marker to the next circle to keep track of which step of the decision-making process it is on. Keep this part of the activity moving and watch the time; you will need about 5 minutes to wrap up the exercise after everyone has completed their last response.

5. When all the pairs have reached the inner heart of the moral decision-making poster, gather the entire group and lead it in a short discussion on the following questions:

- Which of the first four steps in the moral decision-making process was the hardest to respond to? Why?
- Which step was the easiest to respond to? Why?
- What does this tell you about how you need to apply the moral decision-making process?

- How did the group affect your decision making? Did it add insight? Did you feel pressured to give an answer you were not sure about?

Note: Keep the moral decision-making process, Beatitudes, and Ten Commandments posters for use in the next two sessions.

D Break (10 minutes)

Serve snacks during the break.

E Presentation and Reflection: The Catholic Faith Response (20 minutes)

Be sure you allow a full 20 minutes for this activity. Omitting the Catholic responses to the case studies could give the impression that morals are relative or that one need not rely on the church's moral wisdom.

Before the session. Set up the prayer space where the participants can see it, perhaps on a small table. Use an attractive covering, a Bible, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and a candle. You may also wish to display an icon, a picture of Jesus, and so forth. The Bible and the *Catechism* represent the authentic references for the moral teaching of the church.

Make a copy of the Catholic response from resource 1–B, “Catholic Responses to the Case Studies,” for each case study used in step C. If more than one pair used a particular case study, make enough copies of the appropriate response for each pair.

1. After the break invite the group members back to your meeting area. Explain that now that the participants have reached the “heart of the matter” for their case study, they must compare their answer to the question, What does authentic Christian love look like in this situation? to a response prepared by Catholic leaders in morality and youth ministry. Remind them that the love referred to here is not romantic love or even sisterly or brotherly love. It is not love based only on feelings or personal pleasure. It is agapic love, the unconditional love for others taught to us by Jesus. It is a love that sometimes calls for the sacrifice of our own pleasure, our own needs, at times even our own life. This is the heart of Christian morality.

Note that we listen to the responses of Catholic leaders because Catholics rely on the wisdom of the church to guide their moral decisions and actions. We have a responsibility to examine our motives carefully and to learn all that we can about the issues and the reasons behind that teaching. Share with the group your own appreciation of the church's moral teaching. You might tell a short story of how it helped you with a moral dilemma.

2. Introduce the prayer space to the group. Draw attention to each of the items you have placed there. Tell the group members that you will be using the prayer space in each session of this course, as a place to gather for prayer. Ask them to go over to the prayer space with their partner from the previous activity and retrieve the Catholic response to their case study. Ask the pairs to read the Catholic response and compare it with the response they gave for the question, What does authentic Christian love look like in this situation? Give the pairs a couple of minutes to decide whether they would change or modify their own response based on the Catholic response.

3. After a couple of minutes, direct the pairs to take turns reading their own responses to the entire group. If the participants were split between two or more circles for the previous activity, ask each pair to begin by recapping its moral situation. After each pair has read its response, ask if it would modify that response based on the Catholic response and if so, how.

If time allows encourage the group to respond to the following questions:

- What did you think of the Catholic responses to the moral situations?
- What would be the benefits to someone who responded to these situations in these ways?
- What would be the costs to someone who responded to these situations in these ways?

F Preparation for Session 2 (10 minutes)

1. Explain that during session 2 the participants will be examining moral situations that they or people they know have experienced or that they would like to spend some time exploring. You can also announce that a moral guide (or you) will explain the church's position on these issues. Ask the group what some of those situations might be. Spend a

few minutes brainstorming ideas and list the suggestions on newsprint. Keep going until you have at least eight to ten situations listed.

If the group has a hard time coming up with ideas, you can prime the pump by offering suggestions like these:

- A teacher gives better grades to girls than to boys.
- A girl applies for an opening at the local car wash and is turned down even though she is fully qualified to do the job.
- A young person cannot decide whether to spend money on expensive designer clothes.
- The local power company wants to build a generator that burns refuse, just outside of the neighborhood.
- A friend has been drinking and wants to drive.
- A guy finds out his girlfriend is pregnant.
- A local family of a minority race has been taunted and threatened by some people at the high school.
- A young girl who is dying asks a friend to help her commit suicide.

2. If you have recruited a moral guide who is comfortable reacting spontaneously to a variety of situations, tell the participants that in session 2 they will be asked to choose some of the situations they just listed and explore them in detail. If your moral guide prefers to have time to prepare responses to specific situations (or if you were unable to recruit a moral guide), ask the young people to choose from the list four or five issues they would like to explore in the next session, and write these issues on newsprint. If the participants do not reach agreement quickly, call for a simple vote to decide which moral situations are of the highest interest to the group.

Save the appropriate list from this activity for use in session 2.

G Closing Prayer (15 minutes)

1. Ask the young people to form a circle sitting on the floor in front of the prayer space. Light the candle and place it in front of you. You may want to turn down the room lights. Invite the group members to quiet themselves and to become aware of God's presence. Then have the person you selected read Col. 3:3–15. You might briefly reflect that the writer of Colossians is inviting us to become more like our Creator by leading a moral life. We must become a new person who rejects the ways of living

that do not bring us closer to God or to one another. This is not always easy. We must support one another in this journey. Ask the group to pray for all who struggle with important decisions.

2. Distribute an index card to each person. Ask the group members to write on their card a situation in which a person they know is facing an important decision. The person can be themselves or someone else. They are to describe the situation but not write any names on the card.

3. Ask the group members to pass all the cards to you. Mix up the cards and hold them faceup in a stack. Read the situation on the top card you are holding and then pause briefly so that everyone can pray silently for that situation. Continue through the stack, reading each situation and pausing briefly for a silent prayer after each.

Note: If you prefer suggest that the participants keep their card instead of handing it in. Then invite the young people to silently read their own card and offer a prayer for the situation on it.

4. Conclude with these or similar words:

- Merciful God, you hear our prayers and know our needs. Look kindly upon the situations we bring before you. Send your spirit of judgment and perseverance upon the people who face these decisions. May they make these decisions according to the vision and values of Jesus. And may their decisions make them holy, healthy, and happy.

We pray this in the name of Jesus, our friend and savior. Amen.

Invite the participants to take their index card home and to continue praying for that situation until the next session.

Alternative Approaches

After reading the session plan, you may choose to do some things differently or to make additions to an activity. Consider your time limitations first and then these alternative approaches:

For step A. If your group is small, this exercise may work better with the pairs sitting together but not forming concentric circles, or with the group remaining whole and not dividing into pairs. If your

group is large, you can save time by dividing it into two equal parts and instructing one part to be the inside circle and the other to be the outside circle.

For step A. If some members of your group are new to one another, you might use the following questions instead of the “What if . . . ?” questions. Or you could use a mixture of these questions and the “What if . . . ?” questions.

- Who is your favorite teacher in school? Why?
- What do you want to do after you graduate?
- What is the best movie you've seen or book you've read in the past year? What did you like about it?
- If you could go anywhere in the world for a vacation, where would it be? Why?
- How would you describe your family?
- If you could spend a day as another person, who would it be? Why?
- What's your attitude about money? Who or where did you get that attitude from?

For step C. If you have a large group, prepare a moral decision-making poster for every eight to ten participants. For parts 3 and 4 of step C, form two or more circles with eight to ten participants in each, and place a poster in the center of each circle. Move among the circles as necessary to facilitate their discussion.

For step C. If you know that your group enjoys discussion and has little trouble keeping a conversation going, you could make the activity less structured. Give each member of the group a copy of one of the case studies you selected. Ask one young person to read his or her case study to the group. Read the questions for the case study and lead a group discussion of them. When discussion wanes, call on someone else to read a different case study. Continue in this manner until you have reached the break time.

For step C. If you have a television and a VCR, you could present case studies audiovisually. Two video series present some moral situations. One is Hot Talk–Starter videos, from Group; the other is Edge TV, from Youth Specialties (see the Suggested Resources section at the end of the course introduction for more information). Preview these to determine which segments to use, formulate questions that correspond to the first four steps of the decision-making process, and research and prepare the

Catholic response for step E. Because of the length of the video segments, you may have time for only a couple of moral situations.

For step C. If you would like the group to use moral situations other than the ones provided, consult your youth ministry library or consider purchasing additional resources. *Group Magazine* has a monthly program resource called “The World Times.” This feature offers current news articles about real situations that deal with moral issues. A year's worth of back issues should give you plenty of situations. The resource books *Tension Getters*, *Tension Getters Two*, *Option Plays*, *Quick Skits and Discussion Starters*, and *Short Skits for Youth Ministry* all contain moral situations that can be used as case studies. (These books are listed in the Suggested Resources section at the end of the course introduction.) If you use material from these resources for case studies, you will need to formulate the Catholic responses for them, too.

For step F. If you know that your group tends to be quiet, pass out slips of paper to everyone. Give the participants 5 minutes to list as many moral situations as they can. Mix the papers up and give each person one to read aloud. List each situation on newsprint for all to see.

For step F. Bring in a stack of recent newspapers. Ask the young people to go through the papers looking for articles that involve moral situations that can be developed into case studies. When they find one, they should let you know so that you can list it on newsprint. They should also tear out the article so that you can keep it for the next session.

For step G. You could use many other Scripture passages to begin the prayer service. You may wish to use Eph. 5:1–9 or James 1:12–15, or a favorite of your own.

For step G. If you know that your group is used to sharing prayer concerns spontaneously, you could use a candle pass instead of the index cards following the Scripture reading and reflection. Begin by holding the lighted candle from your prayer space. Explain that you will pass the candle around the circle. Remind them that the candle is a symbol of the light of Christ. When it comes to each person, she or he should hold it while saying a short prayer, silently or aloud, for young people facing important



moral decisions. You might start by praying that all young people may have the wisdom and the courage to make good moral decisions. Then pass the candle to the person to your right. After the candle has gone around the circle, if you have time, you might send the candle around again, this time inviting the group members to pray for any special needs they are aware of. When the candle has come back around to you, invite the group to join hands and close by praying together the Glory Be or the Lord's Prayer.

 **Family Connections**

- Send home with each group member a case study and its Catholic response. Suggest that the young people read the case study and discuss the questions and the Catholic response with their family.
- Suggest that each participant's family choose a moral issue its members are concerned about. Have the family members research applicable Scripture teaching and church teaching to prepare a Catholic response.
- Ask each participant's family to list the moral situations it feels young people need to discuss. If you have recruited a moral guide who is comfortable with giving spontaneous responses, instruct the participants to bring the lists to the next session, and include the situations in the options you offer for small-group presentations.

Closing Prayer and Evaluation

Before doing the closing teacher prayer, you may want to complete the evaluation at the end of this session.

 **Closing Teacher Prayer**

Scripture

Let no one have contempt for your youth, but set an example for those who believe, in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity. . . . Attend to the reading, exhortation, and teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was conferred on you through the prophetic word with the imposition of hands of the presbyterate. Be diligent in these matters, be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to everyone. Attend to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in both tasks, for by doing so you will save both yourself and those who listen to you. (1 Tim. 4:12-16, NAB)

Prayer

Thank you, Lord, for your many gifts. Thank you especially for these young people who are struggling to understand and do what is right. Help me to set an example and to use the gifts you have given me to support them in that struggle. I especially pray for _____, who needs help with _____. Please send your Spirit to _____ with the gift of _____. I pray this in the name of Jesus, my Lord and friend. Amen.



 **Evaluation**

Take a few moments after the session to evaluate how things went and to think about the following questions. Write your thoughts in the spaces provided, for future reference.

1. The things that worked best in this session were . . .

2. Some things I would change about this session are . . .

3. The next time I teach this session, I will remember to . . .

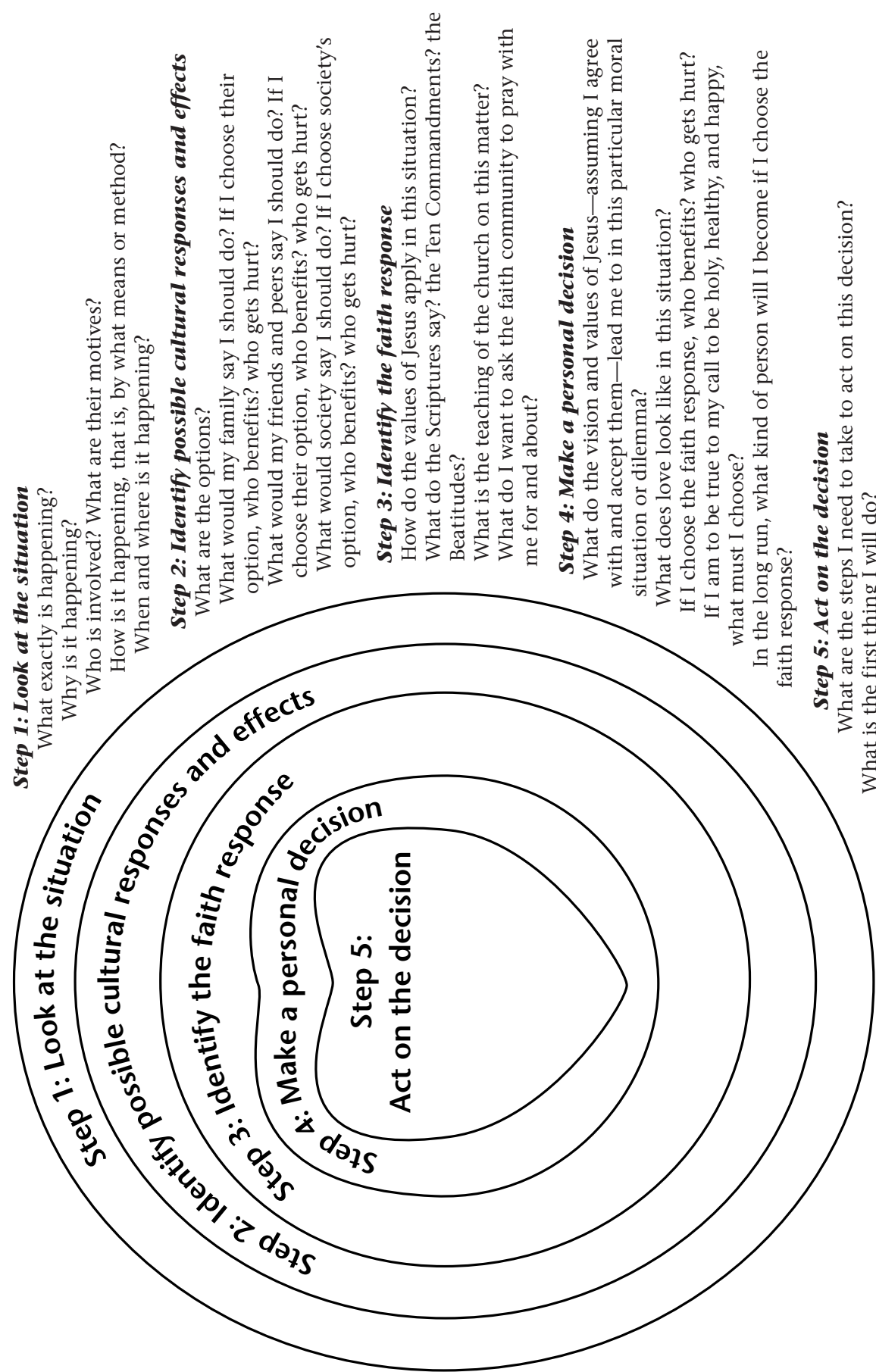
4. On the following scale, circle the number that best describes how well this session applied the moral decision-making process to issues and situations that young people encounter or may have questions about:
 It was a failure. ←→ It was a rousing success!
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Comments:

5. On the following scale, circle the number that best describes how well this session helped the young people understand how Catholic teaching applies to moral issues, particularly in answer to the question, What does love look like in this situation?
 It was a failure. ←→ It was a rousing success!
 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
 Comments:

6. Did anyone in the group seem to be struggling with the Catholic faith response to a moral issue? If so, what kind of support or follow-up might be helpful for that person or persons?

7. Did you recognize any particular needs of the young people that you would like to bring to God?

Getting to the Heart of the Matter



Case Studies of Moral Situations

Case Study 1: Tips and Taxes

Miranda listened to the IRS recording again. There was no mistake. It said, "If you receive more than \$20 in tips in one month, you must report it to your employer." Miranda recently got a job as a waitress at a new restaurant in town. She makes much less than minimum wage per hour, but she doubles that in tips. This has been a great blessing. Miranda comes from a large family, and her parents do not have a lot of money. She's had to wear hand-me-downs and miss many of the camps and trips sponsored by her church and school. For the first time in her life, she has money not only to buy new clothes from the mall but to save for college or special trips.

When Miranda started this job, her employer told her that at the end of every month, she would have to report her income to him so that he could withdraw the appropriate amount from her paycheck for the IRS. But another waitress, Diana, advised: "Girl, don't you go worrying about that. Just report forty or fifty dollars a month. We make little enough here as it is without Uncle Sam dipping into our pockets." Miranda sometimes makes forty or fifty dollars in tips in one night. Now it's time to make her monthly report to her employer, and she's not sure what to do.

Questions

Step 1

- What choice is Miranda faced with?
- What conflicting values does she have to sort out?
- Are there special circumstances that might affect her decision?

Step 2

- What are Miranda's options?
- What would Miranda's friends and peers advise her to do?
- If she does this, who benefits? who gets hurt?

Step 3

- What commandments or beatitudes apply to this situation?
- What teachings from the Bible or from the church apply?

Step 4

- What would the vision and values of Jesus lead Miranda to do?
- What would authentic Christian love look like in this situation?

Case Study 2: Sweet Revenge?

Mike's parents have moved his family out to the country to avoid the problems of the city, but this has not helped Mike. On his first bus ride to school as an insecure sixth grader, he is welcomed by two obnoxious brothers whose sole purpose in life is to demean anyone smaller or weaker than them. They find Mike's weak spot right away. "Hey, lips," says one brother. "Yeah, lips," says the other, "who said you could ride our bus?" Mike fights back tears at this humiliation and quickly finds a seat as far away from the brothers as he can.

The brothers continue to torment Mike for four years. Mike tries his best to ignore them, but the brothers seem to take this as a personal challenge to goad him even more. Mike hears rumors that the brothers' parents are alcoholic and abusive. That might explain why they act the way they do, but still, slowly Mike's hurt turns to anger and the anger turns to rage. He begins to fantasize about using the brothers for karate practice, even though he knows that his parents are strong advocates of nonviolence.

One day in the spring of his sophomore year, Mike and his friend Perry are walking over to the tennis courts after school for practice. The two brothers pass by, walking in the opposite direction. "Hey, lips, you couldn't hit the broad side of a barn," one of them calls out in his usual greeting. The rage starts to swell up in Mike, and then Perry says, "Let's go teach those two a lesson." At that moment there is no doubt in Mike's mind that, with his racket in his hand and Perry at his side, he can make those brothers regret the pain they have caused him.

Questions

Step 1

- What choice is Mike faced with?
- What conflicting values does he have to sort out?
- Are there special circumstances that might affect his decision?

Step 2

- What are Mike's options?
- Think of your favorite television show. What advice would Mike get from its characters?
- If he follows this advice, who benefits? who gets hurt?

Step 3

- What commandments or beatitudes apply to this situation?
- What teachings from the Bible or from the church apply?

Step 4

- What would the vision and values of Jesus lead Mike to do?
- What would authentic Christian love look like in this situation?

Case Study 3: Capital Punishment

Lucanda stands in the voting booth trying to make a final decision. On the ballot is a referendum to reinstate capital punishment for certain violent crimes. It was put on the ballot by several lawmakers who feel that capital punishment needs to be brought back because of the state's rising crime rate, including an increase in murder. The issue has been hotly debated in the news media over the last several weeks.

Lucanda is confused about the best way to vote. On the one hand, she is upset about the rising violence she sees in her neighborhood every day. In the last year, a boy she knows from school was shot and killed, and her best friend was cut with a knife during an argument in the school cafeteria. But on the other hand, she's heard the statistics that minorities are sentenced to death more often than whites, and that seems unjust. And the billboard she saw that said, "Why do we want to kill people who kill people to show that killing people is wrong?" also made sense to her. It's her first time voting, and she wants to do the right thing.

Questions

Step 1

- What choice is Lucanda faced with?
- What conflicting values does she have to sort out?
- Are there special circumstances that might affect her decision?

Step 2

- What are Lucanda's options?
- What would Lucanda's friends advise her about how to vote? What would be their reasoning?

Step 3

- What commandments or beatitudes apply to this situation?
- What teachings from the Bible or from the church apply?

Step 4

- What way would the vision and values of Jesus lead Lucanda to vote?
- What would authentic Christian love look like in this situation?

Case Study 4: Pornography on the Web

Carlos's friends Scott and Paulo regularly come over to his house after school to do homework and goof off. The last couple of days, they've been using the family computer to explore the Internet, where they have found museum exhibits, NASA photos, Star Trek sites, and on-line stores.

Today, as they begin to go on-line, Scott says: "My brother at State gave me these Web site addresses yesterday. He said to check them out if we really want an education." So Carlos types in the first address. Up on the screen comes a page titled "Join the Revolution," with further topics like "Secrets the Government Doesn't Want You to Know" and "How to Build Your Own Bombs." "Weird," says Carlos. "Try the next address," urges Paulo.

Now they see a picture of a half-naked woman on a page entitled "The Fantasy Club." At the bottom of the screen is the warning "This site contains explicit sexual content. You must be 18 to enter." "Come on, let's try it," says Scott. Even though he is very curious, Carlos replies, "I don't know; we're not eighteen." "They just have to put that there, they can't tell if you are or not," Scott says sarcastically. "If you guys open that file, I'm not hanging around," says Paulo. "The Bible says, 'Avoid temptation,' and this certainly qualifies in my book."

Questions

Step 1

- What choice is Carlos faced with?
- What conflicting values does he have to sort out?
- Are there special circumstances that might affect his decision?

Step 2

- What are Carlos's options?
- If Carlos goes into the X-rated area, who benefits? who gets hurt?

Step 3

- What commandments or beatitudes apply to this situation?
- What teachings from the Bible or from the church would apply?

Step 4

- What would the vision and values of Jesus lead Carlos to do?
- What would authentic Christian love look like in this situation?

Case Study 5: Sexual Harassment

Su Kim has heard of this but never believed she'd be in this situation. First, she never imagined the courses at the university would be this hard. Chemistry is giving her an especially difficult time, and she needs to do well in it. If she does not, she will have to kiss her dreams of a career in medicine good-bye.

Two graduate students are assigned as tutors for chemistry. One is no help to her at all. The other, Jerry, is much better—except for one problem. He seems to have more than just an academic interest in her. In the tutoring sessions, he tells her how attractive she looks. He often puts his arm around her as they are working on a problem, and his hand brushes across her in places where she is not comfortable having it. Once he told her that he has heard that Asian women are incredible lovers.

The chemistry final is coming up in a week. She will have to ace it to get at least a C in the course. If she does worse, she might not even pass. When she asks Jerry for an extra session to prepare, he replies: "I'm awfully busy in the next week. The only way I can fit you in is if you come over to my apartment Tuesday night. I'll fix some dinner." Then he gives her a strange smile: "I might even be able to get you a copy of the test if you wear something sexy."

When Su Kim tells her roommate about Jerry's offer, her roommate replies: "What's the big deal? If you can get his help by showing some cleavage and letting him think you're interested, you're a lucky woman." This only confuses her more, and now Tuesday is only two days away.

Questions

Step 1

- What choice is Su Kim faced with?
- What conflicting values does she have to sort out?
- Are there special circumstances that might affect her decision?

Step 2

- What are Su Kim's options?
- If Su Kim follows her roommate's advice, who benefits? who gets hurt?

Step 3

- What commandments or beatitudes apply to this situation?
- What teachings from the Bible or from the church apply?

Step 4

- What would the vision and values of Jesus lead Su Kim to do?
- What would authentic Christian love look like in this situation?

Case Study 6: Vandalism

Frank enters his new school in Memphis with about as much enthusiasm as someone going to have their wisdom teeth pulled. He does not want to change schools, but his mother took a promotion that required them to move. His social life was just getting good at his old school, and he does not want to have to make new friends and start over with only two years of high school left.

The students at the new school seem like snobs. Finally, loneliness and boredom push Frank to start talking to Harley, a guy who has joked around with him once or twice. Then Harley invites Frank to go to a football game. At least it is something to do on a Friday night. After he has agreed to go, Frank realizes that Harley expects him to drive and that Harley's two buddies Rick and Dave will be coming, too.

Frank has fun at the game, cheering with his new friends when their team wins. After the game Harley announces that it is time to celebrate and tells Frank to take them to a corner grocery. Frank and the others wait in the car while Harley runs into the store. In a few minutes, Harley comes out with a twelve-pack of beer. He directs Frank to a local park and tells him where to stop the car. Not wanting to be left out or ridiculed, Frank joins the others in having a couple of beers.

They start driving around again, looking for something to do. Frank is feeling good about having new friends and is picking up on their rowdy mood. Then they pass by the local zoo. "Hey," Dave yells, "let's rip off some of those crazy signs and put them in people's yards!" Frank laughs. The zoo uses large, brightly painted signs in the shapes of animals to direct people to different areas. "Yeah," Harley adds, "let's go for it. Stop over there, Frank." This time Frank does not laugh. His friends are serious. "Come on, Frank," urges Rick. "It's no big deal, people do it all the time."

(This case study is based on "Frank's Mess," in Ahlers, Allaire, and Koch, *Growing in Christian Morality*, page 7.)

Questions

Step 1

- What choice is Frank faced with?
- What conflicting values does he have to sort out?
- Are there special circumstances that might affect his decision?

Step 2

- What are Frank's options?
- What advice would Frank's mother give him?

Step 3

- What commandments or beatitudes apply to this situation?
- What teachings from the Bible or from the church apply?

Step 4

- What would the vision and values of Jesus lead Frank to do?
- What would authentic Christian love look like in this situation?

Case Study 7: Lying to a Friend

It has all been planned: Samantha, Carol, Laura, and Mindy will have lunch together at the mall and then go shopping. Now Laura and Mindy are electing Samantha to uninvite Carol. "Call her and tell her we can't go," Mindy says. "Then we'll just go without her." Laura and Mindy do not like Carol. They say that Carol used to be okay, until she started getting into religion. Lately Laura and Mindy feel uncomfortable around Carol.

Even though Carol is Samantha's friend, Samantha also feels uncomfortable with the religious stuff. She is beginning to feel that her friendship with Laura and Mindy is more important to her than her friendship with Carol. She would feel bad about canceling the lunch with Carol, but if she does not, Laura and Mindy might not have anything more to do with her. She gets up and begins to walk over to the phone.

(This case study is based on "A Friendly Lunch," in Lynn and Yaconelli, *Tension Getters Two*, page 83.)

Questions

Step 1

- What choice is Samantha faced with?
- What conflicting values does she have to sort out?
- Are there special circumstances that might affect her decision?

Step 2

- What are Samantha's options?
- What advice would society give Samantha?
- If she does this, who benefits? who gets hurt?

Step 3

- What commandments or beatitudes apply to this situation?
- What teachings from the Bible or from the church apply?

Step 4

- What would the vision and values of Jesus lead Samantha to do?
- What would authentic Christian love look like in this situation?

Case Study 8: A Friend Who Is Homosexual

It is one of those hot, muggy days in July. Anthony and Tyrone have been playing a wicked game of beach volleyball. They have been best friends for many years. They spend most of their spare time together, always having fun. As they walk down the beach after the game, Anthony is not saying much. "Something on your mind, Tony?" Tyrone asks. "I haven't seen you this quiet since your dad died." "I'm just thinking," Anthony replies, but the depressed look on his face concerns Tyrone.

The next day Tyrone finds a letter from Anthony in his mailbox. It says that Anthony has been struggling over his sexual feelings for a long time. He's finally had to admit to himself that he's gay. He's not ready to tell his mom, or anybody else, but he had to tell Tyrone. He thought that he owed it to his best friend. "I understand," says the letter, "if you don't want to hang around together any more. I don't want you to be affected if word gets out that I'm homosexual."

Tyrone is floored. How can this be? He and Anthony have made crude comments about homosexuals. To be considered gay is to be a social leper with most people at school. If word gets out that Anthony's gay, Tyrone will be guilty by association. But he has been Anthony's friend for so long, how can he turn his back on Anthony when Anthony needs him the most?

Questions

Step 1

- What choice is Tyrone faced with?
- What conflicting values does he have to sort out?
- Are there special circumstances that might affect his decision?

Step 2

- What are Tyrone's options?
- What advice would Tyrone's peers give him? If he does this, who benefits? who gets hurt?

Step 3

- What commandments or beatitudes apply to this situation?
- What teachings from the Bible or from the church apply?

Step 4

- What would the vision and values of Jesus lead Tyrone to do?
- What would authentic Christian love look like in this situation?

Catholic Responses to the Case Studies

Cut apart the following responses along the dotted lines.

Catholic Response to Case Study 1: Tips and Taxes

Miranda is faced with a popular American pastime—cheating the government. Saint Paul reminds us in the book of Romans that all authorities, including governments, have their authority from God. Saint Paul says, "Pay to all what is due them—taxes to whom taxes are due, revenue to whom revenue is due, respect to whom respect is due, honor to whom honor is due" (Romans 13:7). However, we are obligated not to obey civil authorities when they direct us to violate the fundamental rights of other people or to disobey the teachings of the Gospel (*Catechism*, number 2242).

Therefore, the Catholic church has consistently taught that Christians have an obligation to pay their taxes out of obedience to proper authority and to support the common good (*Catechism*, number 2240). Miranda needs to remember that it is through taxes that we fund our schools, our public roads, and services to poor and needy people. By not paying her complete share, she would in a sense cheat those who do—a sin against the seventh commandment. The vision and values of Jesus would lead Miranda to claim all her income from tips when making her monthly report.

Catholic Response to Case Study 2: Sweet Revenge?

Mike's anger about his mistreatment is understandable and justifiable. His dignity as a person has been assaulted. That is certainly a sin against him. Jesus himself was angry at injustice. But Mike needs to recall Jesus' words about this in the Beatitudes ("Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God" [Matthew 5:9, NAB]) and in Matthew 5:43–45 ("You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of [God]" [NAB]).

If Mike's anger turns to hate, and if his hate causes him to lash out at the two brothers in verbal or physical violence, he is in danger of becoming that which he hates. Jesus' way of love would call Mike to reach out to the brothers in an attempt to heal them and convert them. Mike might try approaching the brothers with head high and saying: "I'm sorry if you feel you have to humiliate others in order to feel better about yourselves. Your words do hurt me, and I wish you wouldn't say them. I'd like to find a way of being friends, not enemies." The brothers will certainly be surprised. They might react positively, or they might just jeer at Mike all the more. But Mike will have kept his dignity and will have grown in the strength that comes not from wielding power and intimidation but from knowing who he is and being true to his beliefs.

Note: The church does teach that Mike has a right to defend himself should the brothers ever physically attack him.

Catholic Response to Case Study 3: Capital Punishment

The issue of capital punishment divides people and elicits a deep emotional response. But we must make moral decisions using both our head and our heart. So we must start by analyzing the reality. Many studies show that capital punishment does not deter violent crime. And some innocent people have been executed.

When we turn to the Scriptures, we find in the law of the Jewish people in the Old Testament passages that call for capital punishment. But Jesus, the fulfillment of the law, seems to bring that teaching into question. In John 8:2–11, when Jesus is asked to approve the execution of a woman caught committing adultery, he refuses to do so and reminds everyone that we are all guilty of sin. He calls for us to love our enemies and to respond to evil with good. Based on this, the Catholic bishops of the United States issued a statement in 1980 calling for an end to capital punishment. They have repeated this call several times since then. In 1995 Pope John Paul II, in his encyclical on ethics, *The Gospel of Life*, said punishment for a crime "ought not go to the extreme of executing the offender except in cases of absolute necessity." He saw cases where capital punishment is called for as "very rare if not practically nonexistent" (as quoted in *Origins*, volume 24, page 709).

Given all this, the moral vision of Jesus would seem to call Lucanda to vote against reinstating capital punishment.

Catholic Response to Case Study 4: Pornography on the Web

The question is not really whether Carlos and his friends should stay out of the file because they are not yet eighteen. Even if they were sixty-five, there would be a serious question about whether they should be viewing pornographic material. The church considers pornography to be a serious sin. First, pornography causes those who view it to fantasize about sex with people who are not their spouse—a temptation against the sixth commandment. Second, the pornography industry routinely victimizes many of the men and women who appear in its pictures and videos. Therefore, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says pornography "is a grave offense. Civil authorities should prevent the production and distribution of pornographic materials" (number 2354).

Adolescents are understandably curious about sexual things. But Carlos and his friends should stop before going any further. Pornography can easily become a habit that is difficult to quit. Carlos could save face by making his parents responsible: "Sorry, guys, my parents would lock the computer up if they ever found out." Or he could take a more courageous stand and say: "Sorry, guys, this goes against my values. I want to stay a virgin until marriage, and this just isn't going to help me do that." With the latter response, Carlos would fulfill the Scriptural command "Among you there must be not even a mention of sexual vice or impurity in any of its forms, or greed: this would scarcely become the holy people of God!" (Ephesians 5:3, NJB).

Catholic Response to Case Study 5: Sexual Harassment

There are two issues here: cheating, and responding to sexual harassment. If Su Kim accepts a copy of the final exam in advance, she will be cheating, no matter how she obtains it. Cheating is an offense against the spirit of both the eighth and ninth commandments. It is like stealing from the students who have worked honestly for their grades, and it is lying to the professor and the college. If she accepts the test, Su Kim's self-image will be diminished by the knowledge that she is a thief.

Furthermore, if Su Kim accepts Jerry's offer to come to his apartment, she may be in danger of greater harassment and even rape. If she gets the test by agreeing to a sexual favor, she will also be committing a sin against the sixth and ninth commandments.

Authentic Christian love calls Su Kim to reject preparing for her test by cheating. She will need to work hard to get the best grade she can by legal means. To keep her integrity and prevent what's happening to her from happening to someone else, she also needs to terminate the tutoring relationship and report Jerry's behavior to college authorities.

Catholic Response to Case Study 6: Vandalism

Frank is caught between the value of being accepted and the value of respecting other people's property. He laid the ground for trouble through his consumption of alcohol. His judgment of right and wrong is now impaired, which means it is harder to make a good decision. Alcohol and other drugs are dangerous not just because of their physical side effects but also because they can lead us to make poor moral decisions with even more serious consequences.

Stealing the zoo signs is clearly against the seventh commandment, "You shall not steal." It is also illegal, which means that if Frank, Harley, Rick, and Dave get caught, they could face criminal proceedings. The best thing for them to do is to stop right now. Frank could say something like "Wow, look at the time. If I don't get home in fifteen minutes, my mom probably won't let me use the car again for a month!" In a situation like this, such a statement would be acceptable even if Frank and his mom do not have an agreement about curfew and consequences. Or Frank could simply say: "Wait, guys, this is wrong. Let's stop now." If Harley, Rick, and Dave are the kind of people Frank wants as long-term friends, they will accept his decision. The words of Proverbs 17:17 may help Frank remember, "A friend is a friend for all times" (NJB).

Catholic Response to Case Study 7: Lying to a Friend

Samantha faces an important decision here. Telling Carol that Samantha, Mindy, and Laura are not going to lunch and then going without her would clearly be a lie. Thus, it would be a sin against the eighth commandment. It may seem like a little lie, but even little lies have a way of blowing up on us. What if Carol decides to go to the mall by herself and sees Samantha, Laura, and Mindy? Or what if she hears from someone else that the other girls were at the mall that day? Jesus said: "'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends'" (John 15:12–13). Are Samantha, Mindy, and Laura acting as Jesus commanded?

We are not always going to get along with everyone. However, lying almost always makes things worse. The values of Jesus call Samantha to be honest with Carol. Samantha should tell Carol that Laura and Mindy are uncomfortable with Carol's religious talk—maybe Carol could tone it down a little? Samantha also should tell Laura and Mindy that she will not lie to Carol. If they cannot accept Carol, maybe Samantha will have to keep up separate friendships with Laura and Mindy and with Carol, instead of going out with all three as a group. Finally, Samantha should take some quiet time to reflect on why Carol's religious stuff bothers her. Maybe Carol is being too righteous about her faith. Or maybe Carol's faith is making Samantha feel uneasy about her own relationship with God.

Catholic Response to Case Study 8: A Friend Who Is Homosexual

In the Bible several passages condemn homosexuality. The clearest Christian Testament passage is Romans 1:24–27:

Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the degrading of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen.

For this reason God gave them up to degrading passions. Their women exchanged natural intercourse for unnatural, and in the same way also the men, giving up natural intercourse with women, were consumed with passion for one another.

In our time we see a clear distinction between homosexual orientation, which is when someone is sexually attracted to people of the same sex, and homosexual acts, which means actually having sex with someone of the same sex. Most people do not choose their sexual orientation, therefore it cannot be a sin. Recognizing this, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that people with homosexual orientation "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (number 2358). But the *Catechism* also says that "homosexual persons are called to chastity" (number 2359), that is, are not to be sexually active.

The values of Jesus would call Tyronne to accept Anthony and not break up their friendship because of Anthony's homosexual orientation. Tyronne should continue to offer his love and support to his friend even if it becomes known publicly that Anthony is gay. This may be difficult, but Jesus, who was a friend to all outcasts, also said, "'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends'" (John 15:13). Tyronne might also encourage Anthony to speak to a trusted counselor at church or at school, to help him sort things out.