

Growing in Christian Morality

Casebook Leader's Guide

by Kathleen Crawford Hodapp



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INTRODUCTION

As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

—Colossians 3:12–17

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- What does religion have to do with my life?
- How do I know right from wrong?
- How do I make good decisions?

Great questions from teenagers! And what answers do we give them? Learning what Christian morality entails is a very important part of a Catholic teenager's religious education, whether it is part of a high school curriculum, a parish religious education program, or a youth ministry program.

The Virtuous Life

Catholic education calls young people to a life of virtue. Jesus is the role model for this life; he lived out the moral virtues, which are the building blocks of character.

Character development and moral decision making are related. Moral behaviors are shaped more by the character we have developed than by the rules or principles we learn. In a morality course, it is important to encourage students to develop a character that is consistent with our divinely graced human nature and our ultimate destiny with God. A wise saying captures this truth:

Plant an act; reap a habit.

Plant a habit; reap a virtue or a vice.

Plant a virtue or a vice; reap a character.

Plant a character; reap a destiny.

“Pray It! Study It! Live It!”

The Catholic Youth Bible certainly catches the wisdom of the best religious educators in its subtitle, “Pray It! Study It! Live It!” Students have often expressed that they learn the most from classes that allow them to connect the content with life experience. They want “real-life” applications in the midst of studying the material. Students also wonder how prayer and God enter into the moral dilemmas of their life. The cases in this book weave real-life applications with content and prayer through a process for making decisions.



The LISTEN Process

Moral decision-making skills can be taught. The LISTEN process is the vehicle for these skills. LISTEN is an acronym that outlines the steps in a decision-making process:

- **L**ook for the facts.
- **I**magine possibilities.
- **S**eek insight beyond your own.
- **T**urn inward.
- **E**xpect God's help.
- **N**ame your decision.

As young people learn the steps of the process and study related concepts, the LISTEN process allows for real-life application. Here, too, young people will learn that decision making is both a skill and an art.

The cases in this book are the real-life experiences of real people who have faced moral decisions. Reading the stories of these individuals and then applying the LISTEN process allows teens to explore moral dilemmas from another person's viewpoint.

Special Features of This Leader's Guide

This guide is designed to be a resource for the *Growing in Christian Morality* textbook (Winona, MN: Saint Mary's Press, 2002), although it can work well with any morality course, parish religious education program, or youth ministry program. Everything that you need to lead a session is provided in a friendly format that puts all relevant information at your fingertips.

The guide also gives you permission to photocopy handouts, cases, and prayer experiences—all of which can be used to build lessons or programs of varied lengths. This guide can also be used in conjunction with the student casebook that has all the cases and LISTEN application pieces in a bound format.

Special features of the leader's guide include the following:

- *a concise introduction* to the LISTEN process, sample questions for each step of the process, and an attractive two-page visual for case applications
- *over thirty cases* divided into themes based on the moral virtues of wise judgment, justice, courage, wholeness, honesty, respect for people, compassion, respect for creation, reverence for life, and peacemaking
- *ten discussion-starters*—a new and creative one for each theme—to help you process the cases
- *ten reproducible handouts* with a short prayer focus based on each of the moral virtues or themes

- *strategies for faith application* to take the concepts out of the learning environment and apply them to the real world
- *an outline of important concepts* to develop for each case, along with a specific focus for each case
- references to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, provided as helpful teaching background
- Scripture connections to articles in *The Catholic Youth Bible*
- course connections to relevant topics in the student text *Growing in Christian Morality*
- *case research leads* with relevant Web sites that pertain to concepts, organizations, or issues in the case
- *follow-up to the cases*, when applicable
- *sample questions* for each step of the LISTEN process

How to Use This Guide

The student casebook and leader's guide are intended to support a morality course by providing meaningful applications of the content. The cases may be used as discussion-starters, assigned as homework for individual reflection, or compiled by students into a decision-making portfolio.

The themes, which are based on the moral virtues, do not need to be studied in any special order, which provides flexibility. Also, depending on the needs of the youth in your class or program, you may choose to study all the cases in a particular theme or just a select few. Because each case has a particular focus, they can stand alone or be used in a more comprehensive program.

At the beginning of each theme section, a short focusing prayer and a suggested discussion-starter help you set the theme. After studying the cases in each theme section, you can follow through further by using the suggested action steps for faith application. The goal here is to truly pray, study, and live the virtue emphasized in each case.

Ongoing Support

Saint Mary's Press is committed to providing excellent resources for those ministering to youth. One such resource is the Faith Community Builders Web site, www.smp.org/bs. This site is filled with resources, links, and discussion related to the study of morality and to the cases presented here.

Theme Section Resources

Discussion-Starter: Character Role in a Fishbowl

Vary the way you discuss and process the cases in your classroom. Try this idea during one of the cases in this section.

Ask for volunteers to participate in a fishbowl discussion, where a small group of students sits in the center or front of class, and has a “normal” discussion while the rest of the class listens. What makes this discussion different is that the students will assume the role of the people in the story and answer questions from those people’s perspective. Ask questions that require the students to apply the LISTEN process, such as those in the casebook, or use the statements listed in the concept focus sections. After a good deal of discussion in the fishbowl format, ask the rest of the class to analyze the responses from the “characters.”

Faith Application

After discussing the cases in this theme section, ask the students to consider an action step that would move what they have learned out into the world. Consider these possibilities:

- discussing with the seniors of the school “fun” pranks as opposed to those that vandalize property and hurt people
- learning more about gun control legislation

Opening Prayer

(See handout on next page.)

WISE JUDGMENT

Good-Conscience-in-Action



A Prayer for Wise Judgment

Leader: God of wisdom, let us be open to what you can teach us! Let us hear the words from the eighth chapter of Proverbs that can guide our steps and actions each day.

Reader 1: “Does not wisdom call, and does not understanding raise her voice?” (v. 1)

Reader 2: “To you, O people, I call, and my cry is to all that live. O simple ones, learn prudence; acquire intelligence, you who lack it.” (v. 4)

Reader 1: “Hear, for I will speak noble things, and from my lips will come what is right; for my mouth will utter truth.” (v. 6–7)

Reader 3: “Take my instruction instead of silver, and knowledge rather than choice gold; for wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.” (v. 10–11)

Reader 1: “The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil.” (v. 13)

Reader 4: “Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.” (v. 13)

Reader 1: “I have good advice and sound wisdom; I have insight, I have strength.” (v. 14)

Reader 5: “Those who seek me diligently find me.” (v. 17)

All: I walk in the way of righteousness, along the paths of justice. Amen.

Resources for Judgment Case 1

A Deadly Practical Joke

Concept Focus: Impulse Control

Throughout the discussion of the case, bring up the following points and have the students apply and reflect on them:

- We practice wise judgment when we develop our *conscience*, make decisions according to it, and carry out those decisions.
- We practice wise judgment when we seek reality by searching for solid information and weighing the *consequences* of each *option*.
- We practice wise judgment when we evaluate the *means* used to accomplish a good end.

Catechism Connections

Read the following passages in the *Catechism* and ask the students to explain how the faith statement can be applied to this case:

- Circumstances are secondary elements of a moral act. (no. 1754)
- We cannot judge the morality of an act by considering only the intention. (no. 1756)
- Willfully damaging private or public property is contrary to moral law. (no. 2409)

Scripture Connections

The Catholic Youth Bible (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press) includes an article on responsibility that can connect with Matilda’s story:

- “Caught Up in the Moment” (see Ex 32.1–35)

Course Connections

This case can be used with the course *Growing in Christian Morality* with the chapter on wise judgment:

- knowing one’s own feelings and motives (p. 97)

Follow-up for Judgment Case 1: A Deadly Practical Joke

No charges were filed against Mr. Crabtree.



The LISTEN Process Applied

Use the sample questions below to help the students work through the application of the LISTEN process for this case. You may wish to suggest questions for the students or focus on one particular section of the process.

Look for the Facts

1. What was the critical decision Matilda needed to make?
2. What was the critical decision Mr. Crabtree needed to make?
3. What circumstances surrounded the decision?
4. What role did time play in this situation?

Imagine Possibilities

1. What possible decisions could Matilda have made that night?
2. What possible options did Mr. Crabtree have for handling the situation?
3. What short- and long-term consequences could potentially result from each decision? (You may wish to use the consequence tree handout on page 208 for this activity.)

Seek Insight Beyond Your Own

1. What would you say to Matilda's suggestion to go back to her house and play a joke on her parents?
2. Who would you turn to for advice in deciding whether or not to play a practical joke on someone?
3. What would your parents expect from you in a situation like this?

Turn Inward

1. What motives would you have for participating in a practical joke?
2. What role would your conscience play in deciding whether to play a practical joke on someone?
3. How would you feel if someone played a practical joke like this on you?

Expect God's Help

1. Compose a prayer that would help you make a wise decision in this case.

Name Your Decision

1. What decision would you make if you were in Matilda's situation?
2. What core values are being upheld in living out that decision?

Final Questions and Thoughts on Judgment Case 1:

A Deadly Practical Joke

1. Whom do you most identify with in this case? Why?
2. Apply the LISTEN process from the viewpoint of Mr. Crabtree. How would you handle a situation in which you thought someone had broken into your house?
3. Explain how the virtue of wise judgment was not clearly demonstrated in this case.
4. What does this case teach about impulse control?
5. What lingering questions or thoughts do you have after reflecting on this case?



Judgment Case 1

A Deadly Practical Joke

One Saturday night, fourteen-year-old Matilda Kaye Crabtree had planned to spend the night at a friend's house while her parents were away. But later she changed her mind and the two girls went back to Matilda's house.

Hours later, around 1:00 a.m., Matilda heard her parents' car pull into the driveway. She and her friend decided to play a practical joke on them by making noises as they hid in a closet. They wanted to make it seem like someone was breaking in.

When Mr. Crabtree heard the noises, he found his gun and went through the house to investigate. Matilda heard her dad approaching and then jumped out of the closet yelling, "Boo!" Taken by surprise, Mr. Crabtree fired his pistol, shooting his daughter in the neck. Matilda's friend was not hurt.

Matilda was rushed to the hospital, where she died twelve hours after the shooting. The last words she spoke to her father were, "I love you, Daddy."

No charges were filed against the father. A deputy said that Mr. Crabtree totally focused on Matilda while she was in the hospital and was devastated by what happened.

Applying the LISTEN Process

Direct the students to their casebook or photocopy and distribute the LISTEN process handout on page 209 for use with the students.