

CONTENTS

Introduction.....	4
32. Living the Moral Life.....	10
33. Moral Decision Making.....	20
34. Honoring God.....	30
35. Honoring Family.....	40
36. Respecting Life.....	50
37. Respecting Truth and Property.....	60
38. Respecting Sexuality.....	70
39. Working for Justice.....	80
Acknowledgments.....	90

Chapter 33

Moral Decision Making

Preparing for the Chapter

Background for the Teacher

To Thine Own Self Be True (Shakespeare)

"Just let your conscience be your guide," sang Jiminy Cricket in the movie *Pinocchio*. This singing cricket was Pinocchio's conscience, and it took all of Jiminy's moral persuasion to get Pinocchio to follow "the straight and narrow" so he could become a real boy.

We too are in the process of becoming. We, like Pinocchio, are trying to become "more real" each day—truer to God, truer to ourselves, and ultimately, truer and more loving toward others. We express this real, or true, self by our good decisions. Action by action, the true self breaks through the barrier of the false self that can lead us astray—the false self that thrives on the illusion that controlling other people or acquiring more things will bring us happiness.

How can we keep the false self (the self that wants what I want when I want it) from getting the upper hand in our lives? The various anonymous recovery programs (originally for alcoholics but now supporting anyone dealing with addictions) thrive on short slogans to help members find and express their true selves. One is "GOD stands for Good Orderly Direction." If you want to emerge from the fogginess, the illusion, the anxiety, the compulsions of the false self, do something positive. Take an action in a good orderly direction. Even a small action, like washing dishes or cleaning out a drawer, will help. As Jesus said in the parable of the talents, one who is faithful in small things will be faithful in greater ones (see Matthew 25:21). Good action prepares us for good moral decisions. Good moral decisions strengthen the true self. Action by action, we become truer to ourselves, more real, more complete, and happier human beings.

Isn't that what God wanted all along? Isn't that what we want too? Who would have guessed that happiness would follow simply from our own good actions? Yet we cannot take credit for them completely. In our good actions, we cooperate with God's grace. Ephesians 2:10 explains, "God has made us what we are, and in our union with Christ Jesus he has created us for a life of good deeds, which he has already prepared for us to do."

As the saying goes, "Don't just stand there—do something!" Do the next good thing. A lifetime of good deeds awaits us.

Catechism references: 1749–1756 (**The Sources of Morality**), 1776–1802 (**Moral Conscience**), 1846–1876 (**Mercy and Sin**)

Teacher's Prayer

Lord, you love us so much that you gave us the ability to choose our own paths. As Catholics we have chosen to follow you, yet we live in a world filled with temptations. We all need your

The peace that Christ gives is to guide you in the decisions you make.

—Colossians 3:15

guidance and wisdom to remain faithful to you. Please help me as I lead my students in discovering and developing ways to make good decisions that will lead them closer to you. Amen.

Teacher's Reflection

How do I help my true self break through in times of fogginess or anxiety?

Background Reading

- *The Catholic Connections Handbook for Middle Schoolers*, chapter 33
- CCC, numbers 1749–1756 (The Sources of Morality), 1776–1802 (Moral Conscience), 1846–1876 (Mercy and Sin)
- Colossians 3:1–17

Overview

In this chapter, the students will learn about moral decision making and what makes a choice moral or immoral. The chapter also discusses venial and mortal sins and their effect on our relationship with God, and it identifies the seven deadly sins. The sources of a moral action—the object, the intention, and the circumstance—and the role of each in defining the degree to which an action is moral or immoral are also explained, as is the gift of God's love, which restores our relationship with him when we have sinned. Finally, the sources of moral guidance that God gives us, particularly the Church's teachings, are also presented.

Learning Goals

Enable the students to

- understand the factors that determine the morality of an act: the object, intention, and circumstance
- distinguish between venial sin and mortal sin and know venial sins are called deadly because they can lead to eternal separation from God
- know that because of God's great love for us, he restores our broken relationships with him after we have sinned

Preparing for the Activities

Materials

"Additional Activity"

- poster board (one sheet per group)
- colored pencils or markers

"Activity master 33B"

- colored pencils or crayons

"Extending the Lesson"

- copies of a pastoral letter or Web posting from your bishop, one for each student

"Media Connections" (optional)

- the DVDs *Teen Scenes* (22 minutes) and *More Teen Scenes* (30 minutes) (Oblate Media & Communication)



Opening with Prayer

1. **Invite** the students to gather in the prayer corner. Direct them to quiet themselves for prayer.
2. **Light** a candle, make the Sign of the Cross, and lead everyone in saying, "Let us remember that we are in the holy presence of God."
3. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud Colossians 3:15 on page 381 in the handbook.
4. **Pray** the following:
 - Lord, you have fashioned us in your own image. Though sometimes we fail to choose good and resist evil, we are truly your people longing to serve you and grow closer to you. Give us the grace to do your will always. Amen.

Close with the Sign of the Cross.



Preview Activity

1. **Distribute** copies of activity master 33A, "Let Your Conscience Be Your Guide."
2. **Read aloud** the introduction and activity directions.
3. **Invite** the students to complete the activity. When everyone has finished, **review** the responses to each temptation. **Encourage** the students to reflect on their responses and to recall the importance of stopping to listen to their consciences when they must make a moral decision.

Introducing Chapter 33

1. **Have** the students turn to page 380 in their handbooks. Tell them that in this chapter they will learn about sin and the guidance we have in avoiding it.
2. **Call attention** to the Key Words list on page 387. Tell the students to listen for the meaning of these words as they read them in the chapter.
3. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the chapter introduction on pages 380 and 381.
4. **Remind** the students that some ways to form their consciences include reading the Bible, learning what the Church teaches, and learning or reading about saints and other holy people who strived always to live in ways pleasing to God.

The Sources of Moral Action

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the first two paragraphs of "The Sources of Moral Action" on pages 381 and 382.
2. **Ask:**
 - What three things must we consider when we judge the morality of an act? (*the object, the intention, and the circumstances*)
 - How do we define the object? the intention? the circumstance? (*the object is the action itself; the intention is our purpose in doing the action; and the circumstance is other factors,*

such as what we know and don't know and outside pressure beyond our reasonable ability to control or overcome.)

3. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the next two paragraphs of “The Sources of Moral Action” on page 382.
4. **Emphasize** that some actions are always wrong. Examples include mistreating children and taking advantage of or exploiting the weak members of society to enrich ourselves or others.
5. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the first paragraph on page 383.
6. **Engage** the students in a discussion about how the intention is important in determining the rightness or wrongness of an act. **Encourage** volunteers to give examples of actions that might be wrong in some cases and right in others, depending on the intention. (Possible examples include telling on a friend or sibling who is engaging in risky behavior to protect the person versus telling to get the person into trouble; disobeying someone in authority because of a moral objection to what the person requires versus disobeying because you don't want to follow the rules.)
7. **Call on** a volunteer to read aloud the paragraphs about circumstances on pages 383 and 384.
8. **Lead** a discussion by asking:
 - How does the circumstance in which the act is done affect the wrongness of the act? (If the person committing the act that would be considered immoral cannot control or defend against certain factors that lead to doing the act, the person's responsibility is lessened.)
 - How is a person's responsibility not lessened despite ignorance of the immorality of an act? (We are all responsible for forming our consciences by learning God's law and developing a habit of choosing to do the right thing, even when doing so poses challenges.)
 - How we can develop well-formed consciences? (by reading the Scriptures, learning Church teachings, and seeking the guidance of holy people and the Holy Spirit)
 - Who in your life helps you develop a strong, well-formed conscience?

For More Information

HALT!

The anonymous recovery programs use the acronym “HALT!” as a slogan to remind participants that no one can make good decisions or steer clear of temptation if that person is too hungry, angry, lonely, or tired. When we are physically or emotionally vulnerable, the wrong path looms as ever more attractive. When we find ourselves in such a condition, when we are somehow “beside ourselves” and not comfortable in our own skin, we can do one thing: We can assess how we are. We can use “HALT!” as a short checklist to get us back on track. Once we take care of our root need—to eat, to calm down, to call a trusted relative or friend, to take a nap or go to bed early for a change—we are able to make better decisions, for our own sake and for the sake of those who depend on us. You might like to share this acronym with your students. As they identify the sources of their own anxieties, they may be able to learn to meet their own needs in a positive way.

Did You Know?

1. **Call on** a volunteer to read aloud the “Did You Know?” sidebar on page 382.
2. **Explain** that venial sins, although less serious, weaken our relationship with God. Repetition of venial sins can develop vices in us, or the inclination toward doing something wrong repeatedly.
3. **Share** that mortal sin requires confessing the sin in the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation to be forgiven. **Explain** that if a person dies without the ability to receive absolution through the Sacrament of Penance and Reconciliation but sincerely seeks God’s forgiveness, God will show mercy to the person.

Fun Fact

1. **Read aloud** the “Fun Fact” sidebar on page 383.
2. **Invite** volunteers to share their opinions on the Supreme Court’s decision. Ask the students to share ways in which promoting greater knowledge of the Ten Commandments can lead to a more civilized and peaceful society.

Aiming for God

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the first three paragraphs of “Aiming for God” on pages 384 and 385.
2. **Call on** a volunteer to read aloud the next two paragraphs of “Aiming for God” on pages 385 and 386.
3. **Invite** a volunteer to tell what it means to say that sin starts in small ways but can develop into capital sins. (*The response should reflect the idea that committing a small [venial] sin can seem like no big deal, but doing so can make it easier to commit the sin again and again, until it becomes a damaging habit, or a vice, which can then lead to a serious, or mortal, sin.*)
4. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the next three paragraphs on pages 386 and 387.
5. **Call on** a volunteer to define *justification* in his or her own words. (*Justification is the process by which God takes away the damaging effect of our sins and restores us to friendship with him. He forgives our sins and makes us holy.*)
6. **Continue** the discussion about justification by asking the following questions:
 - What makes freedom from sin and forgiveness of our sins possible? (*Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross*)
 - Why is God’s love essential for justification? (*God’s love helps us turn away from sin, strengthens us to choose good over evil, and enables us to seek and receive forgiveness for our sins.*)
 - How does the experience of Saint Peter illustrate justification? (*Peter showed human weakness and betrayed Jesus, but Jesus’ mercy and love brought him back into a good relationship with Jesus.*)

Explain that Peter felt remorse for betraying Jesus. He could have despaired, but instead he trusted in God's love and mercy and was forgiven. When we sin we can admit our failings but also know that God will forgive us.

- How does Peter's experience encourage you to seek God's forgiveness when you sin?

FYI

Saint Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225–1274)

Much of the study of moral theology owes a debt of gratitude to Saint Thomas Aquinas. Through his study of Greek philosophy, Aquinas merged the best of the ancient world with the principles of Christianity. According to Aquinas, the goal of human life is happiness. Ultimate happiness is union with God in the perfect, unending happiness of Heaven. Our lives on earth can be paths to that happiness through charity, peace, and holiness. (When we sin, of course, we think we are choosing happiness, but in reality we are making the wrong choices and taking the wrong paths to our goals.) Our everyday choices "to do good and to avoid evil" (as Aquinas wrote) can bring us happiness here on earth and unending happiness in Heaven.

Pray It! Liturgy Connection

1. **Read aloud** the "Pray It! Liturgy Connection" sidebar on page 384.
2. **Invite** the students to turn to page 502 in their handbooks. **Direct** their attention to the *Confiteor*. **Invite** the students to pray the prayer aloud together. **Point out** that this is the prayer we say during the Penitential Act at the start of Mass. **Encourage** the students to pay attention to the words when they pray this prayer and to be intent on asking God for mercy.

Think About It!

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the "Think About It!" sidebar on page 386.
2. **Direct** the students to open their Bibles to Colossians, chapter 3. **Call on** a volunteer to read aloud Colossians 3:1–17.
3. **Review** the message of this Scripture passage by inviting volunteers to respond to the questions at the end of the sidebar. **Continue** the review by asking:
 - What are some qualities Paul advised his audience to rid themselves of? (*anger, malice, fury, slander, and lying*)
 - What qualities does he advise them to adopt? (*heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, forgiveness, and especially love*)



Did You Know?

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the “Did You Know?” sidebar on page 389.
2. **Review** the seven deadly sins with the students. **Call on** volunteers to give examples of messages we receive through the media or in society that can make these sins seem acceptable or in some cases even desirable.

Additional Activity

1. **Tell** the students that the reason the seven deadly sins are so deadly is that they are the root causes of many other sins.
2. **Ask** the students to gather into groups of three or four. **Give** each group a piece of poster board and colored pencils or markers. **Ask** them to draw a tree with seven roots and to label each root with one of the deadly sins.
3. **Ask** them to think of sins, or situations that could lead to sin, related to the seven deadly sins. **Instruct** the students to write these on their posters, up the tree and around it, using arrows. For example, greed is the root cause of cheating in financial matters, stealing, working too many hours, neglecting family obligations, and so forth.
4. If there is giggling or inappropriate remarks around lust, **remind** the students that relationship violence is rising in our society, and this is no laughing matter. The compulsion to control another person can be an offshoot of lust, and this need to control (which is never part of a healthy relationship) can result in tragedy. **Emphasize** that lust is not love, control is not love, and violence is not love. **Teach** that love means respect and caring. **Emphasize** strongly that if someone is not treating you with respect and care, that person does not belong in your life. Strongly **suggest** that this situation be brought to the attention of a trusted adult.
5. When all are finished, **allow** the students to share and discuss their posters.



Activity

1. **Distribute** copies of activity master 33B along with colored pencils or crayons. Direct the students' attention to the second activity, “Batting the Seven Deadly Sins.”
2. **Have** the students quietly read the directions and work to create their bumper stickers. When everyone has finished, invite volunteers to share their bumper stickers with the class.

Rock-solid Guidance

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud “Rock-solid Guidance” on pages 387 and 388.
2. **Share** with the students that the Church's teachings, given to us through the authority of the Pope and the bishops, guide us in living moral lives pleasing to God and in harmony with the natural law.

3. **Call on** a volunteer to explain in his or her own words what it means when we say the Magisterium is infallible. (*When speaking on matters of faith and morals, the Pope, and bishops in union with him, teach without error.*) **Explain** that the Pope and the bishops are responsible for teaching us how the Church's doctrine is to be applied to our moral lives, based on the natural law and human reason.

Extending the Lesson

4. To acquaint students with the teaching authority of the Church at the local diocesan level, **have available** copies (one for each student) of a recent letter from your bishop. Often these pastoral letters can be found printed in the diocesan newspaper or posted on the diocesan Web site.
5. **Read** the letter aloud together and discuss its contents. **Encourage** the students to look for and read their bishop's letters on a regular basis. The bishop is the primary teacher of the diocese, and in his teaching he, with the help of the Holy Spirit, strengthens the faith of the people of his diocese.
6. **Remind** the students that infallibility means that the Pope and bishops, when proclaiming a doctrine of faith or morals, speak without error. The Pope is infallible by virtue of his office as supreme pastor and teacher. The bishops, together with the Pope, speak infallibly when they proclaim a doctrine of faith or morals, particularly when gathered in an Ecumenical Council. Like every other Christian, the Pope and bishops endeavor to speak the truth and are especially empowered by the Holy Spirit to teach the truths of faith. This does not mean that every word the Pope or the bishops say every day is infallible (see CCC, nos. 888–892).

Live It!

1. **Invite** a volunteer to read aloud the "Live It!" sidebar on page 388.
2. **Help** the students reflect on the message of this sidebar by having them complete the following activity.

Activity

1. **Distribute** copies of activity master 33B. **Direct** the students' attention to the first activity, "Live It!"
2. **Read aloud** the introduction and directions and have the students fill out the chart about temptations and making better choices. When everyone has finished, **call on** volunteers to share their answers. (*Possible temptations for clothing might be to dress immodestly; for music CDs it may be to listen to music that has lewd lyrics or lyrics that demean a particular group of people; for movies, the temptation may be to imitate the immoral behavior of the characters. Note also that the temptations may be indirectly related to the ads. For example, ads for clothing or music CDs may lead to the temptation to steal. Lead the students to recognize that because these advertising messages are so commonplace, it is sometimes hard to judge them objectively and realize that their message is not in keeping with the Commandments.*)



Closing Activity

1. **Distribute** copies of activity master 33C, “A Moral Decision Word Search.”
2. **Invite** the students to complete the word search. When all have finished, **review** with the class the solution to the word search.



Closing Prayer

1. **Invite** the students to open their handbooks to page 381. When all are ready, ask a volunteer to read aloud the prayer in the “Pray It!” sidebar.
2. **Conclude** with the following prayer:
 - Jesus, open my heart and mind to the guidance you give me through the Church’s teachings to help live a moral life pleasing to you. Make me worthy to be called your disciple. Amen.

Close with the Sign of the Cross.

Chapter Test

1. The chapter test will help the students recall what they have learned. The test covers the key points of the chapter.
2. **Distribute** copies of the chapter 33 test from the *Catholic Connections for Middle Schoolers Test Booklet*.
3. **Explain** to the students that completing the test exercises will help them remember the content of the chapter they have just completed. **Direct** them to work quietly to complete the test.
4. **Collect** and **grade** the test. Alternatively, you may wish to **review** the answers to the test as a group. **Review** with the students any items that were generally misunderstood. **Refer** to the answer key at the back of the test booklet for the correct answers as well as a list of the pages on which the answers can be found.



Activity

1. Distribute copies of activity master 33B along with colored pencils or crayons. Draw the students’ attention to the second activity, “Reading the Seven Deadly Sins.”

2. Have the students quietly read the description and work to create their own...



Rockin’ in! Cadenza

Media Connections (optional)

Throughout this unit, show appropriate scenes from *Teen Scenes* (22 minutes) and *More Teen Scenes* (30 minutes), available from Oblate Media & Communication.

- *Teen Scenes* shows four vignettes, one on each of the following topics: plagiarism, shoplifting, peer pressure, and gossip or cliques. The appropriate ages for this video are age 12 through high school.
- *More Teen Scenes* shows four moral dilemmas based on the subjects of chastity, alcohol, bullies, and racism. The appropriate ages for this video are junior high and up.

In both videos each scene ends just as a decision is about to be made—and then the rest is up to the viewer. A leader's guide is included with each video to help the leader engage the viewers in discussion.