



YEAR LEVEL	9 and 10
TITLE	Making Christian Decisions
STRAND	CHRISTIAN MORALITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
SUGGESTED DURATION	10 weeks (25 hours)
ENDURING QUESTIONS	How are we called to contribute to the common good? How can I use my gifts for the common good?

## Unit Focus

In this unit, students will investigate the relationship between Christian values, conscience formation and decision making. It will seek to inform the students of the Catholic Christian view of values, morality and sin. Students will also understand the role of Scripture, the dignity of the human person and the Church in the establishment of a personal and informed conscience. Christian decision making strategies will be explored.

## Achievement Standards

By the end of Year Ten:

***Students examine Christian life as being informed by Church teaching, human development and conscience, and inspired by people of faith.***

## Unit Outcomes

By the end of this unit students should be able to:

1. Research and understand the frameworks for moral and ethical discernment within the Jewish and Christian traditions.
2. Examine the role of conscience in Christian decision-making.
3. Explain and apply steps in Christian moral decision-making.

## Key Understandings for Students

- Values are those things held as being important by the individual or a society and are used to help us make our decisions.
- Our values are influenced by many factors including, family, peer group, Church, school, the wider community, media, social media, and music.
- Traditionally, western society's moral and ethical values originate from the Jewish Tradition and have been shaped by Christian Scripture. They have been further developed by the lived experience of the followers of Christ.
- Gospel values include justice, mercy, compassion, forgiveness, peace and liberty.

- Conscience is making a moral judgement, that is deciding whether an action is right or wrong. It is important that individuals have a conscience that is properly formed and informed. Having formed our conscience it is our moral obligation to follow faithfully what we know to be just and right.
- Decision making involves following one of the many methods available in order to make an informed decision. It involves analysing the problem, looking at all the available options to solving the problem, choosing one and putting it into action and then evaluating the decision at the end to decide if it was a good one or not.
- Prayer and discernment are important tools to be used when attempting to make a wise or moral decision. Looking at the examples set by Jesus will also help the individual to make good decisions.
- Christian decision making has as its aim not only to make the correct decision morally but also to bring about the Reign of God or to live out the Kingdom of God here on earth.
- *The word “discern” means to “separate” or “distinguish between”...Christian... discernment is a... life skill by which one can realise God’s will and act in harmony with Gospel values. (Ekstrom, 2000, p.80-81)*

## Student Context

Teachers of Year 9 and 10 students may expect them to exhibit a capacity for introspection and insight and an ability to make one’s own, in very particular ways, certain values that have come from different influences. They question the behaviours and priorities of adult figures, and express disillusionment when they perceive logical inconsistencies and a mismatch between rhetoric and practice.

Growth in moral decision-making is life-long. Year 9 and 10 students are just emerging as abstract thinkers. Attention should therefore be given to the use of concrete life experiences rather than to examples of abstract moral dilemmas which are not relevant to them. The former is more likely to stimulate fruitful consideration of moral and ethical issues and thus challenge the students to appropriate Christ-like responses. In the face of complex issues young people need support and guidance to clarify their own values and convictions. They are caught in the struggle between the need to rely on authority and the need to think, decide and be responsible for themselves. Family, peers, media and information technologies often provide messages about what is right and wrong so it is important for teachers to give their students strategies to make balanced and informed moral decisions.

## Theological Background for Teachers

- Choosing life’s path, one’s stance on contemporary issues, lifestyle, or simply living in today’s pluralistic society requires reflection and choices based on a wide range of values. For the Christian discerning what is the correct choice or the right path to follow requires knowledge, skills, understandings and pathways to the mind, heart and teachings of Jesus Christ, the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the prompting of informed conscience. This unit will seek to inform the student of the Catholic Christian view of values, morality and sin. Students will also understand the role of Scriptures, the dignity of the human person and the Church in the establishment of a personal and informed conscience.
- All societies have *moral codes* governing matters of life and death, sexuality and relationships, honesty and truth, justice and equality. Different religious groups have their own moral codes. The golden rule, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” forms something of a common orientation for such moral codes. Certain moral matters, such as prohibition against murder, violence and stealing, are often incorporated into the law of the land. Matters such as adultery are regarded by some communities as private morality. Other communities regard adultery as falling within the public law and punishable by the state. In pluralistic societies there is a measure of agreement in some basic moral matters protecting life, property and bodily integrity while there exists a large measure of disagreement in many areas when it comes to the application of basic moral principles to concrete matters. In contrast Catholics are challenged by the Ten Commandments, the Beatitudes, and the teachings and examples of Jesus, the ongoing teaching of the Church and their informed conscience as foundational in Christian discernment.

- Jesus Christ is the source and inspiration for Christians to discern what is right or wrong in any given situation. Jesus was a Jew and thus his moral understanding is founded on his Jewish moral heritage. He did not come to destroy the Jewish law summarised in the Ten Commandments, but to bring it to fulfilment.
- The Beatitudes (Mt 5: 3-11 and Lk 6:20-26) sum up Christian attitudes and values. The Beatitudes are addressed to those who realise their dependence on God, who are gentle, compassionate and hunger and thirst for justice, who are merciful, honest and humble, who are peacemakers and who are prepared to suffer persecution. The Parables, the teachings of Jesus and his very life, challenge and teach, call and inspire the Christian to consider, choose and act in ways that discern what it is to be a Christian or follower of Jesus.
- Initially it is important for students to have an understanding of values and their role in forming conscience and informing decision-making. Values have been defined as qualities, goals or things which people consider important. One's values come from and are developed from a myriad of sources. They form a deep part of one's being. They act on one's thinking, actions, relationships and choices. All are constantly met and challenged by values present in a pluralistic society. Values can change, broaden, develop, deepen, waver or be lost but they are certainly a dynamic aspect of one's being. They are intimately related to moral decision-making, sin and forgiveness, ultimately to the heart of being human.
- Morality involves human judgement and human action. It has to do with how one behaves, the choices one makes and the motive one has for actions and decisions. It is the free and informed movement towards the good. It is the choosing to do that which enables you to be the best person you can be at any given moment of your life, promotes the genuine good of others and enables society to be the best society it can be at any given moment in history. Once again, Jesus Christ is the source and inspiration of Christian morality.
- Ethics are concerned with how we should live. They take into account not only our personal wellbeing, but also the impact of our choices on others and the world at large. Any system of ethics is rooted in an understanding of the human person. Whilst ethics is based on a philosophy of humanity it is closely related to morality which draws on religious understanding.
- Vatican II described conscience as a person's most secret core and sanctuary. It is the experience of us as moral agents passing judgements. It flows from our self-knowledge as rational and free human beings. Every person develops a conscience. For the Christian, conscience is our experience of ourselves enlivened by the Holy Spirit and judging according to God's revelation. Conscience can be viewed as the act of a person judging the moral goodness of a proposed course of action. Conscience requires constant formation. One's moral judgement is based on one's faith, personal experience, knowledge and moral code. These are subject to constant growth and review. One also experiences negative forces at work such as sin and self-interest. Their influence has to be continually recognised and countered.
- "... conscience is now seen as more than an intellectual, skilled exercise in right decision making ... [it comprises] both a fundamental attitude or way of living that adheres to the good or the right, plus a fundamental way of acting that results from the correct use of reason and sound decision making skills. ... as a capacity, conscience enables a person to do what is good and to avoid what is evil. This fundamentally human orientation to the good also gives a person a sense of moral value and responsibility toward life. As a process, conscience involves accurate perception and moral reason so as to be able to search out accurately the objective moral values in each specific situation in order to discover the right thing to do... conscience uses its judgment dimension to evaluate and to decide what each unique person must do in a particular situation; the judgment dimension of conscience also enables the person to commit to that decision." (Caron, p.105)

- “A person’s conscience must operate in an environment of freedom in order for the conscience to develop and to act ethically or morally. Freedom involves two human capacities: freedom of choice and the power of self-determination ... both are necessary components for responsible ethical decision making.” (Caron, p107)

### *Christian Discernment*

- Christian discernment may follow the line that an individual has an obligation to act according to one’s conscience. The individual must weigh up the competing concerns shared by all involved, through prayer, the guidance of the Commandments, the inspiration of the beatitudes and teachings of Christ, the enlightening guidance of the Church and the Holy Spirit. The final choices and responsibilities rest with the individual.
- The object of Christian discernment is to identify the presence or absence of God in human activity. The process is experiential and deductive and enables practical judgements and decisions about life choices. Christian discernment attends to feelings and thoughts in a prudent way. Over time, a person who develops their relationship with God and grows in self-knowledge becomes alert to indicators of God’s will and is able to make decisions that are in harmony with their fundamental life option. The challenge is to properly interpret the feelings that show consonance to or dissonance from the spiritual orientation of the person and to interpret associated choices. Individuals who practise Christian discernment seek validation of their decisions from the community and/or from mentors or spiritual companions (Wakefield, 116).

## Scripture

### **Deuteronomy 5:6-21 *The Ten Commandments***

6 I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>7</sup>you shall have no other gods before me. <sup>8</sup>You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>9</sup>You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>10</sup>but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments. <sup>11</sup>You shall not make wrongful use of the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not acquit anyone who misuses his name. <sup>12</sup>Observe the sabbath day and keep it holy, as the LORD your God commanded you. <sup>13</sup>Six days you shall labour and do all your work. <sup>14</sup>But the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God; you shall not do any work--you, or your son or your daughter, or your male or female slave, or your ox or your donkey, or any of your livestock, or the resident alien in your towns, so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. <sup>15</sup>Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm; therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the sabbath day. <sup>16</sup>Honor your father and your mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>17</sup>You shall not murder. <sup>18</sup>Neither shall you commit adultery. <sup>19</sup>Neither shall you steal. <sup>20</sup>Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbour. <sup>21</sup>Neither shall you covet your neighbour’s wife. Neither shall you desire your neighbour’s house, or field, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

### **Mt 22: 34-40 *The Greatest Commandment***

When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" He said to them, "'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the greatest and the first commandment. And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the laws and the prophets."

### **Mt 5: 3-11 *The Beatitudes***

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called the children of God.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### **1 Jn 3:18-23 *Love One Another***

Little children, let us love, not in word or speech, but in truth and action. And by this we will know that we are from the truth and will reassure our hearts before him whenever our hearts condemn us; for God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything. Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have a boldness before God; and we receive from him whatever we ask, because we obey his commandments and do what pleases him.

And this is his commandment that we should believe in the name of his son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as he commanded us.

## **Major Assessment Task**

In groups of three identify and define a moral issue that confronts young people.

1. Write a scenario or present a role play that introduces characters, briefly defines the issue and poses a situation where a choice is required.
2. Apply the five step "Moral Decision Process" (KWL Yr 10 p221) to the selected issue.
3. Make a detailed analysis for each step in the process for decision making.
4. Present scenario/role play and analysis to the class in an oral presentation.
5. After presenting your report, critically reflect on small group effectiveness and personal contributions.

***It is expected that students and teachers will co-construct an assessment rubric for this task beginning with the below. Teachers are encouraged to assess skills and knowledge from other learning areas that may be included in this task.***

	WELL ABOVE EXPECTED LEVEL	ABOVE EXPECTED LEVEL	AT EXPECTED LEVEL	BELOW EXPECTED LEVEL
<b>Knowledge and Understanding (defining the issue)</b>	An excellent understanding of the nature of the issue with insightful exploration of people, place and causation.	The issue, people and places are described with sound analysis.	The issue and people involved are named with a useful consideration of the central facts.	A limited consideration of the issue.
<b>Knowledge and Understanding (consequences, prayer, conscience &amp; action)</b>	A careful weighing up of possible consequences. The decision/action is clear.	Most possible consequences are weighed up. The decision/action is clear.	Some consequences are considered. The decision/action is clear.	A limited treatment of consequences. Decision/action are not clear or are poorly supported.
<b>Reasoning</b>	A detailed and very deep response concerning the values and authorities that influence personal decision- making and affect common good.	A thoughtful response concerning the values and authorities that influence personal decision- making and affect common good.	A consideration of the values and authorities that influence personal decision- making and affect common good.	The values that influence personal decision- making have been considered.

## Suggested Teaching & Learning Experiences

### Focusing Activity:

- Values Auction: Each student receives an envelope containing some 'money'. A list of items are put up for auction (for example, being popular, physical attractiveness, good health, power, accepting who are different from me). Students bid on the items according to their interest and needs.
- Identify the values within TV shows such as *Survivor*, *Married at First Sight* and *Home and Away*.

### Outcome 1 Research and understand the frameworks for moral and ethical discernment within the Jewish and Christian traditions.

- Students draw up a table of acts they consider damaging to a relationship with God, self or others.
- A good outline of the values contained in the Ten Commandments is in *To Know, Worship and Love year 9*, pp246-250. As a class, or in small groups, work through each Commandment and any associated reflection activities. Complete the Activity on p251.
- The Beatitudes' values are also outlined in *To Know, Worship and Love year 9*, pp.255-257. Discuss their relationship with the Ten Commandments (i.e. calling Christians to love of God and of neighbour). What did Jesus mean by the term 'kingdom'? Do some of the Beatitudes sound incompatible with societal values? If yes, why? Complete the Group Activity on p.259 (you may choose to change / update some of the people).
- Complete the reflective exercises in *The Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes: Reflective Writing* (To Know, Worship and Love, year 10, pp 188-189)
- With reference to the table of acts students have drawn up, suggest alternative choices that could have been taken. Use examples from Scripture (The Beatitudes, The Ten Commandments) to justify your alternative choices.



- Read Mt 22:34-40. Respond in terms of what it says to you about love of God and love of neighbour. How can people demonstrate these principles in their lives?
- In small groups, students are allocated a few qualities of Jesus that are listed in *To Know, Worship and Love, year 10 pp 186-187*. Students look up these Scripture references and identify the qualities of Jesus that are shown and how he showed these qualities. Create a poster for display that identifies one of these qualities and illustrate with Scripture quotations and pictures.

## **Outcome 2      Examine the role of conscience in Christian decision-making.**

- In groups, discuss and give examples of how decisions reflect the values of an individual.
- Invite a guest speaker (Parish Priest, Parish representative, member of school leadership team) to speak to the class regarding how a religious perspective can influence personal and communal codes of ethics and morality. Afterwards, students discuss the values and ethics that seemed most important to the guest speaker and evidence for their conclusions.
- Choose a number of scenarios where a decision is required (some examples listed on p181, *To Know, Worship and Love year 10*). Ask students to make a decision and then try to identify how they came to that decision – that is, who was involved, what things needed to be considered, what were the possible outcomes, why did they choose their particular outcome?
- Work through quiz, *Test yourself: How informed is your conscience? To Know, Worship and Love, year 10 pp 184-186*.
- “Deep within their consciences men and women discover a law which they do not lay upon themselves, and which they must obey. Its voice, ever calling them to love and to do what is good and to avoid evil, tells them inwardly at the right moment: do this, shun that. For they have in their hearts a law inscribed by God. Their dignity rests in observing this law, and by it they will be judged”. *Gaudium et Spes*, n.16.  
Examine three main ideas from this Vatican II quotation. Explain each, illustrating its meaning with reference to scripture and research, then rewrite the three ideas in your own words.

## **Outcome 3      Analyse some case studies in terms of the steps involved in moral decision making.**

- Read 1 Jn 3:18-23. What does this text say to you? What is God’s commandment? Identify examples where Christians are following this commandment. Is it necessary to be Christian to follow this commandment?
- View a clip showing a character making a moral decision; analyse the process and outcome for the people affected. (The “soapies” e.g. *Home & Away* or *Neighbours* regularly show characters making moral (and immoral) decisions).
- Invite a member of the school community, for example a parent, who is a public official, e.g. police officer, magistrate, doctor, to share experiences of how and when they had to make informed moral decisions.
- Draw a cartoon with captions illustrating a moral dilemma; ask a fellow student to decide what the outcome should be by completing the cartoon.
- Hold a class debate on a selected moral issue, usually encountered by young people, highlighting different viewpoints on the subject.
- Select a moral issue and role play the decision making process an individual/community must pursue. Some good examples are included in *To Know, Worship and Love year 10 p199*. Other members of the class make a choice for action using the decision making process.
- Investigate a process for Christian moral decision making (e.g. see *To Know, Worship and Love year 10, p198*). Outline the process in diagrammatic form. Lead a class discussion on its strengths and weaknesses.
- Access the Catechism of the Catholic Church, for example on the Vatican website ([www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va)). Locate the Church’s teachings on issues such as abortion, alcohol, drugs, euthanasia. Follow the process outlined in *To Know, Worship and Love, year 10, p 197* to present the Church’s teachings on these issues.
- Research recent changes in Church teaching regarding a particular issue (e.g. the death penalty, just wars). Why has the Church’s teaching changed / developed?
- Use the five step process of moral decision-making (outlined in *To Know, Worship and Love, year 10, p221*) to present a moral dilemma and a decision based on this process.

- Investigate the National Apology to the Stolen Generations (2008) and the Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017). Consider the Christian and moral imperatives concerned with each of these statements.

*Liturgical celebrations/sacramental celebrations – provide opportunities for connection with the prayer life of the Church for reflection and resonance.*

*Such celebrations should be an integral part of every unit, and should be linked to the liturgical year wherever possible.*

## Resources

## Appendices