Included here is one sample session from the 8th grade *Spirit of Truth, Parish Edition* catechist’s guide, followed by the corresponding pages from the 8th grade student workbook.

Order the full Grade 8 books at SophiaInstituteforTeachers.org/SpiritofTruth
SESSION 11

Conscience and Our Obligation to Form It

What students will learn:

- Conscience is God’s voice in our hearts, which helps us to choose the good.
- Our conscience is not the source of moral law but must be well formed by Christ’s teaching.
- We have a solemn obligation to form our consciences.

What students will do:

- Fill out a conscience visual aid.
- Read the *Catechism* on conscience.
- Evaluate real-life scenarios on how to follow their conscience.
Session At a Glance

Workbook pages your students will complete:

- What Is a Conscience? (page 203)
- How the Conscience Directs Action (page 202)
- Our Obligation to Form Our Consciences (page 205)
- How Free? (page 207)

Vocabulary your students will learn:

- **Conscience**: The gift God gave human beings to be able to use reason in order to judge right from wrong. Conscience is God’s voice in our hearts.
- **Reason (Intellect)**: One of the faculties of the human soul. It is a person’s ability to know and understand. Human beings have intellect.

Prayer for this session:

Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth your Spirit and they shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who has instructed the hearts of your faithful by the light of the Holy Spirit, grant that by the same Holy Spirit we may have a right judgment in all things and evermore rejoice in his consolations. Through Christ Our Lord. Amen.
Session Plan
Choose from a warm-up and activities.

Warm-Up

A. Begin with the prayer for this session.
B. Ask your students this question: What is the conscience, and what role does it play in our decision-making? Invite students to share what they already know, and accept reasoned answers.
C. Write on the board Catechism no. 1796:
Conscience is a judgment of reason by which the human person recognizes the moral quality of a concrete act.
D. Convey from this paragraph that our conscience allows us to use reason in order to judge the morality of our actions. Point out that this judgment is based on external moral principles and not simply our preferences.
E. Draw on the board the visual of the relationship of conscience (at the top): reason, will, and action.
F. Have students turn to and complete How the Conscience Directs Action (page 202) from the information they see on the board.
SESSION PLAN

Activity 1

A. Have students turn to What Is a Conscience? (page 203) in their workbooks. Read it aloud as students follow along. As you read, emphasize the following points. Conscience:

- (1) prompts us, (2) makes judgments, and (3) bears witness.
- Is a judgment of reason.
- Is designed to use objective principles of the moral law to judge the morality of acts in specific circumstances.
- Is meant to discover the moral law; it is not the source of the moral law.

B. Have your students answer the questions on the worksheet and then discuss the correct answers.

Activity 2

A. Challenge your students with this question: Is your conscience always right? Offer a few examples:

- If my conscience tells me that racism is good, does that make racism good?
- If my conscience isn’t bothered by the idea of shoplifting from a huge, greedy company, is shoplifting morally right?
- What if my conscience tells me that abortion is a good thing if a young mother has been abandoned, or if the baby has a bad birth defect, or if the mother just doesn’t feel ready to have a baby? Does that make abortion good?
- The answer to all of these questions is no. Ask students: Why not? We do not make things good just by convincing ourselves they are good. We can’t “make” them good, because objective morality exists. Every person does not determine for himself what is good.

B. Discuss the following points:

- Our consciences, in and of themselves, are NOT the source of morality.
- God is the source of morality, and conscience is God’s voice in our hearts. Humans are the only creatures with this special gift. We do not merely act on instinct, nor do we need to always follow our feelings. We are free to choose how we act.
- Our conscience helps us to make good moral choices.
To help us make good choices, our conscience must be well formed.

A well-formed conscience makes it possible to live a good moral life; a faulty conscience can ruin a moral life.

A good moral life is the only way to true happiness—the beatitude you were created for.

C. Have students complete Our Obligation to Form Our Consciences (page 205) in their workbooks. Answer and discuss the questions, emphasizing our duty to conform to God's wisdom in the formation of our consciences.

Activity 3

A. Read aloud Catechism no. 1783 and instruct your students to listen carefully:

Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.

B. Ask the class: Who were the first people to prefer their own judgment and reject authoritative teachings? Adam and Eve. Their Original Sin wounded human nature and made us inclined to sin. We don’t live in the Garden of Eden, but we have the same choice to make every day—to accept and return God’s love or to reject Him. Our consciences help us make the right choices.

C. Have students turn to and complete How Free? (page 207). Discuss the scenarios and give the correct answers.
Get Ready for the Next Session

- Photocopy *Catechist Resource: Ten Commandments within the Covenant* for each student.
- Review the upcoming session.
Answer Key

Responses should resemble the chart in the session plan.

How the Conscience Directs Action

Directions: Complete the chart below to show how conscience directs action, then give a description of what conscience is.

Conscience is ______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________

Conscience is ______________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
______________________________________________________________________
What Is a Conscience?

Part I
Directions: Read the information, then answer the questions that follow.

Conscience is our natural ability to judge. This powerful ability to determine right from wrong is uniquely human. A conscience is designed to do three things:
1. Before we act, conscience prompts us to do good and to avoid evil.
2. Conscience makes a judgment about the good and evil of particular actions in specific situations.
3. Conscience bears witness after we act. This is why we feel guilty after doing bad things.

Conscience is a judgment of reason, not emotion. Conscience itself is not the source of the moral law but is the ability to discover and recognize the moral law.

The Word of God is a light for our path. To form our consciences, we must bring His Word into our hearts through faith and prayer. Further, we must put His Word into practice in our lives, because His Word should guide all of our actions.

1. What is conscience? __________________________________________________________________________
2. What does conscience prompt us to do before we act? 1. ______________________________________________________________________________
3. What does conscience make a judgment about? _______________________________________________________________________
4. What does conscience do after we act? __________________________________________________________________________________
5. Is conscience a judgment of reason or emotion? ___________________________________________________________________________
6. Is conscience the source of the moral law (what is wrong or what is right)? ______________________________________________________________________
7. How do we form our conscience? ___________________________________________________________________________________

Answer Key
1. Conscience is our natural ability to judge. This powerful ability to determine right from wrong is uniquely human.
2. To do good and avoid evil.
3. About the good and evil of particular actions in specific situation.
4. Bears witness.
5. Reason.
6. No, conscience is not the source of moral law, rather it is the ability to discover and recognize the moral law.
7. We must bring the Word of God into our hearts through faith and prayer. We must put God’s Word into practice in our lives, because His Word should guide all of our actions.
Part II

Directions: Read the following quotation. Then answer the questions.

Veritatis Spendor no. 57

Pope St. John Paul II wrote, “Conscience in a certain sense confronts man with the law, and thus becomes a “witness” for man: “a witness of his own faithfulness or unfaithfulness with regard to the law, of his essential moral rectitude [goodness] or iniquity [wickedness]. Conscience is the only witness, since what takes place in the heart of the person is hidden from the eyes of everyone outside. Conscience makes its witness known only to the person himself. And, in turn, only the person himself knows what his own response is to the voice of conscience.” (Veritatis Spendor, 59)

1. What does conscience become because it confronts man with the law? ________________

2. What is conscience a witness of? _____________________________
   _____________________________

3. Why is conscience the only witness? _____________________________
   _____________________________

4. What does the person himself only know? _____________________________
   _____________________________
Our Obligation to Form Our Consciences

Part I

Directions: Read the information, then answer the questions that follow.

St. Bonaventure taught, “Conscience is like God’s herald and messenger; it does not command things on its own authority, but commands them as coming from God’s authority, like a herald when he proclaims the edict of the king. This is why conscience has binding force.” In other words, making a good moral choice is not about acting according to our personal opinions, or doing what feels right, but about discovering the moral law and then using our reason to apply it to how we choose to act in any given situation.

Our consciences are NOT the source of the moral law. Rather, they are the uniquely human tool God has given us to apply His moral law to our actions. Many people will say, “I am just following my conscience” when they do bad things because they have not done the work to form their consciences properly. There are many reasons why we might fail in forming our conscience: we do not learn about Christ and His gospel; we mimic bad examples; we give in to our feelings; we wrongly think our consciences are the source of moral law; we deny Church authority and teaching; we do not turn away from sin and toward Christ; we lack love. All these things might get in the way of us forming our conscience properly.

A poorly formed conscience leads to sin. Sin hurts us, hurts others, and separates us from God. That is why we all have an obligation to form our consciences. A well-formed conscience will never contradict the divine moral law revealed by Christ and taught by the Church. If your conscience seems to be telling you something that contradicts Church teaching, it means there is something you still need to understand about the teaching. You have a very serious responsibility to learn more about Church teaching until you understand it.

Ultimately, the process of conscience formation involves learning to know, understand, and obey God’s law and the Church’s teaching. Deep down, every human being knows the moral law to be true and the only way to real happiness. God has written it on all of our hearts and has revealed it to us in Scripture. The Church, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, plays an essential role in helping us to know the morality of various actions and attitudes.

1. On whose authority should our conscience speak to us? ________________________________

2. List three reasons we can fail to form our consciences.

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________________

Answer Key

1. God’s.

2. We do not learn about Christ and His gospel; we mimic bad examples; we give in to our feelings; we wrongly think our consciences are the source of moral law; we deny Church authority and teaching; we do not turn away from sin and toward Christ; we lack love.
3. What does a poorly formed conscience lead to? _______________________________________________

4. Two things that are true cannot contradict each other. What does that mean in situations where your conscience seems to be telling you something that contradicts God's will?
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

Part II
Directions: Read the following instructions from the Catechism concerning the formation of the conscience. Then answer the questions.

1783 Conscience must be informed and moral judgment enlightened. A well-formed conscience is upright and truthful. It formulates its judgments according to reason, in conformity with the true good willed by the wisdom of the Creator. The education of conscience is indispensable for human beings who are subjected to negative influences and tempted by sin to prefer their own judgment and to reject authoritative teachings.

1785 In the formation of conscience the Word of God is the light for our path, we must assimilate it in faith and prayer and put it into practice. We must also examine our conscience before the Lord's Cross. We are assisted by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, aided by the witness or advice of others and guided by the authoritative teaching of the Church.

5. How long should it take you to educate your conscience? _____________________________________

6. What does a prudent education do? __________________________________________________________

7. What does the education of the conscience guarantee? _______________________________________

8. What is the light for our path? _______________________________________________________________

9. Where must we examine our conscience? ____________________________________________________

10. How are we assisted in the examination of our conscience?
    ___________________________________________________________
        ___________________________________________________________

Answer Key
3. Sin.

4. One of them has to be false. Since we know Church teaching is the true moral law given to humanity by God, it cannot be false.

5. All your life long.

6. It teaches virtue. It prevents or cures fear, selfishness and pride, resentment arising from guilt, and feelings of complacency.

7. It guarantees freedom.

8. The Word of God.


10. By the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the witness or advice of others, and the authoritative teaching of the Church.
How Free?

Directions: Does it seem strange to think that you become more “free” by making the moral law part of your character? For each scenario, rank how “free” the person is on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being the least free and 3 being the most free. Then answer the questions that follow.

Scenario A
Macy finds a wallet full of cash on the sidewalk just outside the school building. She quickly puts it in her bag and goes to class. All day she tries to decide what to do. No one saw her pick it up. The person who lost it probably thinks it’s gone forever. “Finders keepers, losers weepers,” right? Possession is nine-tenths of the law! She thinks about what she could do with that money: new clothes, some gifts for her family, especially her mom, who has been working so hard lately. Maybe it could even go into her college fund. Then she starts thinking about the person who lost the wallet. Maybe that person had been saving for something important. He probably has a parent who has been working hard and deserves a gift too. Maybe the money was for something really important, such as tuition, medicine, or food. By the end of the day, Macy’s conscience gets to her, and she realizes that she can’t keep the money. She goes to the office after the final bell and turns it in.

How free is Macy? 1 – 2 – 3

Scenario B
John finds a wallet full of cash on the sidewalk just outside the school building. He goes straight to the office and turns it in, and goes about his day.

How free is John? 1 – 2 – 3

Scenario C
Jacob finds a wallet full of cash on the sidewalk just outside the school building. He thinks about it for a second and decides to keep it. He spends all day daydreaming about the new things he’s going to buy. That night, he heads to the mall and spends all the money on new clothes and shoes. But that night, he can’t sleep. Visions of the wallet’s owner keep popping into his head. He imagines who it might have belonged to and how that person had worked hard to earn that money. The next morning he looks at the clothes and shoes, still in their bags. He decides not to wear any of them that day. Weeks go by and the shopping bags are still in his room. When Jacob’s mother sees them and asks where he got the money to buy such expensive things, Jacob is so ashamed that he lies to her. He decides to try to return the clothes and shoes to the store,
Answer Key

1. His conscience.

2. John was most free. He seems to have made a habit of doing good, to the point at which he doesn’t have to deliberate the morality of certain choices. Both Macy and Jacob faced the “witness” of their conscience, prompting them to, in Macy’s case, eventually do the right thing, and, in Jacob’s case, try to make amends after doing wrong.

3. If we think we are made “freer” by escaping moral truths, we are kidding ourselves. Freedom comes only in conforming our lives to the truth. Accept additional reasoned answers.

put the cash back in the wallet, and turn it in to the office, but he can’t find the receipts. He takes the clothes and shoes to a homeless shelter and replaces the cash in the wallet out of his own money. He takes it to the office and explains that he found it a month ago. How free is Jacob on a scale of 1 to 3?

How free is Jacob? 1 – 2 – 3

1. Jacob made the wrong decision at first. What prompted him to try to make amends for his action?

2. Both Macy and John made the right decision, but one of them was freer than the other. Who? Explain your answer:

3. “Freedom of conscience is never freedom ‘from’ the truth but always and only freedom ‘in’ the truth.” – POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II

How would you connect this quotation to the scenarios above? How can you connect it to choices you make every day?

Accept additional reasoned answers.
How the Conscience Directs Action

Directions: Complete the chart below to show how conscience directs action, then give a description of what conscience is.

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Directions: Read the following quotation. Then answer the questions.

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3. What does a poorly formed conscience lead to? _______________________________________________

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5. How long should it take you to educate your conscience? ________________________________

6. What does a prudent education do? ________________________________

7. What does the education of the conscience guarantee? ________________________________

8. What is the light for our path? ________________________________

9. Where must we examine our conscience? ________________________________

10. How are we assisted in the examination of our conscience?

   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________________________
How Free?

**Directions:** Does it seem strange to think that you become more “free” by making the moral law part of your character? For each scenario, rank how “free” the person is on a scale of 1 to 3, with 1 being the least free and 3 being the most free. Then answer the questions that follow.

**Scenario A**
Macy finds a wallet full of cash on the sidewalk just outside the school building. She quickly puts it in her bag and goes to class. All day she tries to decide what to do. No one saw her pick it up. The person who lost it probably thinks it’s gone forever. “Finders keepers, losers weepers,” right? Possession is nine-tenths of the law! She thinks about what she could do with that money: new clothes, some gifts for her family, especially her mom, who has been working so hard lately. Maybe it could even go into her college fund. Then she starts thinking about the person who lost the wallet. Maybe that person had been saving for something important. He probably has a parent who has been working hard and deserves a gift too. Maybe the money was for something really important, such as tuition, medicine, or food. By the end of the day, Macy’s conscience gets to her, and she realizes that she can’t keep the money. She goes to the office after the final bell and turns it in.

**How free is Macy?** 1 – 2 – 3

**Scenario B**
John finds a wallet full of cash on the sidewalk just outside the school building. He goes straight to the office and turns it in, and goes about his day.

**How free is John?** 1 – 2 – 3

**Scenario C**
Jacob finds a wallet full of cash on the sidewalk just outside the school building. He thinks about it for a second and decides to keep it. He spends all day daydreaming about the new things he’s going to buy. That night, he heads to the mall and spends all the money on new clothes and shoes. But that night, he can’t sleep. Visions of the wallet’s owner keep popping into his head. He imagines who it might have belonged to and how that person had worked hard to earn that money. The next morning he looks at the clothes and shoes, still in their bags. He decides not to wear any of them that day. Weeks go by and the shopping bags are still in his room. When Jacob’s mother sees them and asks where he got the money to buy such expensive things, Jacob is so ashamed that he lies to her. He decides to try to return the clothes and shoes to the store,
put the cash back in the wallet, and turn it in to the office, but he can’t find the receipts. He takes the clothes and shoes to a homeless shelter and replaces the cash in the wallet out of his own money. He takes it to the office and explains that he found it a month ago. How free is Jacob on a scale of 1 to 3?

**How free is Jacob?**  1 –  2 –  3

1. Jacob made the wrong decision at first. What prompted him to try to make amends for his action?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

2. Both Macy and John made the right decision, but one of them was freer than the other. Who? Explain your answer:

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

3. “Freedom of conscience is never freedom ‘from’ the truth but always and only freedom ‘in’ the truth.” — POPE ST. JOHN PAUL II

How would you connect this quotation to the scenarios above? How can you connect it to choices you make every day?

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________________________________