

Doctrinal Themes: Morality

Introduction

This segment is designed to help you reflect on the theme of Morality. It will also provide insights into teaching this theme at different ages. In addition, you may want to refer to the section on Child Development and the article on Stages of Moral Development. Just follow the outline. Begin by reflecting on or journaling the first question. Watch the video *Theological Foundations: Morality* and note how the explanation sheds light on the topic for your own understanding. Then read the article “Morality” and answer the reflection questions.

First Question

How would you define morality?

Video

Watch the *Theological Foundations: Morality* video and respond to these questions:

1. What is the last moral action you performed?
2. What did “The Story of the Baby Doll” tell you about morality?
3. What does morality teach us about true happiness?
4. In what ways do you look to the Church to help you make moral choices?

Article: Morality

Read the following article and respond to the questions:

The topic of morality in today's world could be overwhelming and is certainly broad. One of the questions we might ask is "How do I know I am doing right?" As religion teachers, we follow that with, "How do I hand that on to my students when young people today get so many different competing moral messages from the society around them?" Certainly, we teach them the content that is the foundation for Catholic morality. We also need to lead them to right action and continued practice.

The Israelites looked on the Torah, their Law, with the utmost reverence. They regarded it as sacred because it confirmed the covenant between God and the people. Traditionally, laws have helped groups of people live together rightly and justly. Rules guide life at home and at work; in clubs, teams, and organizations; and in parishes. Behavioral codes and guidelines direct and preserve communities everywhere. The Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, which includes the Beatitudes, serve to guide the moral life of Church members. The Precepts of the Church assist Catholics in determining those minimal actions expected for adherents of the Catholic faith. These Precepts specify some of the behaviors that will enhance Christian growth in love of God and neighbor. They help Christians choose moral living and faithfulness. The content of Christian morality is the same for children, adolescents, and adults. However, we learn to use that content differently as we grow in moral reasoning. (See article on Moral Development in the Child section.)

Leading our students to right action and continued practice, means

helping them to develop virtues. Virtues are good habits, and actions become habits with practice. The Theological Virtues of faith, hope, and love are gifts from God. Christians accept these gifts, and practice them until they become second nature, blending human and divine characteristics. Other virtues that are an important foundation for moral behavior include Prudence, Justice, Temperance, and Fortitude. These are all habits to cultivate with students and to be intentional about having them practice virtues. Cultivating virtue goes beyond instruction. Often this kind of practice takes place informally as situations arise during the school day.

Cultivating virtue in the younger grades, often means helping students see that there are consequences to certain actions. Students in primary grades are not always aware of the consequences of their behavior on others. They need to have consequences pointed out to them and/or be put in the other person's shoes through role-play. Older students are capable of seeing consequences and effects, but often, have not been asked to reflect on them. Helping them consistently reflect on the effects of their actions or the actions of others develops an attitude of empathy and compassion, which is essential in moral development. The same technique of role-playing can be effective with them. Being diligent about having older students choose actions they will take during the week, and then checking on whether they were able to follow through on them, is another way to lead them into the practice of habits or virtues.

Reflection Questions

- What are some moral messages of the Church today that can be counter-cultural in our current society?

- What is the value of having moral standards that are consistent, no matter how trends and events change?

