



Moral Formation of Conscience for Novices of the Scmm Congregation Based on the Teachings of the Catholic Church and Moral Philosophy

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Corresponding Author: Sihol Situmorang	The formation of conscience is an important element in the formation of religious candidates because it is related to the ability to assess actions, cultivate motivation, and make responsible decisions. This Community Service activity was carried out for the novices of the SCMM Congregation in the Community of St. Maria Karangsari Pematangsiantar to strengthen their understanding of morality and conscience based on the teachings of the Catholic Church and moral philosophy. The program uses a participatory-reflective approach through interactive lectures, group discussions, Scripture reflection, moral case analysis, experience sharing, and mentoring. Evaluation was carried out through initial mapping, participation observations, reflection sheets, case study rubrics, and participant feedback. The results of the activity showed that participants were increasingly able to distinguish moral judgment from emotional reactions, identify factors that influence decisions, and connect moral principles with community life, digital media use, interpersonal relationships, and service. The activity also encourages openness in dialogue, willingness to accept corrections, and preparation of personal coaching commitments. This program emphasizes that conscience coaching becomes more effective when knowledge, experience, prayer, critical reflection, and mentoring are integrated in an ongoing manner. Keywords: conscience; moral philosophy; novice; religious formation; moral decision-making

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INTRODUCTION

Social changes, digital information flows, and encounters with diverse moral views affect the way young people understand freedom, responsibility, and the boundaries between good and bad. In religious life, these challenges become increasingly important because religious candidates are not only called to obey the rules, but also develop inner freedom and decision-making skills in accordance with faith, charisma, and community needs. The Synod's preparatory document on youth affirms that the digital world has become a real environment that shapes the identity, choices, relationships, and discernment processes of the younger generation (Synod of Bishops, 2017). Therefore, moral development for novices needs to touch concrete experiences, not just provide normative descriptions.

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The novitiate period is an important stage for recognizing vocations, purifying motivation, building discipline, and developing human and spiritual maturity. Effective coaching needs to create a culture of brotherhood, dialogue, solidarity, and shared responsibility. Educating to Fraternal Humanism places human relationships and the common good as an important part of a wholesome education (Congregation for Catholic Education, 2017). At the same time, *New Wine in New Wineskins* reminds that the structure of formation, the use of authority, and community life must truly serve the charisma and personal growth of members (Congregation for Institutes of Consecrated Life and Societies of Apostolic Life, 2017). This perspective shows that the formation of conscience is inseparable from the quality of relationships, example, and the climate of the community.

Conscience is not just a spontaneous feeling, but a practical judgment that demands the search for truth, self-recognition, and the willingness to account for choices. The 2018 Synod Final Document emphasizes the importance of listening, mentoring, participation, and discernment in helping young people process life experiences and decisions (Synod of Bishops, 2018). *Christus Vivit* then emphasizes that mentoring must respect freedom, process, creativity, and personal responsibility so that participants are not mechanically formed, but helped to become mature subjects (Francis, 2019). In the context of the novitiate, this principle is important so that moral decisions are born from fostered freedom, not just from fear of sanctions or the desire to conform externally.

The formation of conscience is also related to the appreciation of holiness in daily life. *Gaudete et Exsultate* describe holiness through patience, gentleness, courage, self-control, discernment, prayer, and concrete service (Francis, 2018a). Religious vocations are therefore tested not only in formal spiritual activities, but also in the way of using time, responding to corrections, managing conflicts, treating others, and carrying out community duties. Missionary orientation further makes it clear that moral formation must produce readiness to be witnesses of the Gospel through real life and action (Francis, 2018b). Thus, the sensitivity of conscience needs to develop along with the spirit of service and responsibility to others.

Synodality provides a relevant framework for the formation of conscience in religious communities. The International Theological Commission (2018) describes synodality as the Church's way of life embodied through walking together, listening, dialogue, participation, and responsibility in mission. The 2021 Synod Preparatory Document places communion, participation, and mission as the three axes of the Church's journey, while the *Vademecum Synod* offers a spiritual conversation that combines prayer, listening to experiences, speaking honestly, and opening oneself to the movement of the Spirit (General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 2021a, 2021b). This approach supports a process of moral formation that is non-judgmental, but still demands honesty, evaluation, and a commitment to change.

The maturity of moral decisions is also supported by social-emotional competence. Self-control, empathy, openness, perseverance, and the ability to work together are related to the quality of relationships and readiness to face complex situations (OECD, 2021). Wise reasoning is needed so that participants are able to consider different perspectives, recognize the limitations of understanding, and seek the common good when facing value conflicts (Grossmann et al., 2017). The Synod's Continental Stage Document invites the community to expand the space of encounter so that diverse experiences can be accepted

and processed in communion (General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 2022). Based on the needs of partners, this activity aims to strengthen moral understanding and conscience, improve the ability to analyze ethical issues, and build habits of reflection that support the religious life of the novices of the SCMM Congregation.

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

Goals and Approaches

The activity was carried out at the St. Maria Karangsari Community in Pematangsiantar with the target of novices of the SCMM Congregation and involved community coaches as companion partners. The program uses a participatory, reflective, contextual, and transformative approach. The participatory approach places participants as subjects who process experiences, while the reflective approach helps participants connect moral principles, prayer life, community relations, and daily decisions.

The implementation of the program is divided into three stages, namely preparation, implementation, and evaluation. The preparation stage includes coordination with community coaches, identification of participant needs, preparation of materials, selection of cases, and preparation of reflection sheets and evaluation instruments. The implementation stage includes the delivery of materials, discussions, reflections on the Bible, analysis of moral cases, sharing, and preparation of commitments. The evaluation stage is carried out through observation, case analysis rubrics, written reflections, and participant feedback. The main methods of implementing activities are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Method of Implementation of Activities

No.	Method	Description
1	Needs mapping	Identify initial understanding, moral experiences, relationship challenges, and use of digital media.
2	Interactive lectures	Presentation of moral concepts, conscience, freedom, responsibility, and decision making.
3	Group discussions	Exchange of experiences and analysis of problems that arise in community life.
4	Reflections on Scripture	Processing of the values of love, obedience, responsibility, forgiveness, and service.
5	Moral case studies	Analyze concrete situations by considering facts, values, impacts, and options of action.
6	Sharing and mentoring	Submission of personal reflections, feedback, and preparation of growth commitments.
7	Evaluation	Observations, case study rubrics, reflection sheets, and feedback from participants and coaches.

The activity material is arranged in five main subjects, namely the understanding of morality and conscience, types and conditions of conscience, factors that shape moral decisions, discernment steps in concrete situations, and the application of Christian ethics in community life and digital space. Case studies are selected from close experiences with participants, such as task responsibilities, use of gadgets, interpersonal communication, compliance, conflict, time management, and service. Each case is analyzed through the stages of identifying facts, parties involved, values at stake, possible choices, consequences, decisions, and inner evaluation.

Evaluation Instruments

Evaluation activities not only measure the mastery of concepts, but also the ability of participants to use moral principles in real situations. Evaluation indicators include the accuracy of distinguishing facts and assessments, the ability to identify values, the willingness to consider the impact on others, openness to accept corrections, and the ability to formulate follow-up commitments. The Evaluation Components and Instruments are presented in table 2.

Table 2. Evaluation Components and Instruments

Aspects	Instruments	Indicator
Moral understanding	Initial questions and reflections	Able to explain morals, freedom, responsibility, and conscience.
Case analysis	Case study rubric	Able to identify facts, values, choices, and consequences.
Relational sensitivity	Observation and sharing	Able to consider the dignity, needs, and impact on others.
Self-reflection	Reflection sheet	Able to recognize personal motivations, weaknesses, and response patterns.
Commitment	Follow-up plan	Able to formulate concrete habits for moral growth.
Sustainability	Monitoring pembina	Consistency in the implementation of commitments in community life.

RESULTS OF ACTIVITIES AND DISCUSSIONS

Implementation of Activities

The activity began with a conversation about participants' experiences when it came to making choices in community life. Initial mapping showed that participants were already familiar with the term conscience, but there was still a tendency to equate it with feelings of comfort, guilt, or obedience to commands. These findings were used to emphasize that moral decisions require an acknowledgment of facts, consideration of values, freedom, responsibility, and readiness to bear the consequences.

In the interactive lecture session, participants learned the relationship between morals, freedom, habits, and character formation. The material did not stop at definition, but was linked to the experience of using time, carrying out tasks, relationships with coaches, communication between community members, and the use of digital media. The discussion showed that daily moral problems often arise not because they do not know the rules, but because of a lack of reflection, self-control, courage to convey the truth, or willingness to consider the common interest.

Case studies are the most encouraging part of participation. Participants are asked to distinguish fact from assumptions, identify affected parties, find value at stake, and devise some alternative course of action. Through this process, participants learn that moral decisions cannot be based solely on personal gain or peer pressure. They also see that the right choice often requires courage, sacrifice, openness to accepting correction, and a willingness to correct mistakes.

Scripture reflection and sharing help participants connect moral knowledge with a life of faith. Participants are invited to recognize the motivations that drive action, response

patterns when experiencing conflicts, and tendencies to justify themselves. At the end of the activity, each participant compiles commitments that can be monitored, such as limiting the use of gadgets, improving communication, conducting daily inner evaluations, completing tasks on time, or asking for assistance when facing problems.

Activity Achievements

The program achievements are summarized based on the facilitator's observations, discussion results, reflection sheets, case analysis, and supervisor feedback. Because the initial documents available do not contain final statistical data, the results are presented descriptively so as not to display unverified figures. The achievements of Moral Conscience Development are presented in table 3.

Table 3. Achievements of Moral Formation of Conscience

Aspects	Observed Achievements	Meaning of Construction
Understanding of conscience	Participants can distinguish conscience from spontaneous feelings and external pressures.	Decisions are understood as a rational, spiritual, and responsible process.
Moral analysis	Participants are able to identify the facts, values, affected parties, and the consequences of actions.	Consideration becomes more systematic and non-reactive.
Self-reflection	Participants begin to recognize motivations, habits, and patterns of self-justification.	Self-awareness is the basis for moral growth.
Community relations	Participants are more open to listening, accepting different perspectives, and giving non-judgmental responses.	A culture of dialogue and brotherhood is strengthened.
Digital ethics	Participants were able to relate the use of media to discipline, honesty, time, and quality of relationships.	The digital space is understood as part of the call's responsibility.
Follow-up commitments	Participants develop concrete habits for inner evaluation and behavior improvement.	Coaching is geared towards sustainable change.

Discussion

The results of the activity show that conscience coaching needs to start from the concrete experiences of the participants. Mentoring that values freedom and process helps participants move from external obedience to internal responsibility. These findings are in line with *Christus Vivit* which places young people as active subjects and emphasizes mentoring that respects freedom, process, and decision-making ability (Francis, 2019). When participants are given space to explain reasons, test motivations, and consider consequences, moral learning becomes more personal and meaningful.

Discussion and sharing showed that the quality of conscience is closely related to social-emotional abilities. Self-control helps participants delay reactions, empathy helps them see the impact of decisions on others, and openness allows correction to be accepted as a means of growth. This supports the OECD's (2021) finding that social-emotional competence is related to the quality of relationships, cooperation, and the ability to cope

with environmental demands. In community life, these competencies are not additional, but part of moral formation because personal decisions always have relational consequences.

Case studies help participants develop thoughtful reasoning. They learn that a moral issue often contains incomplete facts, differing interests, emotional pressures, and possible long-term impacts. Thoughtful reasoning demands a willingness to consider other perspectives, acknowledge limitations, and seek the common good (Grossmann et al., 2017). Therefore, case analysis is more effective when it is not directed only at finding answers that the facilitator considers correct, but at practicing an honest, rational, and open process of consideration.

The process of formation also demonstrates the importance of synodal culture. Listening, speaking from experience, praying, and discernment together help participants process differences without immediately judging. The principles of communion, participation, and mission demand that each member grow with the community, not individualistically (General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 2021a). The Vademecum Synod affirms spiritual conversation as a process of listening and opening oneself to the movement of the Spirit, making it relevant to the life of the novitiate that requires honesty, fraternal correction, and shared responsibility (General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 2021b).

Strengthening digital ethics is an important finding because gadgets and social media affect attention, time use, communication, and self-image. The Synod Preparatory Document on youth emphasizes that the digital world is not just a tool, but an environment that shapes relationships and choices (Synod of Bishops, 2017). Conscience coaching therefore needs to help participants evaluate the motives for media use, the type of content consumed, its impact on tasks and prayers, and the quality of presence in the community. Digital discipline is part of mature freedom, not just technical restrictions.

The spiritual dimension remains at the center of the formation process. *Gaudete et Exsultate* remind that holiness is manifested through patience, gentleness, courage, self-control, prayer, and daily service (Francis, 2018a). The formation of conscience becomes authentic when it produces concrete habits, such as speaking truthfully, keeping responsibility, respecting others, daring to apologize, and faithfully carrying out one's duties. Missionary orientation also affirms that moral maturity does not stop at personal perfection, but prepares religious to become reliable witnesses of the Gospel in ministry (Francis, 2018b).

The sustainability of the program requires the support of the trustees and the community. The Synod's Continental Stage document emphasizes the need to expand the space of encounter so that diversity of experiences can be accepted and processed in communion (General Secretariat of the Synod of Bishops, 2022). Therefore, follow-up is suggested through daily inner evaluations, periodic formation conversations, simple case studies in community meetings, and monitoring of personal commitments. With these steps, the formation of conscience does not become a momentary activity, but is integrated into the rhythm of formation.

CONCLUSION

Moral and conscience development activities for Congregation SCMM novices help participants understand that conscience is not just an external feeling or obedience, but an assessment process that involves truth, freedom, responsibility, prayer, and consideration of

the impact of action. The approach of interactive lectures, discussions, Scripture reflection, case studies, sharing, and mentoring encourages participants to connect moral principles with community life, interpersonal relationships, use of digital media, and service. Key achievements are seen in the increased ability of participants to distinguish facts and assumptions, identify values at stake, accept different perspectives, and develop growth commitments. The sustainability of the program needs to be strengthened through inner evaluation, formation conversations, personal mentoring, and integration of moral analysis exercises into regular community coaching.

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