



## Informed Conscience

Conscience is not a feeling. Just because we feel that something is right or wrong does not mean that, our conscience is guiding us. Therefore, conscience needs to be formed and informed. In making an informed conscientious decision, we should consider the views of a range of sources and not just say to ourselves, 'I've worked it out myself'. For the Catholic, two guiding sources that will inform one's conscience is prayerful reflection on Scripture and accessing Church teaching e.g. Catholic Social Teaching.

The **STOP** method is an easy-to-remember framework for checking one's conscience.

**S – Study.** Decisions of conscience begin with knowledge. It is not a matter of being smart, but of making serious efforts to learn the facts from credible sources, such as reading what the Church teaches and consulting experts in the field. Do not just go on hearsay or Internet blogs.

**T – Think Together.** It is best not to make decisions in isolation. A married couple should not make an important moral decision without discussing it and coming to something mutually agreeable. In faith communities, this means testing out the options with other believers and seeking consensus before making a decision. In both situations, it involves evaluating and weighing the information gathered in the Study phase.

**O – Others' Experiences.** Wisdom is also carried by others who have had experience with the issue. Consulting others whose experience has led them to different conclusions is a helpful way to sort out our rationalizations. Do not listen only to people with whom you agree.

**P – Pray.** Important decisions should always be brought to prayer so that we can check our thinking rationalizations and be honest before God. Prayer provides us time to listen and sort. It is not the same as waiting for a magical sign from God, but rather noticing if we are at peace with the emerging decision.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vogt J & S, (2010). Just Follow Your (Informed) Conscience. *Every Day Catholic: St Anthony Messenger Press*, September 2010, 4.