

Questions to Consider

As you are planning the discussion session on Conscience, you might consider including some of these questions.

- ◆ What are your thoughts about the teaching that “A human being must always obey the certain judgment of his conscience” and the action of the Church towards Fr. Bourgeois? Can both “sides” be “right”?
- ◆ The Church seems to be teaching that (a) we must form our consciences properly; and (b) to do so, we should pray, read Church teachings, and then form our own minds; but that (c) if we do not then agree with the Church’s teaching, we did not form our consciences properly. Does the conclusion in (c) make pointless the demands of (a) and (b)?
- ◆ Do you know of similar disputes where members of the Church felt compelled to disagree with Church leaders?
- ◆ Consider how we as Church handle disagreement. For example, what led to the forced resignation of Fr. Thomas Reese as editor of *America* magazine? What happens in your diocese if a priest disagrees with an assignment or objects to hierarchical practices? How does this compare with the treatment of priests and bishops implicated in the clergy sexual abuse scandal?
- ◆ Is the penalty for Fr. Bourgeois appropriate? How does it compare with Vatican actions taken when the founder of a religious order (Fr. Marcel Maciel, the Legion of Christ founder) was credibly accused of abusing boys and young men?
- ◆ In December 2008, the bishop in the Diocese of Phoenix announced that he was excommunicating two priests for founding a non-denominational “Praise and Worship Center” that meets on Sundays. He said they were in schism with the Church. Interestingly, one of these priests has been on a paid leave of absence since 2005 after being indicted on 10 misdemeanor charges of sexual misconduct with teens. Why would the Church penalties for these two acts be so different?
- ◆ Pedophilia is a sin; it is a personal moral failing. Opposition to Church doctrine is a “public” rather than private “failing.” Clergy who abuse children commit a personal sin with immense public impact and devastating personal impacts. The personal act of Fr. Bourgeois opposed public institutional doctrine. Do you think these distinctions affected the position taken by the CDF?