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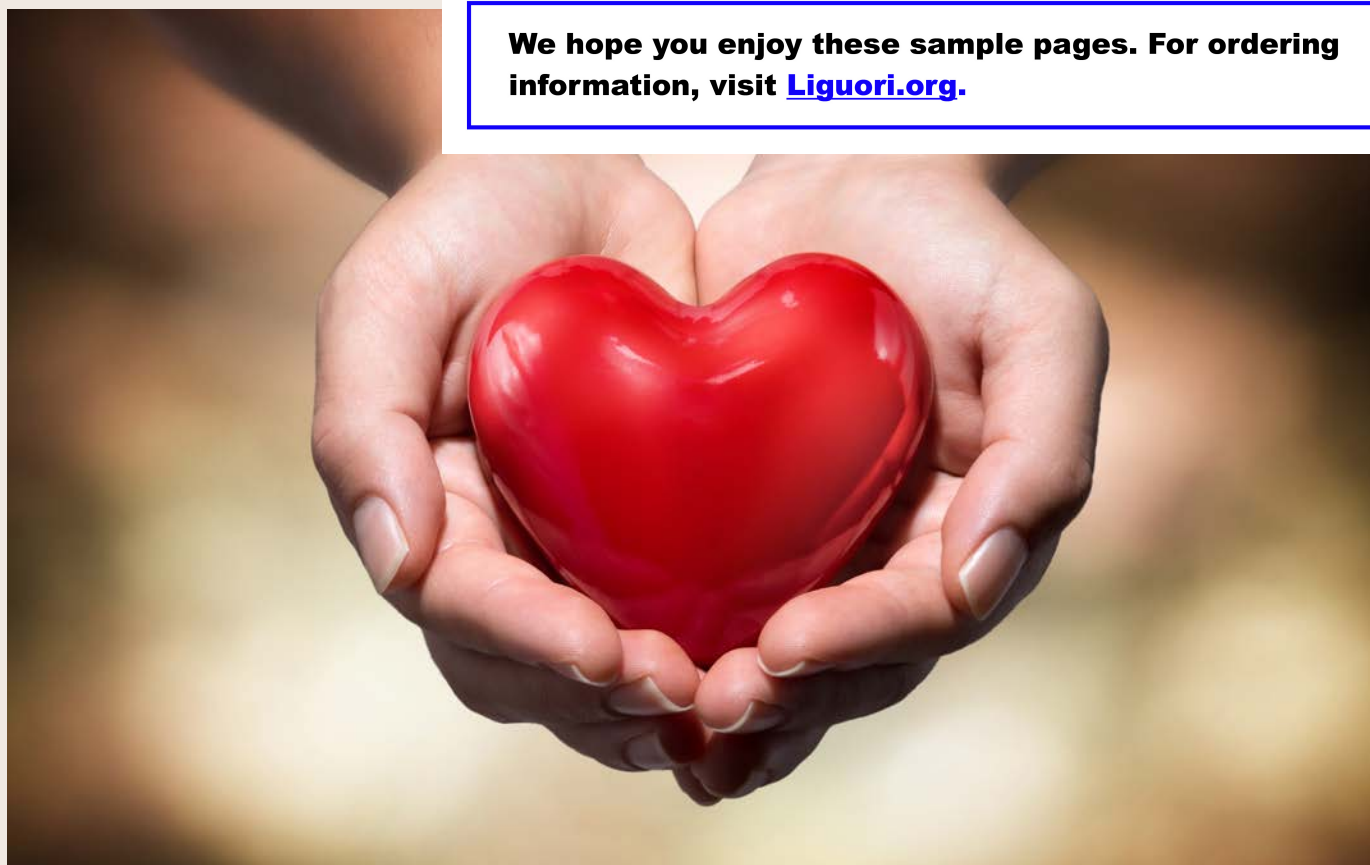
BRINGING UP A MORAL CHILD

GUIDING FAITH AND BEHAVIOR

God's law is written on our hearts and on the hearts of our children. We must both seek it for ourselves and help our children discover it there.

BY JEANNE HUNT

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It's happened gradually, yet the effect is dramatic. Our culture's moral decline has infiltrated every aspect of life. A marriage counselor tells her clients that premarital sex is acceptable. "After all, we try on shoes before we buy them," she rationalizes. Many young people believe an action isn't wrong unless they get caught. Their parents also struggle to make moral choices. The news is full of stories of killing, greed, and lies that reveal the moral decay that touches each of our lives.

A CAUSE FOR CONCERN?

A young boy had seen a cashier being unkind to an elderly patron. His mother pointed out that such behavior was wrong. The boy asked his mother how he would know when something was wrong. Her answer: "Just do what's appropriate." "What does *appropriate* mean?" he asked. The mother looked at him without giving an answer. It seemed she didn't know how to explain what makes an action right or wrong.

Should we be concerned? Yes! We must commit ourselves to the moral formation of the next generation.

As I speak in parishes, sharing practical tips for raising moral children, I meet concerned parents who worry that their children have little or no idea what makes a behavior wrong or right. While young people don't want to get caught for wrongdoing, they're confused about which actions are wrong. It's a cause for great concern if the lessons needed to learn right and wrong aren't being taught. There's much more to living a moral life than not getting caught.

THE GOD CONNECTION



A sign of hope in these troubled times is that there's renewed interest in connecting with God. Many parents realize and others suspect that building a relationship with God will enhance their child's

understanding of what's good and right. Meeting the loving and merciful God fosters new understanding of compassion, service, and selflessness that are at the core of Christian values.

This God connection will help both adults and children understand the reasons for doing what's right and avoiding evil. Without that connection, some people will see little reason to choose the moral right. However, when we listen to God's voice, we become aware of what's good and what's bad. We find the meaning of doing "what is appropriate" in the gospel.

THE CONFLICT

Living morally has lost favor in the secular world. Too often, those who defend the moral good are ridiculed as prudish and out of touch. The world teaches that if an action pleases us and harms no one, it's acceptable. This message is proclaimed every day in the media, political arena, and workplace.

It's no wonder our children are confused. It's the task of every parent, grandparent, teacher, and civil authority to return to the work of forming moral children. What we have lost, we must recover. What we have forgotten, we must relearn.

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