

Living With Integrity

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The September-October issue of "Human Development"- a Jesuit periodical, devotes the entire issue to the subject of integrity. It is discussed in a psychological and moral sense. Fr. Bill Barry, Jesuit priest and Editor of the Magazine, analyzes the components of integrity and point out there is no shortcut to becoming a person of wisdom and integrity. It will involve taking risks, being misunderstood and will take a consistent effort to work through the process of becoming integrated in our values and actions. (www.regis.edu/hd)

What do we mean by integrity? The word "integrity" comes from the Latin word "integer", meaning entire, consistent and unbroken. It means integrating our values and actions and expressing them in courage, compassion, justice and love in our everyday lives. We need a spirituality that puts us in touch with the Divine as the basis of our integrity. We live in a world where there are many idols and often it appears that ethics has become a matter of opinion and not based on truth. Spirituality is not just the connection between myself and God. It is concerned with the deeper dimensions of every aspect of our lives, everything we do or say or feel and calls us to compassion, especially for the most neglected and abandoned in our society.

Stephen Carter, ethicist describes integrity as having three steps:

1. Discerning what is right and wrong based on sound moral principles
2. A willingness to risk acting with integrity at a cost to ourselves.
3. Acting on what you have discovered to be right or wrong in your particular situation.

Often one's moral vision may be lacking in integrity and may hinder individuals and groups from working together for the common good. Working from a framework of personal integrity will contribute greatly to the creation of integrity within the various institutions where people are involved. It will also contribute to peace on a personal, societal and global level.

Integrity means doing the right thing the first time and not having to go back and reshape it as in the story of Marion Jones, three-time gold medal winner at the Olympics. At first she swore she was drug free and challenged anyone who dared to prove her otherwise. Recently she admitted to her family and friends that she did indeed use steroids before the games. It took courage to face up to her guilt and admit it to the rest of the world at a great cost to herself in terms of fame and fortune.

When you watch the daily news it becomes increasingly clear that there is a dire lack of integrity in both public and private life. The lack appears in politics, economics, in business and even in church. The result is we are experiencing a crisis of trust. We are suspicious of everything and nothing seems to ease our fears. Every institution seems to be up for grabs. This is a wakeup call to all of us to search our minds and hearts

and actions and bring them into alignment with God's plan for ourselves and our world.

This task will not come without a cost but it will surely pay off in the long run. .

While one may wonder where can we look for and discover integrity in action, I would like to highlight just a few examples that stand out in my mind. Perhaps you would like to share some of yours as well.

- ◆ Vinny Rotino who just finished the season with the Brewers, was recently described in the Milwaukee Catholic Herald in the October 4th issue. It pointed out that Vinny tries to keep his values clear in the world of sports often filled with glamour and glitter. He said he relies on his faith as a source of strength and said: "As God blesses you, with more in your life, the more responsibility you have. Obviously as athletes, you are seen in the spotlight more. That's more responsibility to be a good role model for young kids, even for older people"
- ◆ One church leader that stands out in my mind for his integrity is Bishop Thomas Gumbleton, now retired. He has spoken out consistently and boldly against war and for peace and on behalf of the excluded and disenfranchised of our day. Also many local clergy and lay leaders daily spend their time and energy bringing hope and healing to our broken and bleeding world and challenging systems and structures that dehumanize.
- ◆ The Amish Community who on the anniversary of the killing of their children, extended sympathy to the family of the killer and offered to help them.
- ◆ Local companies and faith groups that are leading the way in care and respect for the environment. Companies like SC. Johnson and others are lighting a path to corporate responsibility and care for the earth's resources.
- ◆ Business groups that are making every effort to make the workplace more family-friendly to meet the needs of families today and by providing a living wage and benefits.

A Company called VISIONPOINT has created a program entitled Integrity Every Day that is designed for healthcare workers. www.visionpoint.com. This kind of integrity can lead to organizational excellence as well.

In summary, we believe that integrity is caught as well as taught, starting with young people. In 2003 State University of Kansas City had an "Integrity Week" recognizing that we live in a society that is unwilling to accept responsibility for our actions and choices. Right or wrong is no longer clear. We must learn and teach what it means to take a consistent stand for what is right, even at a cost to ourselves. Several recent poles discovered that cheating was practiced by the majority in their schools. It will pay off to teach children to be ethical in all aspects of their lives and relationships and to be honest and respectful to others. It can be done. Let us begin today courageously. Written for Parson to Person in Journal Times Racine for November 2nd publication . Sr. Brenda Walsh is a Racine Dominican and member of Racine Clergy Assn.