



## Carmelite Spiritual Center

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### Life is Worth Giving

FORMATION OF CHARACTER IS IMPORTANT IN LIFE

by Fr. Kevin Shanley, O.Carm.

Many years ago the famous historian Arnold Toynbee said, "Our of 21 notable civilizations, 19 perished not by conquest from without but by moral decay from within." And more than a century ago at Harvard University, the famous American essayist and poet Ralph Waldo Emerson asserted, "Character is higher than intellect." And many readers will remember, too, the old saying, "Character is what you do even when nobody's looking."

And all Christians would agree that the formation of character in our lives is an essential part of both our formal and informal education. Without such formation, many people lead unhappy lives.

### Moral Exemplar

What is truly needed in developing authentic character in life is a "moral exemplar." Such a person should have five necessary criteria: 1) a substantial commitment to moral ideals; 2) a consistency between one's ideals and the means of achieving them; 3) a willingness to sacrifice self-interest; 4) a capacity to inspire others; and 5) a humility about one's own importance.

It is important to note, too, that character affects all aspects of our lives, especially in business and politics. When there is no character, there is most often corruption <sup>(OF)</sup> morals, ideals and conduct.

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In education and day-to-day life, it is necessary to point out to families that their first priority must be their children. And then, because the family is the foundation of both moral and intellectual development, helping parents to fulfill their role is the single most important thing that society and schools can do to help students develop strong character and to succeed academically.

### Character Building

Character building begins in the home where the most important thing parents can do for their children is to love each other and stay together. In addition, teaching good judgment is essential and ~~includes~~ (includes) ethical tests such as the Golden Rule, fairness and truth, conscience and consequences to aid in the development of such. The family is the first and foremost influence on a child's character, and the work of the school is to reinforce the positive character values being taught in the home.

Parents and schools, then, need to be equally committed to intellectual excellence and moral excellence. A truly educated person is one grounded in the study of both moral and intellectual virtue.

### Life Goals

And developing character in individuals affirms these life goals as sources of authentic happiness in life:

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1) maturity of character, i.e., becoming the best person we can possibly be; 2) loving relationships such as family and marriage; and 3) contributing to society by making a positive difference in the lives of others.

According to Rachael Kessler, an education author, the soul of an adolescent has seven basic needs: 1) a yearning for deep connection; 2) a longing for silence and stillness; 3) the search for meaning and purpose; 4) a hunger for joy; 5) a need to create; 6) an urge for transcendence; and 7) a need for initiation into adulthood.

And, according to Thomas Lickona, author of "Character Matters," <sup>he</sup> explains that the development of character is a deliberate effort to develop the virtues that enable each person to lead a fulfilling life and, indeed, to build a better world for all people. Communities and individuals, too, can help in the development of character, especially in the young, by providing support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations, constructive use of time, commitment to learning, positive values, social competencies, and positive identity.

In effect, the development of character, which is really a life-long process, gives society a method to raise respectful and responsible children, create safe and effective schools in our society, and to build the caring and decent ~~communities~~ <sup>(neighborhoods)</sup> in which people will truly want to live. These are goals worthy of all people and societies.