

Building character allows us to bring pride to our lives

FOCUS ON THEOLOGY



REV. TIMOTHY F. BABCOCK

your habits, they become character.
Watch your character, it becomes your destiny.
— Author Unknown

Character! A word that has more than one meaning, but that, taken seriously, is one of the most important aspects of human living. I want to give credit for articulating many of those thoughts to the nationally known Dr. Laura Schlessinger, especially in her noted book, "How Could You Do That? The Abidance of Character, Courage and Conscience." (Harper Collins, 1996).

Character, Dr. Schlessinger suggests, is one of the major qualities that distinguishes humans from other animal species. Choices based on character and principle elevate us, and the very meaning and purpose of our lives, above the level of attraction, impulse and conditioned response.

Character is what gives us the ability to choose attitudes and actions that bring pride into our life. It is a strong character that builds trust between people, and also that can influence the interactions between people, making for a better society.

What is the quality that motivates us as human beings to seek out what is right and true, and to be guided by these in our actions and attitudes? Character would be one way of defining this quality.

Then, Dr. Schlessinger would suggest, and experi-

ence would dictate, we need to couple the exercise of character with conscience and, most of all perhaps, courage in following through on what we have determined to be the right course of action.

As we face decisions, particularly decisions that reflect our values and attitudes, we need to examine honestly at what level this choice is being made.

Is this a decision simply based on instinct, or feeling? Upon personal likes and dislikes? From temptation to lesser emotions or attitudes within us? Are our actions dictated solely by what others do to us (not "do unto others as you would have them do unto you," but "do unto others as they do unto you")?

When we are able to exercise self-sacrifice in the cause of something truly good, however, it can bring a tremendous amount of happiness and pleasure into our lives. Such self-sacrifice is at the root of any truly loving relationship.

The poem at the top of this article, borrowed from Dr. Schlessinger's book, presents us with another profound truth. Strength of character does not develop overnight. It is the accumulation, over the long term, of actions and attitudes that build character. It is the willingness to see that the right choice today builds the likelihood of a better choice tomorrow.

Attention to small actions and attitudes can lead to considerably more significant ones, under circumstances demand.

The development of a strong character, through

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BELIEFS Values

Kol Nidre ushers in sacred day

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

Synagogues and temples throughout Oakland County and the world will fill to capacity when Jews gather to usher in Yom Kippur at sundown Friday, Oct. 10.

"Of all the services and all the holy times in Judaism, the most attended, the most special in the eyes of Jews is Kol Nidre night," said Cantor Harold Orbach, who has served Temple Israel in West Bloomfield for 36 years. "It's the beginning of the holiest day of the year, the Day of Atonement."

As the white-draped Torah scrolls are brought forth from the Ark on this sacred eve during the High Holy Days, the most haunting melody of the Kol Nidre sets the mood for repentance, both individually and collectively.

"It's almost a legal absolution of vows made in duress, vows that were not intentional," explained Cantor Chaim Najman, who joined Cong. Shaarey Zedek in 1978. "It's a time when Jews unite in a congregation for the Jews who are with them today and the Jews of the centuries before them. The Kol Nidre very explicitly expresses the uniting of the Jews of past centuries."

Jews living in Spain during the 16th century observed Yom Kippur in hiding when the consequence for non-conversion to Christianity resulted in expulsion or death. Their chanting of the Kol Nidre annulled the Christian vows they were coerced to pledge just to stay



Sacred sound: Cantor Harold Orbach of Temple Israel blows the shofar (Ram's horn) in preparation for Yom Kippur.

alive. "Many Jews publicly proclaimed to be Christian and secretly maintained their Judaism," explained Orbach, a Bloomfield Hills resident. "When I sing the Kol Nidre, I make myself feel as though I'm in a cave. I relive the experience that they must have gone through at that particular time."

As cantor of the nation's largest Reform temple, Orbach is the sole chanter of the Aramaic verses of the Kol Nidre, which are sung three times consecutively to a crowd of 6,000.

Orbach will officiate the 90-minute service at the temple at 6725 Walnut Lake Road with the clerical team of Rabbis M. Robert Syms of West Bloomfield, Harold Loss of Bloomfield Hills, Paul Yedwab of West Bloomfield, Joshua Bennett of Birmingham and interning Cantor David Katz of New York.

Nearby at one of the foremost Conservative congregations in the country, Najman will lead the singing of the Kol Nidre accompanied by a choir, with a congregation of 4,000 softly

humming along. Najman co-officiates the three-hour service as part of a clerical team that includes Rabbis Irwin Groner of Southfield, Leonardo Bitran of West Bloomfield and Stephen Weiss of Southfield and Cantor Sidney Rube of Southfield. The 116-year-old congregation now has three locations, Cong. Shaarey Zedek at 27376 Bell Road in Southfield, and CSZ B'nai Israel Center at 4200 Walnut Lake Road and the Irving

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Survey identifies needs of growing vicariate

BY RENA FULKA
SPECIAL WRITER

For the first time in the history of the local Roman Catholic vicariate, the laity have been called upon to help develop their spiritual community.

Through the first survey of its kind entitled, "Meeting the Needs of Catholics in the New Century," parishioners of the Vicariate of the Lakes expressed their views on beliefs and practices, factors that do motivate Catholics to participate in their faith and willingness to support collaborative efforts in the north-

west corner of Oakland County.

The vicariate planning process began two years ago with a demographic study and continued with the survey prioritizing the needs of parishes and their ministries. The survey was completed anonymously by worshippers attending Mass at 10 parishes in the vicariate on the third weekend in March. It was also mailed to inactive members, or those on the roster with no record of activity.

Of the 22,000 registered units in the vicariate representing 60,000 individuals, there were 8,624 responses. Five percent

came from the World War II generation, 21 percent from the silent generation born from 1925 to 1942, 45 percent from the Baby Boom generation born from 1943 to 1960, and 29 percent from young adults born from 1961 to 1981. Of the inactive parishioners polled, there was a 12 percent response.

Most respondents put their faith in a family context or in relationship to their marriage, parents or children. "The pleasant surprise was that people seemed to have their priorities in line," said the Rev. Msgr. Robert Humitz, vicar. "They see the

value of worship and spirituality and prayer life."

Since the average age in the vicariate is computed at 42, the majority of needs were expressed by the family-oriented Baby Boom generation. "But we also have to listen to the minority needs and respond to those," said the priest of 37 years. "What institutions have to be careful of is being in tune with what people need and responding accordingly."

"Families are changing and ministries need to adapt," said

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