



Minnesota Character Council

# CHARACTER Connect

March 2021

Volume 2, Issue 2

## In This Issue

- Justice—Then Peace
- A Renewed Focus on Character and Virtue Education
- Virtue — Beyond Modern Understanding
- Book Review, "The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How we can do it Again"
- Resources

## Minnesota Character Council

Dave Adney  
 Matt Bostrom  
 David E. Foster  
 Michael Hartoonian  
 Todd Lefko  
 Bill Mittlefehldt  
 Todd Otis  
 Don Salverda  
 Jack Serier  
 Barbara Shin  
 Steve Young\*  
 Deborah Yungner

\*Chair

The MCC is administered by  
 Synergy & Leadership Exchange.  
 To learn more visit  
[www.synergyexchange.org/minnesota-character-council](http://www.synergyexchange.org/minnesota-character-council)

Contact:  
[bbergseth@synergyexchange.org](mailto:bbergseth@synergyexchange.org)

## Justice—Then Peace

It has been a year since our lives began to drastically change. Starting with the fear of COVID-19 in the Nation and the appearance in our immediate community, families, and the closing of our schools. Next, came the dramatic event triggering the rising of racial injustice addressed by demonstrations, the voices of people who have not been heard. The voices became



thunderingly loud on the streets all over the Nation. Civil unrest was demanding racial justice, a rising-up of cries for justice for ALL, a new fear coming to those who had not been aware of the long and deep history of injustices, of anger and pain in our society, the imbedded unfairness in our institutions for Black and Brown people, neighbors, family, friends, and colleagues. Clearly in the public arena, white ally voices included, came the cry out of chaos for racial justice, a cry asking how we can bring justice into our various institutions, our lives.

The time had come to move toward resolution, to bring about peace through justice. But how do we achieve peace when we see reflected in our reality, so much injustice, for peace and justice are inseparable?

As we intelligently review events of the 2020 racial and economic unrest it gives us experiential knowledge of the wrongness in our communities, therefore looking back is helpful for providing an awakening to new knowledge. However, it is not the looking back but looking forward with this knowledge that gives us hope, the hope that we can correct injustice. People of good character stepped forward with good examples: corporations, athletics and entertainment, politics and government, etc. They did not talk, they acted.

In education we know resources are disproportionately distributed, discipline is not always administered fairly, special education referrals are disproportionate by gender and race, curriculum is not inclusive of the stories and history of all Americans. These are good places to "act" aggressively to bring justice to our educational system. Programs for character development that include direct instruction, language development, experiential/practice, moral and ethical reasoning, etc. are important at the elementary and secondary levels. We **can** bring justice to schooling and hence peace. Educating citizens for character and a just society, combined with public safety programs centered on character are ways to recognize Fenghuang, the foretelling of harmony in our nation.

—By Barbara Shin, Ph.D., Education Equity Consultant, Symmetry Systems Unlimited

## A Renewed Focus on Character and Virtue Education

*Following is an interview summary by Bill Mittlefehldt with Michael Hahn, Ph.D., Program Director, for the new Character and Virtue Education program at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota.*

Saint Mary's University of Minnesota was founded in 1912 as a small school in Winona. A lot has changed since then including the addition of the Twin Cities and Rochester campuses. We are now one of the larger comprehensive universities in the state! Our current strategic plan "Building a Future Full of Hope" grounds character and virtue education in our Lasallian Catholic mission and gives it a place of prominence. Character education and virtue formation have always been part of the Saint Mary's experience, but we are now giving it renewed attention, in part because we have seen how essential it is, whether you are a traditional undergraduate student or adult learner preparing for a career. In particular, we are working in our school of education to make character and virtue a lens to prepare future teachers and school leaders.

Our university patron, John Baptist de la Salle, is the saint of teachers. One of his key insights is that before teachers can teach their students well, they first must become brothers and sisters to each other. This is particularly true now with all the challenges teachers face with the ongoing pandemic and political and social questions. For this reason, we started a Faculty Learning Community. We have great teachers at Saint Mary's, but partly what makes them great is that they are still learners! This university-wide faculty community gathers twice per month to read and discuss character and virtue education and how it can enhance student learning. We have faculty with specialization in the humanities, natural sciences, business, education, and theology who participate and this interdisciplinary exploration of character help to prepare our students not only for a living, but for a life.

Formal assessment of character education is challenging but it's critical. We want to know the effect that our initiatives are having on faculty, staff, and students. The best literature suggests a multi-pronged strategy, and that is what we are doing at Saint Mary's, including qualitative studies and self-reflection. But there are other more informal ways that we know what we are doing in this area is having a positive effect. We have



Michael Hahn, Ph.D., program director (right), Nancy Erickson, assistant program director (center), and Antar Salim, D.B.A., business administration program (left), discuss plans for Saint Mary's character and virtue education.

received a great interest from faculty, staff, and students to participate in the programs, speakers, and service opportunities that we offer. We have also received a great interest from the larger Saint Mary's community including alumni and benefactors. Higher education that prioritizes character education and virtue formation is hard work, so we also make sure to find time to celebrate the accomplishments and encourage each other, especially now during the pandemic, for this important work that has been entrusted to us. The formal assessment for this development of character and virtue will be measured with feedback from the Faculty Learning Community, the staff's evaluation of relationship skills and input from communities and organizations that benefit from the service and competencies generated by this exciting program. Their core commitment is a focus on proper order of character which enables capable leadership for Business, Human Resources, Health, and Education.

## Virtue – Beyond Modern Understanding

*The present leaves footprints in the future*

The problem we have as a people today is that we no longer see virtue or first principles as a goal in themselves. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, Americans still believed that virtue needed no direct object. It was good, not for this or that reason, but sufficient in itself. Jefferson suggested that one should go to school, not to become better-off, but to become better, period. The better-off follows from the better, as the future follows from the present. That is, wisdom is the ability to put first things first. So, what were those values of first worth? They included: honesty/truth, courage, piety/humility, thrift (sacrifice — delayed gratification), beauty, and justice — all end-states of being civilized.

As understood by most 18<sup>th</sup> Century philosophers, self-interest was meaningless without consideration of the other ... this was also understood as the seed bed of happiness by Jefferson, Locke, and even Adam Smith,

## Virtue — beyond modern understanding . . . Continued

and today, shown to be empirically true from studies on why people are happy. First principles are also necessary conditions for democracy and a free market. They are not means to these ends — they are simply the end points of a meaningful life and a civil society.

If our people can no longer understand first principles, which are made manifest in one's **character**, we are heading for a fall — of civility, democracy, an ethical market system, and justice. Societies fall when citizens no longer understand love, in all its complexity and gentleness.

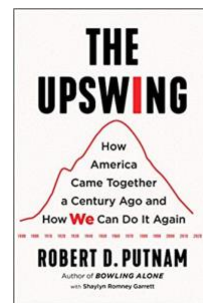
—By Michael Hartoonian

## Book Review

### **The Upswing: How America Came Together a Century Ago and How we can Do it Again** (2020)

By Robert D. Putnam with Shaylyn Romney Garret

Robert Putman and Shaylyn Garrett recently published their research, data and stories about recent patterns in American history. Their collaboration combines his concerns about building social capital and her expertise in weaving the social fabric of American teamwork. This collaboration has been recognized by Harvard University and the Aspen Institute's Weaver Movement. Over more than the last century American society has seen historic development from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century's Gilded Age of individualistic striving, unequal opportunities, and inequality to a pattern in the 1960s toward less self-interest, more commitment to the community, and growing concern with our responsibilities to each other. This pattern has been identified in chapters on Economics, Politics, Society, Culture, Race and Gender. Their analysis defines the movement from an "I" society to a "we" society and back again. Their data demonstrates a convergence of trends from a progressive era in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to a more we-oriented orientation to the progressive 1960s. This multivariate pattern changed in the 1970s back toward the isolation, individualism and despair of the Gilded Age. They conclude that there is currently an opportunity for an Upswing toward community collaboration and shared concerns with our social fabric and norms for American teamwork.



This analysis includes how a new upswing may have a positive impact on the economy, politics, society and culture of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, including the challenges of race and gender. As we work together to amplify this potential upswing, we can observe our success with a variety of illustrations from these core elements of our community's fabric. Putman's career emphasis on the critical importance of growing social capital and Garrett's emphasis on learning how to re-weave the fabric of American teamwork can help readers engage more individuals, organizations and institutions in a process of cultural renewal. In this manner, we may adapt to the pandemic's isolation, political mobs and climate challenges before us. This upswing may help us find the hope we need to fuel investments of time, talent and tenacity as we rebuild American teamwork.

Social scientists may wonder about the historical accuracy of the thesis, but David Brooks and others have emphasized this may be a critical time to invest our hope in connecting character and community in ways that generate more justice, equity and stewardship. The data and graphics indicate that we have generated another era of Me and Mine, but the pandemic, Biden victory and the growing economic recession may pull us together in new ways. Hints of this upswing may provide a match of hope to ignite American teamwork and community collaboration.

—By Bill Mittlefehldt

## Resources

### CHARACTER

- [Character & Social-Emotional Development Model Standards](https://www.character.org/model-standards), <https://www.character.org/model-standards>
- [From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope: Recommendations from the National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic Development](https://bit.ly/2Ncx7D2), <https://bit.ly/2Ncx7D2>

### CIVIC EDUCATION/MEDIA LITERACY

- [Media Literacy Standards to Counter Truth Decay](https://bit.ly/3p23bH2), <https://bit.ly/3p23bH2>