

Changing the World One Virtuous Woman at a Time

By Heather Whittle
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In April 2008, the newly called Young Women general presidency—Elaine S. Dalton, Mary N. Cook, and Ann M. Dibb—stood atop Ensign Peak on the northern edge of Salt Lake City and looked out over the valley.

From their vantage point the figure of the angel Moroni sparkled on the Salt Lake Temple, and they knew then what the Lord had in mind for the young women of the Church.

The three women held aloft a walking stick from which waved a gold Peruvian shawl—their banner and ensign to the nations, a call for a return to virtue.

“We cannot get caught up with this new value of virtue without saying the reason for the value is the temple,” Sister Dalton said. “And the temple is the reason for everything we are doing in Young Women, because it will help these young women to come unto Christ.”

Virtue was officially added to the Young Women values in November 2008. It is defined in the Personal Progress book as “a pattern of thought and behavior based on high moral standards. It includes chastity and purity” (*Young Women Personal Progress* [booklet, 2009], 70).

This value is unique in that all the experiences and the value project are required, where the other values allow young women to choose from several options. In addition, for the first time, mothers have been invited to complete the



Personal Progress program with their daughters and earn their own medallions.

In the last year, young women and others around the world have responded overwhelmingly to the call to return to virtue, flooding the Young Women office with letters and photographs from those who have answered the call. Many have climbed mountains and unfurled their own banners.

One group of young women in Hannibal, Missouri, USA, desiring to make a pledge to be virtuous from a high place and not able to find a mountain nearby, climbed a 36-story cement tower, unfurled their banner, and committed to live a virtuous life.

In Mexico, the name of the Young Womanhood Recognition translates to “The Award of the Young Woman of Virtue.” Young women in Mexico were excited about the addition of virtue as a value, Sister Dalton said—it is a value with which they were already familiar.

“The call to virtue has been received with overwhelming praise, from every aspect, within the Church and without,” Sister Cook said. “Leaders love it; priesthood leaders have emphasized it; mothers and grandmothers have been grateful for it.”

The project for the value of virtue is to follow the Savior’s admonition to learn of Him (see D&C 19:23) by reading the entire Book of Mormon and recording thoughts regularly in a journal.

An e-mail to the Young Women presidency

from a sister in England reads: “Sadly, we have to apologize. We are not going to complete this as quickly as we had anticipated. The reason is my daughter and I are studying the Book of Mormon in a way we never have before. It is such a sweet experience—we want to take our time.”

The Book of Mormon teaches about societies that prospered and were happy when they were virtuous and pure but that fell when they were no longer virtuous, Sister Dibb said.

Men and women have been equally enthusiastic about the new value, the Young Women presidency said, citing examples of entire groups of young men and singles wards that have worked on the value together.

Sister Dibb emphasized that both men and women must focus on virtue to obtain the greatest blessings. “Men have no power or strength to exercise the priesthood that they receive if they are not morally pure,” she said. “And women receive that power and strength to fulfill their divine callings as wives, mothers, and as women as they practice virtue.”

Sister Dalton said she believes that the value of virtue has been saved for this time, a time when the world does everything but promote virtue.

“It’s interesting to us that in this world so many

Young women and their leaders in the Santo Domingo Dominican Republic Independencia Stake ascended Cambita Garabito, a mountain in the Dominican Republic, where they raised their own banner to virtue in August 2009.

young women can lose sight of their identity as daughters of God,” Sister Cook said. “We’re just reminding them of that and also of the fact that if you have made a mistake, you can repent.”

The commitment to remain virtuous and pure is possible because of the enabling and redeeming power of the Savior’s Atonement, Sister Dibb said. The fourth value experience focuses on repentance.

In the last year, many women—both old and young—have communicated a desire to return to being virtuous women. “[The addition of virtue] has created an excitement for women who have made wrong choices. Many have said, ‘I can be a virtuous woman again. . . . It is possible for me,’” Sister Cook said.

Many of those who desire to be virtuous again wonder where they can start. The Young Women presidency shares with them this formula: Pray night and morning. Read in the Book of Mormon five minutes or more each day. And smile.

“If all women in the Church and the world did this, think what the world would be like in five years,” Sister Dalton said. “We really do believe that virtuous young women led by the Spirit can change the world.” ■

