Courage is the most important of all the virtues, because without courage you can’t practice any other virtue consistently. You can practice any virtue erratically, but nothing consistently without courage.

~~Maya Angelou

Reflections on Courage:
A Core Value
By Dr. W. Craig Gilliam

Those who lack the courage will always find a philosophy to justify it.

~~Albert Camus

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.
The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.

~~Nelson Mandela

To be fully human, fully myself, to accept all that I am, all that you envision, this is my prayer.
Walk with me out to the rim of life, beyond security.
Take me to the exquisite edge of courage and release me to become.

~~Sue Monk Kidd

During her Episcopal Address to the Louisiana Conference, Bishop Cynthia Fierro Harvey commented that we are to have courage, to be creative, to be risk takers, not afraid of failure. The word “courage” was woven throughout the week, a common thread that ran through it.

Courage: what does such a big word mean? What is courage in its deepest meanings and soulful expressions? How do we as ministers and leaders connect with it? How do we act out of courage in our daily lives? What might it look like? This article explores courage, especially in its soulful, quiet depths of daily living.
At times I find myself searching for courage; following the yellow brick road like the lion in *The Wizard of Oz* thinking that the wizard or someone else can give me the courage I seek. But, like the lion in the movie, I discover that real courage can’t be given, it is discovered in the daily choices we make. More times than not, we do not get awards, medals or acknowledgements for it. We simply are rewarded by what we know.

Courage is a word that tempts us to think outwardly, to run bravely against opposing fire, to do something under besieging circumstances, and perhaps, above all, to be seen to do it in public, to *show* courage; to be celebrated in story, rewarded with medals, given the accolade.

A look at its linguistic origins leads us in a more interior direction and toward its original template, the old Norman French, *Coeur*, or heart. Courage is the measure of our heartfelt participation with life, with another, with our selves, with a community, a work, a ministry, a future.

To be courageous is not necessarily to go anywhere or do anything except to make conscious those things we already feel deeply and then to live through the unending vulnerabilities of those consequences.

To be courageous is to seat our feelings deeply in the body and in the world. As the poet Mary Oliver writes in a line of her poem, *Wild Geese*, “you *only* have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.” This is a thousand mile “only.” It takes a lifetime to get there.

To be courageous is to live up and into the necessities of relationships that often already exist, with things we find we already care deeply about: with another person, with ourselves, a ministry, a group of people, a future, a possibility in society, or with an unknown that begs us on and always has begged us on. To be *courageous* is to stay close to the way we are made.

Jesus modeled courageous living. He dared to imagine a world and story different from the one that was around him. He imagined a new world and story and began to live into it. Others were so compelled by his new story that they, too, began to catch and live into it and live from its values. Courageously, imaginatively, he lived.

French philosopher and writer Albert Camus used to tell himself quietly to *live to the point of tears*, not as a call for maudlin sentimentality, but as an invitation to the deep privilege of belonging and the way that belonging affects us. It shapes us and breaks our heart at a fundamental dynamic of human incarnation to be moved by what we feel, as if surprised by the actuality and privilege of love and affection and its possible loss. Feelings and courage walk together hand-in-hand on our journeys. *Courage* is what love looks like when tested by the necessities of being alive.
One central test of courage and alignment is parenthood. To be a new mother or father and live up to and into the overwhelming power and helplessness of that new love is to be heartfelt, to be courageous, just by the fact of being shaken and realigned with a new and surprising life who comes from nowhere.

As new parents we may not even know what the word parent means. We may not know what to do or how to get through. We live literally to the point of tears and fears, our own, our spouse’s and our child’s. There is no enemy line to throw ourselves at, no medal to be earned. The interior template of courage shows itself slowly, imperceptibly. It is the interior psyche settling and seating itself into a relationship with a future that chooses as its foundation a new and unknown child.

From the outside we see only someone walking along the street, heavily pregnant, or pushing a stroller, weighted by the bric-a-brac of parenthood. There is no glamor in the outward show, deserving no medal, but on the inside, a heartfelt, robustly vulnerable and courageous realigning of one life with another. It is the beginning of a courageous bearing inside that will only later come to fruition on the outside.

The same is true for ministers. We go to meeting after meeting, hospital visit after hospital visit, home to home; we offer an inspiring word week after week, perform pastoral visits, weddings and funerals, not to get a medal, but because we care. We do the small matters of tending to others and ourselves. We struggle to be courageous, to stay close to the way we are made, to stay close to that heartfelt necessity for existence. Even without recognition, we keep doing what is right, what has integrity, what is loving and compassionate. We laugh with those who laugh and weep with those who weep. We invite our dreams and hear the visions of others. Often, it is a courageous bearing inside that will only later come to fruition on the outside. We live to the point of tears, from a deep place of faith, living closely to the new, unknown possibilities made known inside us.

We become courageous whenever we live closely and to the point of tears with any new possibility made known inside us. We show courage whenever we demonstrate a faith in the interior annunciations and align ourselves with the new and surprising and heartfelt necessities of even the average existence. To allow ourselves to feel deeply and thoroughly what has already come into being is to change our future, simply by living up to the consequences of knowing what we hold in our affections.

From the inside, it can feel like confusion. Only slowly do we learn what we really care about, and allow our outer life to be realigned in the gravitational pull. With maturity, we find the safest ground from which to step, that robust vulnerability. We come to feel that it is the only necessary way forward, the only real invitation and the surest most solid ground, even though there are no guarantees. On the inside we come to know who and what and how we love and what we can do and be to deepen that love; only from the outside and only by looking back, does it look like courage.
Like the lion seeking courage on the journey, he or she, as do we all, has it all along. He or she simply needs help discovering what is already there. Life and ministry invites us on the courageous journey.

Courage;
it comes from the next step,
the next choice,
the daily, mundane decisions,
our inner passions connecting with outward needs,
to rise in the morning,
to face another day,
to calmly speak your voice
in a manner not belittling those who stand at a different place,
but echoing your soul’s quiet, firm, compassionate conviction,
to listen and hear beneath another’s voice;
the small seed beneath the soil
daring to grow toward the light,
the raindrop embraced by the sea,
a leaf falling beautifully in the breeze,
changing landscape without a shudder.

All these are done
not to hide our light,
not to change their natures,
not to see or be seen,
not to resist,
not to speak so one is praised, rewarded or elevated.

But
stepping,
choosing,
making decisions,
offering one’s voice,
accepting another’s sound,
reaching for the light,
floating in the breeze,
finding embrace from the sea,
living to the point of tears,
all these are
because that is who you are and what you do.
Gently, naturally,
beautifully,
courageously
as you live.

Courage is the tear in the hardened heart;
a kind whisper in the midst of ugly shouts;
not to react
when like a dagger,
harshness is thrown your way;
walking forward while your knees quake,
the willingness to accept oneself and be
robustly vulnerable,
which is incarnation.

We are sufficient for the day,
to love, to adventure
to go on the grand tour,
into another
today.

What is courage?
Watch your life and discover its name . . .

Agree or disagree, you are invited into the conversation!

Men (People) must live and create. Live to the point of tears.
~~Albert Camus

It takes courage to grow up and become who you really are.
~~e. e. cummings

COURAGE AND RISK
• We believe that new times call for new actions.
• We are willing to trust ourselves and each other,
and risk acting in new and courageous ways in order to
transform a dying institution into a vibrant movement of faith and action.
~~One of our Core Values for the Louisiana Annual Conference
Where do we find the courage to be leaders today? The etymology of the word courage gives the answer. Courage comes from the old French word for heart, Coeur. When we are deeply affected, when our hearts respond to an issue or person, courage pours out from our open hearts. Please note that courage does not come from the root word for analysis or for strategic planning. We have to be engaged at the heart level in order to be courageous champions. As much as we may fear emotions at work, leaders need to be willing to let their hearts open and to tell stories that open other people’s hearts.

Don’t walk behind me; I may not lead.
Don’t walk in front of me; I may not follow.
Just walk beside me and be my friend.
~~Albert Camus

God, give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other.
~~Reinhold Niebuhr

The courage to be is the courage to accept oneself, in spite of being unacceptable.
~~Paul Tillich

Courage is not the absence of despair; it is, rather, the capacity to move ahead in spite of despair.
~~Rollo May

Upcoming Opportunities offered through The Center for Pastoral Excellence

Residents in Ministry
2014-2015 Gathering Dates
All gatherings are at The Wesley Center, except for the Abbey Retreat. All day gatherings are 9:30AM – 3:30PM.

RIM One
8/5-6/2014 – Overnight retreat with the RIM Twos
(10:30AM Tues – 1PM Wed) –
10:30-11:30 on Tuesday (audit training)
10/7/2014
11/4/2014
12/2/14
2/3/15
4/13-15/15 – Abbey Retreat (St. Joseph’s Abbey, Covington)

RIM Two
8/5-6/2014 – Overnight retreat with the RIM Ones
   (10:30AM Tues–1PM Wed)
   10:30-11:30 on Tuesday (audit training)
10/6/2014
11/3/2014
4/13-15/15 – Abbey Retreat (St. Joseph’s Abbey, Covington)

RIM Three:
8/4/2014 – Bob Carrell, UMF, present that morning.
4/13-15/15 – Abbey Retreat (St. Joseph’s Abbey, Covington)

True change takes place in the imagination.
~~Thomas Moore

You have come to the shore. There are no instructions.
~~Denise Levertov

~~Poetic Meditation~~

God speaks to each of us as he makes us,
Then walks with us silently out of the night.

   These are words we dimly hear:
   You, sent out beyond your recall,
   Go to the limits of your longing.

   Embody me.

   Flare up like flame
   And make giant shadows that I can move in.
Let everything happen to me: beauty and terror.
   Just keep going. No feeling is final.
   Don’t let yourself lose me.
   Nearby is the county they call life.

   Give me your hand.

(Rilke’s Book of Hours: love poems to God, translated by Macy and Barrows,
Be brave. Take risks. Nothing can substitute experience.
~~Paulo Coelho

Courage doesn’t always roar, sometimes courage is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, I will try again tomorrow.
~~Bobi Seredich

Do no harm.
Do good.
Stay in love with God.
~~Ruben Job

If we can be of assistance in any way, please let us know.
Thanks for your ministry! Grace and Peace!

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