

**Lessons from Parker Palmer's "Courage" Ministry:
Building "Circle of Trust"**

*Rev. Dr. Barbara Coeyman(revbarbarac@comcast.net)
CUUMA, River Road UU
September 30, 2015*

Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's Courage....Anais Nin

Participants Outline

MORNING

Welcome and Introductions

'Courage' and Trust in ministry

Circles of Trust: The Theory: Some Habits

Circles

Deep Listening

Touchstones (highlighted items included in this packet)

Circles of Trust: The Practice: Experiencing a Circles of Trust

Use of Metaphor: Blizzards

Poetry as "Third Thing:" **For a New Beginning: John O'Donohue**

Individual Reflection (Art as "Third Thing")

Small-Group Listening

Large-Group Sharing

AFTERNOON

Habits of the Heart:

Reading

Embodiment and Reflection

Closing

Other Courage Components

Resources

Questions and Answers, Reflection

Notepaper is on last sheet of this handout

*The Power for authentic leadership ...
is found not in external arrangements but in the human heart. ... Parker J. Palmer*

Circles of Trust “Touchstones”

- *Give and receive welcome.* People learn best in hospitable spaces. In this circle we support each other’s learning by giving and receiving hospitality.
- *Be present as fully as possible.* Be here with your doubts, fears and failings as well as your convictions, joys and successes, your listening as well as your speaking.

What is offered in the circle is by invitation, not demand. This is not a “share or die” event! During this retreat, do whatever your soul calls for, and know that you do it with our support. Your soul knows your needs better than we do.

- *Speak your truth in ways that respect other people’s truth.* Our views of reality may differ, but speaking one’s truth in a circle of trust does not mean interpreting, correcting or debating what others say. Speak from your center to the center of the circle, using “I” statements, trusting people to do their own sifting and winnowing.
- *No fixing, saving, advising or correcting each other.* This is one of the hardest guidelines for those of us in the “helping professions.” But it is vital to welcoming the soul, to making space for the inner teacher.
- *Learn to respond to others with honest, open questions* instead of counsel, corrections, with such questions, we help “hear each other into deeper speech.”
- *When the going gets rough, turn to wonder.* If you feel judgmental, or defensive, ask yourself, “I wonder what brought her to this belief?” “I wonder what he’s feeling right now?” “I wonder what my reaction teaches me about myself?” Set aside judgment to listen to others—and to yourself—more deeply.
- *Attend to your own inner teacher.* We learn from others, of course. But as we explore poems, stories, questions and silence in a circle of trust, we have a special opportunity to learn from within. So pay close attention to your own reactions and responses, to your most important teacher.
- *Trust and learn from the silence.* Silence is a gift in our noisy world, and a way of knowing in itself. Treat silence as a member of the group. After someone has spoken, take time to reflect without immediately filling the space with words.
- *Observe deep confidentiality.* Nothing said in a circle of trust will ever be repeated to Others.
- *Know that it’s possible* to leave the circle with whatever it was that you needed when you arrived, and that the seeds planted here can keep growing in the days ahead.

Facilitators of Courage & Renewal programs use these Touchstones to create safe and trustworthy space for shared inquiry and exploration in a group. They derive from the Principles and Practices of our Circle of Trust® approach. Read more at <http://couragerenewal.org/about/foundations>. ©2012 Center for Courage & Renewal, www.CourageRenewal.org

“For a New Beginning:” John O’Donohue

In out of the way places of the heart
Where your thoughts never think to wander
This beginning has been quietly forming
Waiting until you were ready to emerge.

For a long time it has watched your desire
Feeling the emptiness grow inside you
Noticing how you willed yourself on
Still unable to leave what you had outgrown.

It watched you play with the seduction of safety
And the grey promises that sameness whispered
Heard the waves of turmoil rise and relent
Wondered would you always live like this.

Then the delight, when your courage kindled,
And out you stepped onto new ground,
Your eyes young again with energy and dream
A path of plenitude opening before you.

Though your destination is not clear
You can trust the promise of this opening;
Unfurl yourself into the grace of beginning
That is one with your life’s desire.

Awaken your spirit to adventure
Hold nothing back, learn to find ease in risk
Soon you will be home in a new rhythm
For your soul senses the world that awaits you.

Five Habits of the Heart That Help Make Democracy Possible

Adapted from Parker J. Palmer, Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit (2011)

The human heart is the first home of democracy. It is where we embrace our questions. Can we be equitable? Can we be generous? Can we listen with our whole beings, not just our minds, and offer our attention rather than our opinions? And do we have enough resolve in our hearts to act courageously, relentlessly, without giving up—ever—trusting our fellow citizens to join with us in our determined pursuit of a living democracy? —

Terry Tempest Williams

“Habits of the heart” (a phrase coined by Alexis de Tocqueville) are deeply ingrained ways of seeing, being, and responding to life that involve our minds, our emotions, our self-images, our concepts of meaning and purpose. I believe that these five interlocked habits are critical to sustaining a democracy:

1. An understanding that we are all in this together. Biologists, ecologists, economists, ethicists and leaders of the great wisdom traditions have all given voice to this theme. Despite our illusions of individualism and national superiority, we humans are a profoundly interconnected species—entwined with one another and with all forms of life, as the global economic and ecological crises reveal in vivid and frightening detail. We must embrace the simple fact that we are dependent upon and accountable to one another, and that includes the stranger, the “alien other.” At the same time, we must save the notion of interdependence from the idealistic excesses that make it an impossible dream. Exhorting people to hold a continual awareness of global, national, or even local interconnectedness is a counsel of perfection that is achievable (if at all) only by the rare saint, one that can only result in self-delusion or defeat. *Which leads to a second key habit of the heart...*

2. An appreciation of the value of “otherness.” It is true that we are all in this together. It is equally true that we spend most of our lives in “tribes” or lifestyle enclaves—and that thinking of the world in terms of “us” and “them” is one of the many limitations of the human mind. The good news is that “us and them” does not have to mean “us versus them.” Instead, it can remind us of the ancient tradition of hospitality to the stranger and give us a chance to translate it into twenty-first century terms. Hospitality rightly understood is premised on the notion that the

stranger has much to teach us. It actively invites “otherness” into our lives to make them more expansive, including forms of otherness that seem utterly alien to us. Of course, we will not practice deep hospitality if we do not embrace the creative possibilities inherent in our differences. *Which leads to a third key habit of the heart..*

3. An ability to hold tension in life-giving ways. Our lives are filled with contradictions—from the gap between our aspirations and our behavior, to observations and insights we cannot abide because they run counter to our convictions. If we fail to hold them creatively, these contradictions will shut us down and take us out of the action. But when we allow their tensions to expand our hearts, they can open us to new understandings of ourselves and our world, enhancing our lives and allowing us to enhance the lives of others. We are imperfect and broken beings who inhabit an imperfect and broken world. The genius of the human heart lies in its capacity to use these tensions to generate insight, energy, and new life. *Making the most of those gifts requires a fourth key habit of the heart...*

4. A sense of personal voice and agency. Insight and energy give rise to new life as we speak out and act out our own version of truth, while checking and correcting it against the truths of others. But many of us lack confidence in our own voices and in our power to make a difference. We grow up in educational and religious institutions that treat us as members of an audience instead of actors in a drama, and as a result we become adults who treat politics as a spectator sport. And yet it remains possible for us, young and old alike, to find our voices, learn how to speak them, and know the satisfaction that comes from contributing to positive change—if we have the support of a community. *Which leads to a fifth and final habit of the heart...*

5. A capacity to create community. Without a community, it is nearly impossible to achieve voice: it takes a village to raise a Rosa Parks. Without a community, it is nearly impossible to exercise the “power of one” in a way that allows power to multiply: it took a village to translate Parks’s act of personal integrity into social change. In a mass society like ours, community rarely comes ready-made. But creating community in the places where we live and work does not mean abandoning other parts of our lives to become full-time organizers. The steady companionship of two or three kindred spirits can help us find the courage we need to speak and act as citizens. There are many ways to plant and cultivate the seeds of community in our personal and local lives. We must all become gardeners of community if we want democracy to flourish.

Some Resources

www.couragerenewal.org: Center for Courage and Renewal

Publications

“Standing in the Tragic Gap,” *Weavings* (March / April 2009: XXIV: 2)

Brown, Judy. *The Art and Spirit of Leadership* (Trafford Publishing: 2012).

Brown, Valerie. *The Road That Teaches: Lessons in Transformation through Travel* (Philadelphia: FGC Quakerbridge, 2012)

..... *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher’s Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998).

..... *Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2011)

..... *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2004)

..... *Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2000)

Intrator, Sam M, ed. *Living the Questions: Essays Inspired by the Work and Life of Parker J. Palmer* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2005).

Intrator, Sam M. and Megan Scribner, eds. *Leading from Within: Poetry That Sustains the Courage to Lead* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

Retreat Series

Courage and Renewal Retreats for All Season of Life
(usually offered as a series, covering several days to several months)

Habits of the Heart for Healthy Congregations: Retreat and Learning Conference.

A Geography of Grace: Alumni Institute for Clergy and Faith Leaders.
(coverage of Circles of Trust methods)

Courage and Renewal Academy for Leaders
(for persons experienced in leadership, and in “Courage” methods)

Courage at Work
(for leadership development in all organizations)

Journaling

*When we stake a claim for our own authenticity,
We do so for the world as well.... Greg Lavoy*

*Hospitality is not to change people,
but to offer them space
where change can take place... Henry Nouwen*

When all that we understand of self and world comes together in the center place we call the heart, we are more likely to find the courage to act humanely on what we know.... Parker J. Palmer

*Don't ask yourself what the world needs,
ask yourself what makes you come alive,
and then go do it.
Because what the world needs is
people who have come alive.... Howard Thurman*

Poetry

Circle of Firelight: Christina Baldwin

It has always been scary
To step into the circle of firelight,
To show up in the company of strangers,
To ask for entrance or to offer it. Our hearts race ---
Will we have the courage to see each other?
Will we have the courage to see the world?
The risks we take in the twenty first century
Are based on risks human beings took
Thousands of years ago.
We are not different from our ancestors,
They are still here, coded inside us.
They are, I believe
Cheering us on.