



Courage Is Contagious

Michael Neuroth
Director, Washington, DC office

“But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also...”
- Matthew 5:39

“Courage is Contagious!” was the closing reminder at a recent training I attended here in Washington, D.C. The training was held by [Free DC](#), a local movement advocating for “home rule” for D.C.’s over 700,000 residents, whose local laws and policy remain subject to Congressional oversight.

The Free D.C. training included lots of good information, but I was struck at the end by this simple reminder: courage is contagious. In our globalized, post-pandemic, social-media driven world where “6-7” can go viral, thoughts, images, and stories can all spread like wildfire across our social media feeds and lives. While we may not be able to stop the spread of hate and misinformation directly, we can work to counter those narratives with stories of joy, of love, of courage. Courage can spread like wildfire if we embody it, if we share it, if we look for it.

A few recent stories of courage have particularly buoyed my spirit over these last few weeks. These are stories of clergy stepping into the front of prayer vigils to deescalate and absorb the violence that border security was threatening against their communities. UCC pastor [Rev. Jorge Bautista](#) and PCUSA clergy Rev. David Black were both shot in the face with pepper balls by border police. Others, like Rev. Michael Woolf, have been violently thrown to the ground and pinned down. In each of

these cases, these clergy exemplified courage in the face of injustice.

Following these attacks, these clergy could have backed down or gone underground. They did not. In his testimony to Congress on November 19th, Rev. Black noted, *"...my faith strongly calls me to return, even in the face of my fear. My Bible tells me to not be afraid and to step out beyond the face of fear. I feel like it's my obligation to be back in solidarity with those who are protesting and in ministry towards those who are inside the facility and ICE officers as well."*

When I think of these examples, I am reminded of Jesus' call to "turn the other cheek." In his historical context, there was likely significant debate around varied responses to resist Roman occupation. Jesus' call to courageous nonviolence inspired Ghandi and Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., among many others throughout history. The call to turn the other cheek is not an act of surrender, but an act of strategic defiance. For those who are trained, prepared, and able to do so (i.e. not those being victimized or traumatized by violence), absorbing hate and violence shames the perpetrator, exposes injustice, and can interrupt systems of violence. Such acts are a shock to the imagination and remind us of the power we have as individuals and communities.

Let me be clear, this is not a call to martyrdom, but simply courage. We must [take precautions to be safe at protests or rallies](#), and be conscious about keeping others safe as well. Yet, I believe these small acts of courage are what is needed now. What does courage look like for you? Writing a letter or making a phone call to Congress? Joining a rally or a nonviolence training? Offering mutual aid, or filming ICE activity? Whatever it is, let it be one step out of your comfort zone. Take one step forward, together. Let us turn our cheek to the political violence in our world and ground these actions in love. Let our actions encourage one another and remind us that in the end love wins. Love knows no borders.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The Rev. Michael Neuroth serves as the Director of the Washington, DC office of the National Setting of the United Church of Christ.

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