

## **What Courage Looks Like**

*First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, DE, by Rev. Michelle Collins, 2013*

**Chalice Lighting:** adapted from Paul MacMillan

May the lighting of this chalice be the work of gladness in our lives, and may its light glow with the memory of joy, and love, and hope—and with the desire to keep our flame of courage forever burning.

### **Check In**

#### **Reading: A Moment of Courage? by Rev. Michelle Collins**

During my last year living in San Francisco, the year I was serving as an intern community minister with the Faithful Fools Street Ministry, a proposition narrowly passed into law in the election. This new law prohibited sitting or lying on any public sidewalks during any daytime hours. Its effects particularly impacted folks who spent a good bit of their days out on the streets, and targeted enforcement began immediately in the more impoverished areas of town, like where I served. There was one woman who occasionally sat outside our building for the day. She usually had something pulled over her head, and rebuffed our attempts at conversation. One morning, after the new Sit-Lie law had been in effect for a little while, I was walking up and she was sitting in her usual spot. This time though, we weren't alone. A patrol car came up and the officer got out and proceeded to glare across the street at us. I stopped rummaging with my keys and stared back at him. I felt the new law itself was unjust as was the style of its enforcement. I didn't know how many times this woman had been cited by the law yet, and after a few citations, you end up with jail time, just for sitting down in public space. I stared and the woman stared and the police officer stared right back. After what felt like an eternity, he got in his car and left.

Now, some folks told me what I did took courage. I don't know about that. My legs were literally shaking at the time, and I just wanted to run for it into the building. It sure didn't feel like courage. But on the other hand, I don't think I could have done it a couple of years earlier. I think what it took was having less "not-courage" than I had before. "Not-courage" is all of the things that get in the way of acting or of taking a stand. Not-courage is what made me want to run for the building that day. I wonder if courage is often a matter of perspective, something easier for others to see in us. Not-courage seems much more real though. And my hope is, rather than becoming more courageous, that I have a little less not-courage with each passing year.

#### **Discussion & Sharing Questions:**

- Tell about a time when you have felt courageous.
- Tell about a time when you witnessed courage in someone else.
- What does courage look like? What does it feel like within yourself?
- What gets in the way of your acting in a way that might be called courageous? (your "not-courage")
- How have your courage and not-courage changed over the course of your life? Have there been any particular turning points in this journey for you?
- If courage in our lives something that we can even affect or change? Does courage change? If we can't explicitly grow our courage, what can we grow?

#### **Closing Thoughts & Extinguishing the Chalice**