

**Small Talk – August 6 2021**  
**By Michael Small**

**Profiles in Courage: COMMAnts from the Conference Minister**



*Last week our nation was privileged to witness five inspiring profiles in courage.*

*On Tuesday, four police officers testified in front of the House select committee investigating the January 6 insurrection at our nation's Capital. Capitol Police officers Harry Dunn and Sgt. Aquilino Gonell and Washington, D.C. police officers Michael Fanone and Daniel Hodges offered harrowing details about their experiences that tragic day in January. Their pain, their trauma, and their dedication to service and country was on full display throughout their testimony.*

*So was their courage: their courage during those long, horrific hours on January 6, and their courage in coming forward to testify despite the wrenching difficulty of doing so. As Sgt. Gonell said, "For most people, January 6 happened for a few hours. But for those of us who were in the thick of it, it has not ended."*

*Thousands of miles from the halls of Congress, Simone Biles, who has won a combined total of 32 Olympic and World Championship medals for her gymnastic awesomeness, announced last week that she would not compete in several Olympic events in Tokyo. Pointing to a case of "the twisties" – when gymnasts lose a sense of where they are in the air while performing routines – she stepped back from competition despite tremendous pressure and was met with a fair amount of ridicule because of it. "It wasn't easy pulling out of all those competitions," Biles said. "But my mental and physical health is above all medals that I could ever win." Biles later returned to competition and won the Bronze medal for her balance beam routine.*

*Watching those five individuals last week reminded me that courage takes many forms. It's not always the big, daring, physical acts that are the stuff of courage. Sometimes courage is the willingness to be vulnerable, to speak our truths for the sake of something larger or more profound. It's doing the hard thing because we know it's the right thing. Courage can also be our willingness to be silent and hear another's story in all its rawness, absorbing the lessons it has to teach us.*

*Churches are called to courage, too. The Conference's calling statement puts courage front and center: "God calls the Minnesota Conference United Church of Christ to equip a courageous church alive with Christ's transforming love."*

*What does being a 'courageous church' look like where you are? First Congregational UCC in Anoka offered one example recently. Despite vandalism to their church and some hostility from community members, the congregation persisted in their public support and welcome of LGBTQi neighbors. Sometimes being a courageous church*

*means standing with those who others would disparage and dismiss, rooted in a Gospel mandate to love our neighbors and draw the circle of welcome wide.*

*But being a courageous church is not just about how and where we stand for justice. Showing courage in our churches is also about the difficult questions we dare to ask ourselves, the congregational conflict we address with honesty and care, or steps we choose to take to create a bold future for our ministry. And especially important these days? Being a courageous church means refusing to allow the toxicity and divisions that surround us in today's polarized society to seep into our church community. It is choosing day in and day out to be counter-cultural, providing an alternative witness to the world of communities characterized by extravagant love, mutual respect, and enduring grace.*

*How is your congregation responding to the call to be a courageous church? I'd love to hear your examples of courage in action, whether quiet, simple acts of courage or bold, public stances. Send me a note at [sharip@uccmn.org](mailto:sharip@uccmn.org). I know I'll be inspired!*

*Be of good courage,*

*Reverend Shari Prestemon, Conference Minister*

Thanks Shari – may we continue to be courageous as we seek to follow in the ways of Christ.

In the spirit and agape love of Jesus, Michael

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