You gave Rona and her students the power of Courage & Renewal practices to help them succeed in school and life.

You Helped Struggling High Schoolers Succeed!

“I wish these Touchstones were my whole life.”

I had a student recently whose mom died of breast cancer last year, and he doesn’t get along with his dad. He drives 35 minutes to come to school here. He’s the kind of student who when he’s struggling with anger, you don’t want to go by him. Just his look will silence you. When we talked about Touchstones (from Courage & Renewal practices), he got really quiet and said, ‘I wish these Touchstones were my whole life.”

That’s a story Rona Zollinger, a Courage & Renewal facilitator, told us about bringing the practices into her classroom at the New Leaf Leadership Academy.

Your contribution created incredible change in the lives of Rona’s students. Most of these kids were unsuccessful in traditional schools. But you gave them a second chance.

Students now experience a mix of classroom learning, community service, environmental stewardship and internships. In the classroom, they interact in a circle format and use self-reflective practices based on the Courage & Renewal Touchstones.

“I carry the Touchstones with me into my life outside of school,” high school senior Amanda Rainey said. “It helps me to be more trusting, more honest, and keep an open mind. I think things through and react more positively.”

Amanda also likes how she’s challenged to reflect on questions like What do you want to do? and How can you achieve that? “These questions seem so basic but they never ask you those kinds of questions in traditional schools.”

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Thanks for giving people courage & dignity.

We have some statements from 1997 about non-discrimination in grading policy, but they were old statements and not strong enough,” said seminary president Lallene Rector. “We could do a lot better.”

“With a topic as volatile and provocative as this, with such strong feelings, it had the potential to blow up,” said Lallene. “I was determined we should do something respectfully, but also that we should absolutely do something.”

Thankfully, your support helped create a vital safe space for provocative conversations about inclusivity at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary.

Seminary president Lallene wanted a way for people to share different opinions, so she invited two Courage & Renewal facilitators to lead the process — Bonnie Allen and Greg Eaton, both highly regarded Garrett alumni. Greg is also on the Board of Trustees.

“‘There’s nothing more powerful than being heard,” said Lallene. “More than affirming, Courage circles give people an opportunity to understand how they’re feeling, what they think, and take courage to articulate it.”

“Intellectually it was all I hoped for and expected, but it was so much better than I imagined,” said Lallene. “Personally, I left feeling more grounded, in touch with myself, and experientially grateful! It was very moving.”

Trustees, faculty, staff and students were all part of these powerful dialogues.

“It was an amazing experience! Immediate, relevant, practical,” said Reverend Thomas Babler, one of the Trustees. “The Circle of Trust helped us find our identity as a community.”

You helped Lallene Rector create more LGBTQ inclusivity at Garrett Seminary.

From the Executive Director

This newsletter shows some of the ways your generous gift creates safe space and a sense of belonging for the people who need it most — people who mainstream society shuns or ignores, like at-risk students, LGBTQ communities, or Latino immigrants.

Like anyone, these folk need welcoming spaces where they can fully show up and be heard. Unfortunately, they don’t often have that.

So thank you! Your gift has begun to close that gap by supporting leaders like Rona, Lallene and Lori, whose inspiring stories fill this issue.

But what you don’t see on these pages are all the people who still need your help.

Your gift today will help other communities that also need the principles and practices you read about in this newsletter.

Will you provide more life-changing experiences to people who need it?

Executive Director
Center for Courage & Renewal

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The Courage to Talk About LGBTQ Inclusivity

You helped Lallene Rector create more LGBTQ inclusivity at Garrett Seminary.

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Thanks for giving
At first, Lori Santiago wasn’t sure that Courage Circles would help. “This ‘kumbaya’ approach is not for us,” she said. “Our people are in crisis.”

“As Latinos,” Lori said, “you get a lot of negative messages from the media. ‘You’re undocumented. You’re criminals!’ People are humiliated by these negative terms. It leaves little room for self-worth among our Latino community. How do you build leaders from that?”

Lori should know. She’s Executive Director of the Hispanic American Council in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

But thankfully you know that Courage Circles are not “kumbaya.” Your gift provided encouragement, empowerment and engagement to a community that desperately needed it.

Lori invited Thom Andrews to facilitate Courage Circles, and she was astonished at how quickly people opened up.

Despite cultural and class differences, people could sit together in the circles with dignity and humanity. Nobody would attack them. Instead, there was deep respect.

After one session, an older Mexican gentleman approached Lori to say, “Thank you so much. This is the first time I feel accepted.”

“People learned that they are not alone,” Lori said.

“With support from one another, they are beginning to take ownership of their community.”

This newfound sense of agency inspired people to be more engaged. A group of a dozen women volunteered to cater the Council’s big fundraising event in May. A youth soccer league, book clubs, parent support groups, Zumba and art classes suddenly appeared. Before the Courage Circles, these activities weren’t happening at all.

Lori said that after Courage Circles, “They feel comfortable enough to say, ‘I have a dream. This is how I see our community, and here’s what I could do to help.’”

Thank you for giving Kalamazoo’s Latino community the incredible courage to lead and transform their own community!
You Helped Struggling High Schoolers Succeed!

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“I was so used to a traditional school where if I didn’t know the answer I’d just ask the teacher. But Rona makes me figure it out myself. It’s important to live through your own questions, and find your own answer—it’s more meaningful!” Amanda said.

Rona said, “In my classroom, my goal is to encourage students to see learning as an opportunity to lead your own life. I teach kids about leadership, transformation and empowerment.”

On behalf of Amanda and Rona, thank you! Your support makes this school—and so many others—a place where real growth happens. What a gift!

You Gave People the Courage to Talk About LGBTQ Inclusivity

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As a result of the dialogue sessions, a set of formal recommendations to improve LGBTQ inclusivity was presented to—and affirmed by—the Board of Trustees. That formal approval is a vital step forward toward improving the culture of the seminary, the lives of its students, and ultimately every person served by its graduates.

Garrett Seminary is one of many institutions that will benefit from authentic conversations about diversity and inclusion, and your gifts create that positive change.

Thank you for helping create the space and conversations for an entire seminary—faculty, students and trustees—to ‘stand in the tragic gap’ and move forward together!

Reflection from Parker J. Palmer: In The Company of Strangers

“I n the company of strangers, we can learn that we are all in this together despite our many differences; that some of our differences are enriching and those that are vexing are negotiable; that it is possible to do business amicably with one another even in the face of conflicting interests. In the company of strangers, we can speak our minds aloud and listen as others speak theirs; in dialogue we may discover a common good in the midst of our diversity; and we have a chance to raise our voices to a level of audibility that none of us could achieve alone.”

How many of us are fully present to strangers even when we are surrounded by them?

— from Healing the Heart of Democracy

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Yes! I will create positive change for teachers, students and communities by providing Courage & Renewal resources and training to people around the world.

Please accept my gift of:

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