

Lean on ME ...



**"Lincoln Walks at Midnight"
West Virginia State Capitol Building
Charleston, West Virginia**

Reflections and Prayers

The *Lean on ME* Cover

Statues often are created to pay tribute to the people who shape history. West Virginia and Washington DC have statues that recognize some of these people who helped to shape the history of West Virginia.

The “Lincoln Walks at Midnight” sculpture on the front cover was originally designed in the 1930’s by Frank Torrey of Fairmont, West Virginia. The statue was later cast in Bronze by Charleston sculptor Bernie Wiepper and dedicated on June 20, 1974 - West Virginia Day. This statue is located on southside of the West Virginia State Capitol Complex in Charleston, West Virginia. The statue captures Lincoln’s many sleepless nights over two major decisions, he had to make, during the American Civil War:

- Issuing the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, and
- Granting Statehood to the people of West Virginia on June 20, 1863.

The “Lincoln Walks at Midnight” photo is being used with the permission of the West Virginia State Archives

The Division Pages

“Lean on ME” contains seven Division Pages. Each division page contains a photograph of a statue of a West Virginian or a Friend of West Virginia who worked tirelessly to promote diversity, inclusion and equality.

Foreword

Lean on ME is God's invitation to us to lean on GOD for everything. "In God we trust" our national motto even supports God's invitation. What are some of the ways we can lean more on God?

- First, we should ask God to show us "How to lean on God." In the lyrics of the song "Lean on Me" by West Virginian Bill Withers, God is actually teaching us "How."
- Second, we need to promote pride in ourselves so we can be of greater service to others. Another noted West Virginian, Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the "Father of Black History Month", was an advocate for taking greater pride in our heritage and ourselves so we can be of greater service to others.

Black History Month was enacted and signed into law in 1986. This legislation officially designates February as Black History Month. February 2021 is the 35th Anniversary of this legislation. However, advocacy for a designated Black History Month began as early as the 1920's through Dr. Woodson's publications, he wrote, while he lived in West Virginia.

We can all use prayer. To celebrate Black History Month, we encourage you to add more prayers to your Black History Month celebrations by using Lean on ME as your prayer book.

According to Lee and Low Books, there are Seven Core Values to Celebrate during Black History Month. All the reflections and prayers in this book are based on these Seven Core Values.

Lean on ME is a collaborative publication between the West Virginia Institute for Spirituality and the Charleston Black Ministerial Alliance to promote diversity, inclusion, and equality in the Mountain State.

May we all lean on God, to show us how we can constantly be improving ourselves so we can be of greater service to others.

The Seven Core Values to Celebrate during Black History Month*

Core Value One

Perseverance, Determination, and Grit

Core Value Two

Leadership and Courage

Core Value Three

Teamwork and Collaboration

Core Value Four

Responsibility and Commitment

Core Value Five

Optimism and Hope

Core Value Six

Compassion and Love

Core Value Seven

Passion and Pride

***The Source - Lee and Low Books**

Core Value One
Perseverance, Determination, and Grit



Carter G. Woodson
1875-1950

Father of Black History

An American historian, author, journalist, and the founder of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History. He was one of the first scholars to study the history of the African diaspora, including African-American history.

February 1
Core Value One - Perseverance, Determination and Grit

You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.

-From *I Will Rise* by Maya Angelou

Reflection

How do we practice determination, perseverance and grit when faced with life's challenges? We recognize in Maya Angelou's words the experience of emotional suffering; Ray Charles, jazz pianist overcame blindness to perform jazz piano. Life provides us obstacles that require these core values that many of our families instilled in us.

How are we able to follow our dreams, resist turning back, and embrace the struggles? 'Lean on Me' tells us HOW to do that. Each of us needs to be a friend, to learn how to be someone's crutch or 'leaning post' by initiating the handshake, making the phone call, being present.

Reflection in Action:

Like air, 'I arise'! Focus on your breathing, as a gift from God. Breathe in the possibilities and problems of our world, and breathe out a blessing encouraging the people in your circle of care to practice determination, perseverance and grit. Be someone to lean on when God needs 'skin'.

Sister Carole A. Riley, CDP
Executive Director, West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
Charleston, WV

February 2
Core Value One – Perseverance, Determination, and Grit

Reflection

John Henry is an African American folk hero immortalized in ballad, legend, and song. A “steel-driving man”, he is said to have competed against a steam-powered machine to drive steel drill bits into solid rock; only John did this by hand with determination and grit. Legend is that he fiercely persevered and surpassed the output of the machine only to die from exhaustion and a damaged heart. He agreed to this competition because he took *“immense pride in his work and hated to see a machine take the work from men like himself.”*

In holding to what one truly believes regarding equity, social change through non-violence, and the universal hope of all people living as one, we are absorbed that these beliefs are grounded in truth focused on values [...*immense pride...*]. Often, others promote controversial ideas and ways of thinking to try to massage and compromise those beliefs. [...*a machine take the work from...*]. Like John Henry, we realize we need to stand firm with courage and determination to live what we believe uncompromised. Our parallel to John Henry is realizing that this can take a marred or fatal toll not only on our spiritual life but our physical being as well. Prayer and staying in God’s favor give us “perseverance, determination, and grit”.

Reflection into Action

Father, keep me in your favor and give me strength and “grit” especially when I struggle. Hear me when I ask for courage and guidance to remain “determined” to live what I believe especially when others seek to distract me. Assure me of your omnipresence as I “persevere” to live so others can see you in me.

Dr. Ray Lowther
West Virginia Department of Education--Coordinator, The Arts
St. John’s Episcopal Church--Vestry, Senior Warden
Charleston, West Virginia

February 3
Core Value One - Perseverance, Determination, and Grit

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer”-Psalm 19:14.

Reflection

The Feast of Saint Blaise occurs on February 3 of each year. He was a physician and bishop in modern Sivas, Turkey. Today, he is venerated as a Christian saint and martyr.

The first reference to Saint Blaise is in the medical writings of Aëtius Amidenus (*ca.* AD 500) where his aid is invoked in treating patients with objects stuck in the throat.

While Blaise was being taken into custody, a distraught mother, whose only child was choking on a fishbone, threw herself at his feet and implored his intercession. Touched at her grief, he offered up his prayers, and the child was cured. Consequently, Saint Blaise is invoked for protection against injuries and illnesses of the throat.

Unkind words and gossip are the biggest injuries to come from the human throat. Unkind words and gossip destroy more people’s reputation and lives than any other contagious illnesses that can come from the throat.

Speaking out against unkind words and gossip requires the spokesperson to demonstrate Core Value One-Perseverance, Determination and Grit.

Prayer into Action

God, grant me the graces of perseverance, determination and grit to avoid saying unkind words and not engaging in gossip.

Julia Harrison, M.A.A.T.
Pastoral Associate,
Sacred Heart Catholic Church Bluefield, WV

February 4
Core Value One-- Perseverance, Determination, and Grit

Reflection

During Black History Month we hit the highlights: slavery was abolished, schools were desegregated, Martin Luther King gave a big speech, people were beaten up on the Selma bridge, the Voting Rights Act helped Black people exercise their right to vote.

The difficulty with a history that just hits the high points is that it ignores the persistent efforts of hundreds of thousands of people who were pushing forward every single day.

The marchers at the Selma bridge were just the most visible in a long history of workers for voting rights. The Fifteenth Amendment in theory guaranteed the right to vote to Black men in 1870; in practice there numerous barriers. As soon as the barriers went up, people started fighting to overcome them. There are instances in the 1800s of Black people standing up for the right to vote and being smacked down. There are instances in the early 1900s.

The marchers at the Selma bridge were not successful because they were beaten down. They were successful because they got back up and marched again two days later. Three weeks later another march reached Montgomery, their original goal.

Reflection into Action

Martin Luther King, Jr. famously said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” If our experience in the fight for rights is any guide, it is true that it is long. It is also true that it only bends toward justice only if people persist in pushing it in that direction.

John McFerrin
Morgantown, WV

Core Value Two Leadership and Courage



Eleanor Roosevelt

1884-1962

First Lady: 1933-1945

In 1939, when the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) refused to let Marion Anderson, an African American opera singer, perform in Constitution Hall, Eleanor resigned her membership in the DAR and arranged to hold the concert at the nearby Lincoln Memorial; the event turned into a massive outdoor celebration attended by 75,000 people. To show her confidence in the ability of The Tuskegee Airmen as pilots, she hopped in the back of a plane and flew with C. Alfred "Chief" Anderson. "Chief" Anderson earned his nickname "Chief" because he was the first African American military and commercial pilot. Her defense of the rights of African Americans, youth, and poor helped to bring groups into government that formerly had been alienated from the political process. Eleanor, West Virginia is named in her honor.

February 5
Core Value Two - Leadership and Courage

“Remember every road that God led you on for those forty years in the wilderness. He put you through.

Your clothes did not wear out and your feet didn’t blister...”

From *Deuteronomy 8 (MSG)*

“Stoney the road we trod, bitter the chastening rod felt in the days when hope unborn had died.

Yet with a steady beat have not our weary feet come to the place for which our fathers sighed.” *James Weldon Johnson*

Reflection

The struggling strength of our limping legacy lives in the story of Mother Pollard that Dr. King frequently repeated to mobilize the marching feet of the masses during the Montgomery Bus boycott of 1956. One day when he saw her walking as he was driving, he offered her a ride out of concern for the senior saint.

Mother Pollard was grateful for the offer but kept on walking with pep in her step and pride in her stride as she told Dr. King, “*Yes my feet is tired but my soul is rested.*” Mother Pollard’s foot talk testimony caused her to become a folk hero of the Movement.

Negro History Week was the brainchild of Carter G. Woodson in 1926. 2021 is the 35th Anniversary of the Congressional Passage of the Bill that was signed into law in 1986 by US President Ronald Reagan that designates February of each year as Black History Month.

Reflection into Action

As we honor this 35th celebration of Black History Month, may it prompt our continuing pilgrimage from disgrace to dignity with a faith that defies defeat. The beat goes on as the feet move on...

Reverend Ron English
Charleston, WV

February 6
Core Value Two-Leadership and Courage

“What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

Like a raisin in the sun?”

From *Dream Deferred* by Langston Hughes

Reflection

A Raisin in the Sun is the title of the 1959 Tony Award winning “Best Play.” A Raisin in the Sun was written by Lorraine Hansberry, who was the first African American, female playwright to earn a Tony Award for “Best Play.”

The play is about a mother Lena Younger and her family. Lena demonstrated “Courage” by buying a home in a suburban neighborhood in Chicago to provide a home with a yard for her family instead of living in the cramped, high rise apartment where the family had been residing.

As the plot of the play unfolds, Lena further demonstrates the importance of the remaining core value of “Leadership” as her family adjusts to their new neighborhood, where bigotry abounds. At the end of the play, not only does Lena grow and demonstrate “Leadership”, and “Courage, but she also instills in her family these core values by her example.

Reflection into Action

God, show me how I can commit or recommit myself to ensure freedom and equality for all West Virginians. I ask for the graces of “leadership”, and “courage” to carry out Your will for me.

Bruce Neal, Executive Director
West Virginia Reading Association
Charleston, West Virginia

February 7
Core Value Two - Leadership and Courage

Reflection

A call to leadership is a call to prepare. Becoming a Godly leader does not happen overnight. Leadership is a learned discipline. Yes, you can be naturally gifted for leadership, but unless you have the courage to develop your leadership, you may never be the leader that you could have been.

God has a plan and a purpose for our lives “Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you that you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father, in my name, he may give it you” (John 15:16).

The question is are you willing to serve God?

Life’s situations oftentimes thrust us into leadership roles, that we never signed up for; when this happens, we must respond with courage.

It takes courage to stand up for what is right; it takes courage to speak truth to power; it takes courage to break from the ranks; it takes courage to rely on the presence and power of God.

Our ancestors were thrust into the leadership role, put away their fear, and provided courageous leadership that we benefit from today.

Reflection into Action

As we lean on God and one another, we pray that God would:
Re-energize or ignite a passion in us and give us the courage for service.

Reverend Dr. Michael A. Poke Sr.
Pastor St. Paul MBC St Albans, WV
Associate Spiritual Director WWIS
St Albans, WV

February 8
Core Value Two - Leadership and Courage

“You can’t teach what you don’t know, and you can’t lead where you
won’t go!”
-Jesse Jackson

Reflection

The core values of leadership that I think are paramount are wisdom and authenticity. We live in a time that wisdom seems to have faded away. No one seems to seek wisdom, which comes from God, to know what to continue or what to cancel. God is the giver of wisdom, and He grants it to us so that we will know how to properly lead when we get to situations that we must trust Him because we cannot trace our path. Moses, the Biblical liberator, when confronted with the Red Sea, had to use wisdom from God to know that when he lifted his rod, God would make a way.

Authenticity is my second value. To effectively lead people, you have to be true to who you are. Leadership requires that you know exactly who you are and what you believe in and then you lead from that value, thus limiting needless exposure and pain later. Moses had to come to grips with his past and who he was before he could be the emancipator of God’s people.

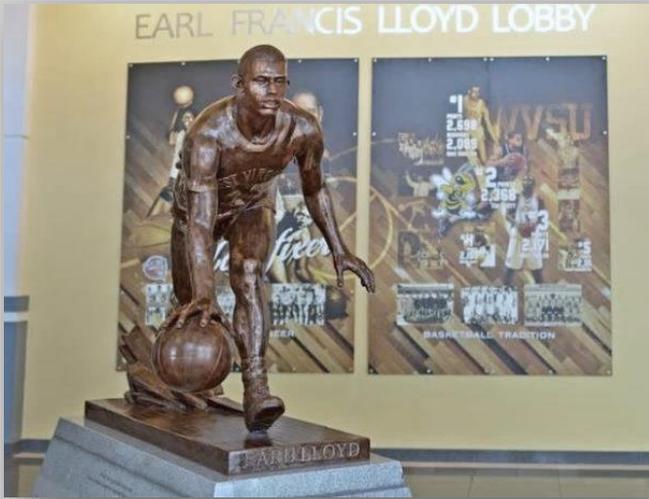
Reflection into Action

As you reflect on the two core values of leadership listed:

1. Look deep into your soul and ascertain who you really are as a person
2. List what you deeply believe in as your center...then do it!

Reverend Paul Dunn, Senior Pastor
First Baptist Church
Charleston, WV

Core Value Three Teamwork and Collaboration



Earl Francis Lloyd 1928 - 2015

Earl Lloyd was an African American professional basketball player and coach. He was the first African American player to have played a game in the National Basketball Association (NBA). He was also an All-American player at West Virginia State and was inducted into the Naismith Basketball Hall of Fame in 2003.

February 9
Core Value Three - Teamwork and Collaboration

“That there should be no division in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it. Now you are the body of Christ and members one of another.”- I Corinthians 12: 25-27, Holy Bible, Apostle Paul

Reflection

In an efficient economy of words, the Apostle Paul uses the metaphor of the human body to illustrate the amazing diversity and marvelous harmony that should exist in the Church of Jesus Christ, the Body of Christ. The Apostle suggests that whatever one member experiences whether agony or ecstasy, tragedy or triumph each member shares in that experience. This would suggest that the Church is a living organism in which its members are mutually interdependent and should epitomize teamwork and collaboration.

Reflection In Action

The current epic novel Coronavirus Pandemic, the associated economic earthquake and racial seismic tsunami, provide a dramatic backdrop for individual Christians and the corporate individual congregations to pray to God and ask Him to fill us with the fullness of His presence that we might live up to the vision that He has for us. And that is to function as one body with many members having mutual concern and care for one another. By this shall all men know that we are His disciples.

Matthew J. Watts
Senior Pastor Teacher, Grace Bible Church
Charleston, WV

February 10
Core Value Three-Teamwork and Collaboration

“I have rarely met a person more fearless and courageous than my father.” - From Reverend Martin Luther King

Reflection

Last year, Lou Holtz was given the American Medal of Freedom, not simply because he was a successful football coach, but because he was such an inspirational father figure for his players.

According to The Pew Research Study roughly one quarter of all children in the US grow up in families without a father being present, and the consequences for the children are disastrous. Without having the collaboration and teamwork of two parents, the children are likely to grow up in poverty, not finish high school, and to run afoul of the law at an early age.

The family is represented as the primitive church, where a father and mother can be role models for discipline, prayer, compassion and love for their children. Clearly, Martin Luther King was profoundly shaped by the righteous character of his father and the love of his mother. He skipped two grades in high school and entered Morehouse College at fifteen years of age. By his twenty- fifth year, he earned his doctorate from Boston University.

Reflection into Action

Dear Lord, help me to pray for the increase of more two parent families where teamwork and collaboration may thrive. Show me how to be a source of inspiration and a good mentor for those children being raised in one parent families, here in West Virginia.

Deacon Peter Minogue,
Saint Patrick Church
Hinton, West Virginia

February 11
Core Value Three – Teamwork and Collaboration

“... the truth shall make you free.” John 8:32

Reflection:

Collaboration is wonderful. When people work together toward a common goal there can be amazing results. We often fail to work together because we walk in different paths based upon culture, religious background, and family associations. The basis for teamwork can be daunting but possible, but only when we agree on what is truth.

The reason we celebrate Black History Month is to uncover hidden truths about the progeny of Africa. Since truth sets us free, none will ultimately be free until the truth prevails. The enslavement and marginalization of God’s people from the golden shores of Mother Africa was only accomplished by denying the truth of the equality of all of humanity. The subjugation and marginalization of a whole race could only be accomplished by the opposite of truth for, if it is the truth that sets us free, it is the great lie of inequality that allows for bondage.

Reflection into Action

The great challenge of today is that after 400 years of living in the lie of bondage, discrimination, and inequality, will we know the truth when we see it? Will the privilege that has developed over these many years blind us to what true equality is like? For many, equal opportunity seems like preference or advantage, equality seems like arrogance.

What say you?

David M. Fryson, Esquire.
Pastor, New First Baptist Church of Kanawha City
Charleston, WV

February 12
Core Value Three - Teamwork and Collaboration

“I destroy my enemies when I make them my friends”
—Abraham Lincoln

Reflection

It is axiomatic of all religions and incumbent for successful politicians to put oneself in the place of other people, to see the world through the eyes of others. We are not all blessed with the ability to empathize, but this trait can be developed and has never been more necessary than in times of religious and political polarity and strife.

Abraham Lincoln had this gift of understanding others and utilized it to help preserve the Union and win the Civil War by putting together one of the most unique cabinets in history, comprised of his opponents and enemies. They disliked and mistrusted not only the President, but each other, as set forth in Team of Rivals by Doris Kearns Goodwin.

Yet Lincoln turned this inherent disadvantage into a strength, by finding common grounds among his adversaries. He was able to see beyond their words and go to their values, forging them into a cohesive group, stronger than any one individual.

Reflection into Action

Give me the ability to recognize that if someone has views or opinions that are different from mine, that I will recognize that that is not a bad person, but one who can make me more complete, by enabling me to incorporate a more universal point of view.

Ted M. Kanner, Attorney
B'nai Jacob Synagogue
Charleston, West Virginia

**Core Value Four
Responsibility and Commitment**



Katherine Johnson

1918 - 2020

Hometown: White Sulphur Springs, WV

She loved math, early in her career she was called a “computer.” Her calculations of orbital mechanics as a NASA employee were critical to the success of the first and subsequent U.S. crewed spaceflights (putting an astronaut into orbit around the Earth and putting a man on the Moon.) NASA

February 13
Core Value Four - Responsibility and Commitment

“How many years can some people exist before they’re allowed to be free? How many times can a man turn his head and pretend that he just doesn’t see?”

-From *Blowin’ in the Wind* by Bob Dylan

Reflection

Our study of Black History must go beyond reading and review to realization and relevance to life today. There is an unbroken line from 1419, when the first enslaved Africans were brought to America, and the racism, discrimination and bias that continues to exist in this country which threatens the lives and well-being of African-Americans and other people of color.

The ability to connect the dots using reasoned analysis and insight allows successful navigation of life. However, when it comes to systemic and institutionalized racism, the questions raised by Bob Dylan in *Blowin’ in the Wind* clearly emerge. The responsibility to know the history of racism and commit to eliminate it from our society is the challenge.

Reflection to Action

Let not my comfort, privilege, and ignorance blind me to the injustices and inequities facing my sisters and brothers of color.

Teach me to meaningfully exercise my faith with love, compassion, and humanity by recognizing this unfairness and by giving me the courage to make lasting change.

May I move from knowledge to action to make West Virginia a place where all your children enjoy freedom, equity, and inclusion. It is my responsibility. I stand committed to this goal.

Katherine “Kitty” L. Dooley
Attorney-at-Law
Charleston, West Virginia

February 14
Core Value Four - Responsibility and Commitment

“This is an African proverb,
‘Until the lion tells the story, the hunter will always be the hero.’

Reflection

Every February, schools around the nation remember the successes of African Americans through Black History Month. It is supposed to be a time to celebrate black achievements. There are some, who do not know that African American history is American history, and it is important to understand history whether you are Black, White, Native American, Hispanic. When you understand your past, others cannot define it for you.

We are not looking to tear down history, but add our voices to it. We do this by telling the stories that have been left out from the past. Teaching our children every day, not just Black History, but about the importance of all history. It is the duty of parents as well as the community; to not limit our interest in Black History to February.

Reflection into Action

The impact of the history of African Americans, both in the past and at present, is too great to have its importance confined to one month of celebration. Parents, who want their children to understand Black History and the effects of prejudice and structural racism on their children, must take on this teaching responsibility themselves.

Reverend Roberta Smith, President
Charleston Black Ministerial Alliance Inc.
Charleston, West Virginia

February 15
Core Value Four - Responsibility and Commitment

“Bringing the gifts that my Ancestors gave,
I am the Dream and the Hope of the Slave.”
-From Still I Rise by Maya Angelou

Reflection

Still I Rise, by Maya Angelou, to this day remains one of the most inspirational, soul invigorating poems in history. It brings forth the most tribal imagery using the chains and the millstones of the past to demonstrate the bitter hopelessness of our existence. Yet, in the face of inscrutable injustice, the author tantalizes the reader with the memory that we have overcome what was designed to be impossible

The line, “I am the dream and the hope of the slave,” sears the impression that defines responsibility and commitment. We are encouraged to elevate our standards by our parents, coaches, mentors, and careers, but sometimes the best can encounter pitfalls. It is understandable when taking a look at the daunting journey in one’s career and consider revisions. One should not be shamed for the temptation; however, before the position is yielded, remember, “the dream and the hope of the slave”. An ancestor once walked the plains of West Africa full of pride and confidence in her future. Kidnapped aboard a slave ship, she planned and plotted for an opening to be free again but that opening never came. At some point she dreamed for her children’s freedom but it was not to come, but she still dreamed. She dreamed about you. You are her hope and you are her dream.

Reflection into Action

God has been our most trusted friend during our struggles. He asked that you pour all your responsibility and commitment into your faith. According to the Scripture, Matthew 17:20, “nothing is impossible.” As faith is cultivated, so are we.

Kenyatta Coleman Grant
West Virginia Coalition against Domestic Violence
Charleston, WV

February 16
Core Value Four - Responsibility and Commitment

Reflection

In the eighth grade at Thomas Jefferson Junior High School I was placed in American Civics; the teacher was Mr. Pat Vance. In addition to classroom instruction, he was a football and track coach. It was his first year to offer this class because civics was usually offered in high school at tenth or eleventh grade. The assignment . . . the study of the United States Declaration of Independence. I was very excited about this, and I enjoyed being in the class and I was prepared for it. I loved studying the Declaration of Independence, and now I had some questions I could finally ask Mr. Vance.

Mr. Vance? “Yes, Linda.” Why did Thomas Jefferson write this sentence in the Declaration of Independence? *“We hold these truths to be (sacred and undeniable) self-evident, that all men are created equal . . .”*

“Surely Mr. Jefferson was not speaking of himself and the founders of the United States of America.” “Now, why would you to say that?” “Because everything I have read about Thomas Jefferson says he was a slave owner.

Reflection into Action

Heavenly Father! Thank You that salvation is for everyone, and, in Christ, all men are created equal. Amen.

Deacon Linda Davis
First Baptist Church
Charleston WV

Core Value Five Optimism and Hope



Lifting the veil of ignorance Sculpture.

Booker T. Washington

Booker T. Washington 1856-1915 was born into slavery. He spent his early adulthood years as salt miner and teacher in Malden, West Virginia in Kanawha County. He rose to become a leading African American intellectual of the 19th century, founding Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute (Now Tuskegee University) in 1881 and the National Negro Business League two decades later.

February 17
Core Value Five - Optimism and Hope

“Speak of hope. Be human in this most inhuman of ages. Guard the
image of man for it is the image of God”
- From “Raids on the Unspeakable” by Thomas Merton

Reflection

Spiritually based traditions with sacred writings demonstrate and form peoples’ consciousness and consciences and core values. When love which unifies, is abandoned and suppressed by racism, sexism, fundamentalism, clericalism, and many other oppressive “isms”, there is always hope that people will come to their senses (Luke 15) and again choose to come home to the ways of love. Disappointments, discouragements, grieving losses call forth desires for the next good thing.

Hope affirms life and truth even in the deepest darkness:” I believe in the sun even when it is not shining. I believe in love even when I cannot feel it. I believe in God even when He is silent.” (Written on a cellar wall in Germany during the Holocaust.)

We lean on God who is the bedrock and shelter of all existence, so “Let us hope that what we will see in the next few years will surprise us by being less bad than we fear, and that God may show His Face and His Truth in our history, in spite of the pride of man and that we may reach a period of peaceful development, if it be possible.” (From “Thoughts in Solitude” by Thomas Merton)

Reflection into Action

“Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess,
for He who promised is faithful”. – Hebrews 10:13

Father Bill Petro, M.A.
WVIS, Associate Spiritual Director
Dunbar, West Virginia

February 18
Core Value Five - Optimism and Hope

“Faith is taking the first step
even when you don't see the whole staircase.”

-Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Reflection

Recently, our nation lost a truly inspirational leader. On July 17, 2020, former United States Representative and civil rights leader John Robert Lewis left our world for the next. Serving in the House of Representatives for 33 years, Representative Lewis left behind one message to the American people in both his actions and his words: No matter what, remain hopeful and optimistic.

During his life, John Lewis faced many obstacles. Like many others, he risked his life fighting for equal rights during the Civil Rights Movement. However, the opposition that Lewis met did not deter him, and he always remained hopeful and optimistic about the equality and future of all peoples.

“Be hopeful. Be optimistic. Never lose that sense of hope,” Lewis once said, and these words are a concise summation of his message to the both the people of the United State and the world. We can learn from Lewis that if we remain hopeful and optimistic and place our faith in God, there is nothing that we cannot achieve.

Reflection into Action

God, please help me to remain hopeful and optimistic of the future of West Virginia and all its citizens. The “optimism” and “hope” you instill in me will allow me to help see Your will for our state fulfilled.

Aaron Parsons
Saint Albans, West Virginia

February 19
Core Value Number 5 - Optimism and Hope

“Life would be easier if God sent memos” -Pam Steelhammer

Reflection

The morning weather report warned people that a major flood was expected. Immediate evacuation was ordered. The man, listening to the report, was not concerned. He was filled with “optimism and hope” and knew God would protect him.

Later, the man noticed the flood waters were rising rapidly, and the waters had already covered his front porch. He climbed to the porch roof for safety, but the water continued to rise. A neighbor arrived in a boat and shouted at the man to join him. The man, unconcerned, thanked the neighbor but refused the offer. He was filled with “optimism and hope.”

The water continued to rise, and the man climbed higher. While sitting on the roof, a helicopter lowered a rescue basket to the rooftop. The man waved the helicopter away. The man was not concerned. He was filled with “optimism and hope” and knew God would protect him.

At dusk, water was covering the roof, and the man clung to the chimney. He shouted to the heavens, “God, why have you not saved me from the flood?”

God responded, “I sent you a weather report, a boat, and a helicopter. What more could I have done?”

Reflection into Action

In order to lean on God, one has to recognize the presence of God.

Pam Steelhammer
Charleston, West Virginia

February 20
Core Value Five - Optimism and Hope

Reflection

I fondly remember my grandmother's love of soap operas. I chuckle as I recall phone conversations in which she excitedly discussed the characters of those soaps as if they were real people. One of her favorites was *Search for Tomorrow*.

Searching for tomorrow was the theme of *The Croods: A New Age*, a movie, which chronicles the adventures of the Crood family as they search for Tomorrow. In Tomorrow they'd discover new opportunities, a safer environment and a better life. Everyone was excited about Tomorrow, except Grug, who feared change and wanted to remain where they were.

Hope is the ability to envision a brighter future; to see one's present situation improving. Hope looks beyond right now, imagining possibilities that don't yet exist. Hope incites change and fuels creativity. Hope is a gift from God.

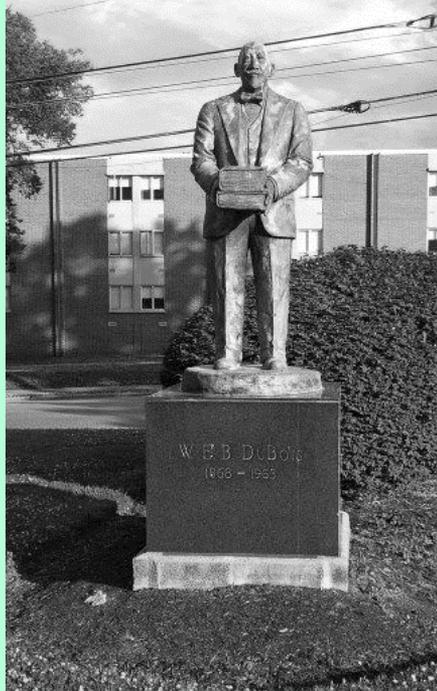
Hope caused Harriet Tubman to risk her life to lead more than 300 slaves to freedom. Hope made Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and others fight the *status quo* of the Jim Crow south, challenging African-Americans to envision a future of equality and freedom. Hope led to the election of America's first Black President, Barack Obama, as we collectively believed change was possible.

Reflection into Action

God, grant that I may always be able to see past my present; ever embracing the possibilities of a better tomorrow. May my hope and optimism spread to everyone I encounter.

Letari D. Thompson
Metropolitan Baptist Church
Charleston, WV

**Core Value Six
Compassion and Love**



**W.E.B. Du Bois
1868 – 1963**

American sociologist, historian, author, editor, and activist who was the most important Black protest leader in the United States during the first half of the 20th century. He shared in the creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909. He taught Summer School at West Virginia State.

February 21
Core Value Six- Compassion and Love

Reflection

The words "Walk a mile in my moccasins" glistened from a piece of cardboard in my childhood dining room. Mother had found it somewhere, maybe at a roadside stand near her Georgia mountain home. It was the core of her sermon, her lesson, her "how-to-relate" to other people. Joe South and the Believers popularized this sermon in a 1970 song:

"Walk a mile in my shoes
Walk a mile in my shoes
Hey, before you abuse, criticize and accuse
Walk a mile in my shoes."

Compassion requires and is the fruit of walking a mile in someone else's shoes. How, quarantined as we are on this One Hundredth Anniversary of Dr. Carter Woodson's advocating establishing Negro History Week in 1920, and, as West Virginia became the 35th state when it separated from the Slavocracy of Virginia, can we walk a mile in someone else's shoes?

How can we grow in compassion for others, especially African Americans? Through reading! Dr. Woodson and other historians and writers tell us stories of people, African Americans, who lived here long ago, and some who live here now.

Reflection into Action

Read. Consult virtual experiences, such as clio.com stories, many with video and audio, about sites of African American history, the arts, sports, and life. Imagine how life feels in those other shoes.

Imagining life as if we were the "other" person leads to understanding, and indeed loving, those other people. "Hey, before you abuse, criticize and accuse/Walk a mile in my shoes."

Joan C. Browning
Freedom Rider
Greenbrier Valley, WV

February 22
Core Value Six - Compassion and Love

“Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”-Matthew 19:19

Reflection

In the Gospels, Jesus is asked how to receive eternal life in Matthew. And, in Mark, He is asked which is the first commandment of all. To the first question He answered that we must keep God’s commandments and “love thy neighbor as thyself.” In the second instance, Jesus answered that the first commandment is to love God with all our heart, our soul, our mind and with all our strength. He followed with “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.”

In both cases by adding “Love thy neighbor as thyself”, Jesus emphasized that the practice of loving the other in our lives is fundamental. For years, I believed that we must love others as we love ourselves. And, with God’s Grace, I needed to learn to love myself so I could better love others. This is surely true. However, another more direct reading of this commandment would be, for us to love others as ourselves. Does loving this deeply transform you and me into the union of “we”? In many ways, each of us is single and unique. Can I really love you as me? Maybe this is what it means when we say we love with our whole heart. Maybe we are experiencing each other as One in the unity of God’s Love for all His children. I am humbled by the mysteries of life and love.

Reflection into Action

In the evening, recall a person who was your neighbor during the day, seated nearby in a restaurant or at a public gathering. Pray for them as if they were you. Now imagine them praying for themselves as you.

Charlie Boll, Spiritual Director
WVIS Associate Director
Charleston, WV

February 23
Core Value Six - Compassion and Love

“Answer the highest calling of heart.
Walk with the wind and let
the Spirit of Peace and the Power of everlasting Love
be your guide.”
-John Lewis, quoted in The New York Times

Reflection

These words were written while John Lewis was quite ill and printed in the New York Times, as he requested, after his death on July 19, 2020. It was clear that he leaned on God and the inspiration of others in answering the highest calling of his heart.

Sometimes the highest calling of my heart is to simply and humbly ask forgiveness for my participation in a culture of systemic racism and my hesitancy to make “good trouble”. However, small, action steps matter. “Now it is your turn...” further wrote John Lewis.

One day, while at a gas station, I noticed a middle-aged man who was filling his car. It was Juneteenth. I wished him a happy day, and we both shared from our hearts about our hopes for a better future. Before we left, he offered me a donut that he had purchased for himself. He wanted me to have it. I gratefully accepted.

As I headed home, I bit into the gift he had given. It was a sign of Communion. This kind man had shared “Soul” food with me. We had somehow leaned on each other. There was a Spirit of Peace and Love. God was guiding.

Reflection into Action

Share “Soul” food with someone

Sister Barbara Goodridge, OSF
Spiritual Director, the West Virginia Institute for Spirituality
Charleston, WV

February 24
Core Value Six - Compassion and Love

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”
-Dr. Martin Luther King

Reflection

It was 1977 the first time I heard Coretta Scott King’s voice over a grainy speaker phone during an all-school assembly in the gym of Mercer Elementary School in Shaker Heights, Ohio, an affluent suburb of Cleveland that was slowly, but steadily integrating. I was in kindergarten and a classmate’s father, the late Rev. Otis Moss Jr., who was friends with the King family, invited them to speak to all of us by phone as part of this early “Black History Month” event at our school. Her strong, beautiful voice came through loud and clear despite the poor connection.

Her exact words are lost to history and a poor memory, but the experience left an indelible impression on this young white kindergartener that every one in the room should be treated with respect and equality despite our racial differences. She had planted a seed that would bloom and grow for decades to come.

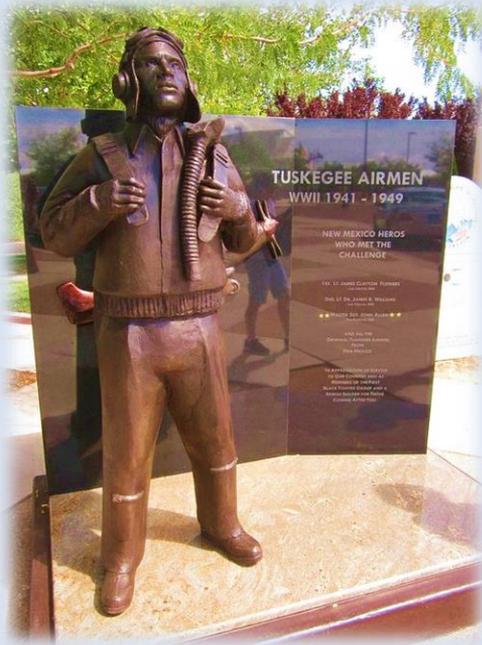
Later in her life and until her death, Coretta Scott King expanded on the belief that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere,” claiming the civil-rights movement was far from over and should further address economic, racial, and gender inequalities at the heart of American society.

Reflection into Action

God, grant us courage to truly see how strong your love is for all. Help us plant seeds that will show others how to welcome all of your children who have been neglected, discriminated against and left out because they are different.

Jeff Sikorovsky
Charleston, WV

Core Value Seven Passion and Pride



Tuskegee Army Air Field in Tuskegee, Alabama, was the training ground for the predominantly Black squadron of the US Army Air Forces during World War II known as the "Tuskegee Airmen." The red tails of their planes earned these pilots the nickname of "Red Tails." However, more Black pilots were trained for the US Army at Wertz Field in Institute, West Virginia than in Alabama. The distinguished service of the Tuskegee Airmen in World War II led to President Harry Truman's decision to desegregate the military in 1948.

February 25
Core Value Seven - Passion and Pride

Let Us March on Together!

Reflection

We thank God for the historic designation made in February 1986, which declared and designated the entire month of February to be a time for recognizing the Black peoples of this country not only for their many contributions of which this country could not have reached the level of greatness it now enjoys, but most importantly, finally being recognized as a people and an inclusive part of God's humanity.

As much as I'm grateful for the designation of 1986, and the efforts of Dr. Carter G. Woodson, I am increasingly fearful for our people because of what I see and hear from many of those leaders of our government under the guise of "Make America Great Again". That being, that many who were against the designation then whether public or private, are now fighting to remove from us not only this, but also other civil and human rights afforded to all under the constitution.

This time we are being blatantly told and shown that "Black Lives Don't Matter" and that there is no such thing as justice for the Black man/woman.

Reflection into Action

With this in mind, I encourage all people to develop a bond of unity that cannot be broken nor infiltrated by those who would seek to come amongst us to use us to destroy us. If there was ever a time, we need to lean on one another, this is certainly that time. We will either March on together, United to victory, or we will fall back to ".....Again"

Reverend Lloyd Allen Hill
The Father's House Missionary Baptist Church
Charleston, WV

February 26
Core Value Seven - Passion and Pride

“It is not your responsibility to finish the work of repairing the world, but you are not free to desist from it either.”

- Rabbi Tarfon, Talmud

Reflection

Jews are a people with a passion for justice; a hunger for righting the wrongs of society. We take great pride in our divine calling of “Tikkun Olam”, to repair the world. Yet too often, the march along that bridge toward a better day feels like one long, never to be completed, journey beset by constant failures and setbacks.

Rabbi Tarfon teaches us that while our important work may never end, we must never become so discouraged as to abandon our mission. In that spirit, may we remember the late Congressman John Lewis. He knew he would not be around to see that better America but called on us to never give up and believed that we, together, can create a more just society.

When our passion for social justice is exhausted due to the daunting tasks ahead, let us reflect on the powerful words of Ruth Messenger: we cannot retreat into the convenience of being overwhelmed.

Reflection into Action

G*d, strengthen our resolve to never grow weary of the tasks You have given us to make this a better world. Fill us with the pride that comes from a divine mission that we are neither commanded to complete nor free to desist from it.

Victor Urecki, Rabbi
B'nai Jacob Synagogue
Charleston, West Virginia

February 27
Core Value Seven - Passion and Pride

As within, so without. As above, so below.
- From *Hermetic Corpus* by Hermes Trismegistus

If Minimal and Maximal had a baby, it would be the perfect red lipstick.
- From *Accidental Icon* by Iris Apfel

Reflection

Parents teach us strength and unconditional love. Schools teach us academics and structure. Sisters teach us the amazingness of a dollar tube of lipstick. Experiences teach us to push our boundaries. Red lipstick and living out loud became badges of courage to a little girl who stuttered when excited and did not understand all the *why*'s of life.

Passion came early when the little girl asked why there were two water fountains with different words on them and so told that some people do not like other people. From that moment forward the little girl knew what passion felt like and pursued fighting injustice whenever she saw it.

Pride came when a kindergarten teacher told that little girl that she was an artist. She again felt pride when she marched in her first gay pride parade knowing it would be okay because she felt unconditionally loved.

Reflection into Action

May we choose to be courageous and live active, out loud, colorful lives - creating new images when we color outside the lines. May we trust our inner landscape and allow that self to manifest on the outside, experiencing an authentic, loving life in all its glory. With or without red lipstick.

Julie C. Palas, J.D.
Member, Asbury United Methodist Church
Charleston, West Virginia

February 28
Core Value Seven - Passion and Pride

“You've got to kiss an angel good mornin'...and love them... until you get back home.” From “Kiss an Angel Good Morning” by Charley Pride

Reflection

Angels are not the typical images we see depicted in statues, paintings, or other forms of expression. Angels often appear to us through the lives of ordinary people. Angels tend to give our lives meaning.

These angels are often our parents, grandparents, family members, relatives, friends, neighbors, co-workers, service providers, or even strangers we may meet. However, all angels share two common, core values- “passion” and “pride.”

Passion is to love someone to the point of pain. Jesus exemplified this core value of “passion” when He died on a cross for us.

Pride is delight or elation arising from some act, possession, or relationship. Here, too, Jesus exemplifies the core value of “pride” with His delight to serve us through His ministry.

“Kiss an Angel Good Morning” by the late Charley Pride gives us ideas on how to “kiss all the angels we meet daily.

Charley Pride was the first African American vocalist to gain recognition as a Country and Western singer with his song, “Kiss an Angel Good Morning.” This song earned Charley the Country Music Association’s Top Male Vocalist and Entertainer of the Year awards in 1972. In 2000, he was inducted into the Country Music Hall of Fame in Nashville, Tennessee.

Reflection into Action

- Who are the angels you will meet today?
- How do you show or tell these angels you are grateful to them?

Bob Harrison, Ph.D.
WVIS Volunteer
Charleston, WV

Leaping Forward



John F. Kennedy

1917 – 1963

President 1960-63

“Ask not what your country can do for you,” he said.

“Ask what you can do for your country.”

February 29 or March 1
Core Values Summary
Where do we go from here?

Reflection

Where do we go from here? A question, that no doubt is resting on the mind of countless individuals who've experienced the traumas and trials of 2020. We've heard the mournful woes, felt the sting of loss, we've witnessed certainty fighting against uncertainty, trying to extract a semblance of hope from hopelessness and hang on to the slightest shred of optimism.

We've seen such a lack of teamwork in the leadership of this country while searching for answers to what seems to be a global question. Where do we go from here as a people? Where does the nation go from here?

Prayer into Action

- We stare in the mirror of forward motion with perseverance, determination and grit and move with abounding courage into a place we'll know once we're there.
- We Leap in Faith, defying the odds of what we cannot see and peer into a reality that has not yet been seen.
- The passion and pride of our ancestors help us to make the choice to walk that proverbial "walk runway" of life, until our feet take us into the new possibilities that await us.
- We will join our hands and our hearts; we'll lift every voice and sing of triumph and victories while uncertainties become certain, hopelessness beams with hope again standing in the shadow of God's great hand, we will forever stand, True to our God, True to our native land.

"O' death where is thy sting? O' grave where is your victory?"

-1 Corinthians 15:55-KJV

Reverend Marykaye Jacquet
Charleston, WV

Leaping Forward
For ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

1 Thessalonians 4:9 KJV

Reflection

There is no American history without Black history. The blood, sweat and tears of our ancestors is embedded in the red stripes of the American flag, a legacy of freedom fighters like Crispus Attucks, Denmark Vesey, Touissant Louverture and John Lewis. Some people think heroism and determination have disappeared from our community.

I disagree.

When I was at the polls last November, I noted with satisfaction that nothing had deterred us from voting. Not the reduction of voting sites, attacks on mail in ballots, Covid-19 or threats from white terrorist groups. Some stood in line for more than six hours; others brought chairs. From youngsters dressed in urban fashions to grandmothers hunched over walkers, they cast their votes like children throwing rocks across a West Virginia creek. In their brown eyes, I caught glimpses of Harriet Tubman, Medgar Evers, Fannie Lou Hamer, Fred Shuttlesworth and C.T. Vivian.

Peaceful, patient resilience is the best response to injustice. Love is more patient than hate.

One day, our rights will be uncontested. One day, we will jog without being murdered, we will sleep in our homes without fear of being killed and drive without anxiety. Someday those charged with enforcing the law will be held accountable. And someday we will be tried in courts of law, not executed on sidewalks.

I know we have much more to do. But the force of each generation validates the authenticity of the struggle. Black Lives Matter and Brown and White lives must unite till slogans give way to solidarity. As Dr. King put it so eloquently, "Until all of us are free; none of us are free." The only thing stronger than fear is faith. The only thing stronger than implicit bias is a common commitment to equality, equity and humanity! And the only thing stronger than hate, raised guns and swastikas is love!

The Honorable Bishop T.D. Jakes
The Potters House of Dallas, Inc.

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“A Stone of Hope”

“The Stone of Hope” on the back cover was carved by sculptor Lei Yixin. The inspiration for this memorial is a line from Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s I Have A Dream speech: “Out of the mountain of despair, a stone of hope.” The Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial opened to the public on August 22, 2011 and is located on the Mall in Washington, DC.