

My Journey

By Bob Juarez

Bob Juarez is a Wisdom Elder with Illuman and Illuman SoCal.

How and when were you introduced to male spirituality?

I was pretty much a solid Catholic until grad school (around 1978), when I was first influenced by the teachings of Richard Rohr, OFM. His attraction was that he taught the gospel and framed the challenges of life in a way that led me to a deeper experience of God's mercy and compassion. It has led me to be a compassionate man throughout my adult and professional life.

As I journeyed on the path through which God led me as a Catholic priest, I was gently seduced into the Men's Rites of Passage (MROP) in 1996, at Whispering Winds, Julian, CA. It was a crucial time in my life, when I was trying to make sense of various turns my life had already taken—never being led astray, but challenging nonetheless. At the time, I was briefly serving in indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico. These two experiences converged to help me let go of many of the things that appeared to give me value, and people who I thought nurtured those for me. At Whispering Winds, I left behind many things and people that fed my false self and did not give my life true value. As my true self emerged, a renewed sense of who I am as a man also burst forth.

How has your participation in Illuman/M.A.L.Es fostered the use and development of your gifts?

Everything I learned in those brief days was brought to my work, ministry, and interaction with people. I also began working more closely with women religious (nuns) and promoted lay leadership in the Catholic Church. I was a leader among fellow laborers of the harvest, and a mentor to a long line of men and women throughout my ministry, guiding many who were discerning their life's direction and vocation. The gifts that were made clear at Whispering Winds continue to enrich my spiritual journey with greater depth today.

Describe a recent Illuman/M.A.L.Es event you attended. What was the impact on you?

At Soularize 2016, I was invited to share about my work with Human Trafficking and what my JOI has brought to this work. It was very

meaningful to have my Illuman brothers not only affirm my work, but show interest in it themselves.

What's one thing you'd recommend to a man starting on the spiritual journey?

Illuman is the Journey of Illumination that continues to inspire me and gives me courage to face my current challenges. Richard's teachings and writings also continue to inspire me and will inspire others. I would simply say, do not walk this journey alone, but be in community with the brothers.

What's the best thing about doing this work?

God has "wired" us to be his sons—we just need to find the right switches. With the light and presence of other revered brothers, family, and mentors, those switches will be made manifest.

Concluding thoughts?

Finally, as a third-generation Mexican-American, born in East Los Angeles, my journey is culturally, socially, and religiously enriched. My bilingual English and Spanish abilities deepen the pool for connecting to the people God places on my path. I look forward to getting to know anyone whose journey intersects mine on this Journey of Illumination. I'm in!