

Conveners Corner

by Stephen Caudana, Convener, Illuman SoCal

Acting from a Shared, Sacred Ground of Grace and Deep Love

*There's so much Fear and Pain, right now.
And at the same time, there's a Grace that's Emerging.*

*It's a transformation that I sometimes try to deny,
but I'm experiencing it more, and trying to live into it.*

*I need to have a shared ground to hold this,
because I can't hold it all myself.*

—Prayer offered in our first SoCal Lockdown

Southern California has been through 11 months of Locking Down, Opening, and Locking Down again.

Things we placed on God's Altar in April and June are still here:

- An inexhaustible increase in cases and deaths.
- Separation and loneliness.
- Lost jobs, financial hardship, and anxiety.
- The dark mirror of racial and political shadow.
- An everyday confrontation with our self-imposed limitations on Love.
- 11 months, and all this still challenges us.

*I need to have a shared ground to hold this,
Because I can't hold it all myself.*

SoCal is the largest urban Illuman chapter, the most spread-out. We're blessed with a large, vibrant, and diverse community, multiethnic and multilingual. Brothers of depth, with willingness to stand and act for other Men.

Eight years ago, SoCal evolved a local, regional structure to empower Men in these diverse communities. The regions (and their small groups) are autonomous, but united in solidarity with the Work. Every year, we build a calendar of events across SoCal. Each region discerns, plans, and hosts a day/gathering with theme, teaching, ritual, and Council, bringing the whole SoCal community together.

But it's been a challenging year. We've had to stretch and begin to adapt, shifting from a very event-driven chapter to a more relational one: supporting our Brothers emotionally and spiritually, trying to build a mentoring culture and relationships, beginning to identify and cultivate partnerships with other spiritual communities. This relational outreach is something other Illuman chapters do very well. But SoCal (and especially its Convener) needs to become more attuned to the relational, and to do better.

Our event-driven instincts are adapting, as well. On September 12, our Orange County and San Diego Brothers welcomed men to their Regional Gathering. The theme was *Life on the Edge: Desert and Mountain Spirituality, Sharing Stories on This Side of the Coronavirus*.

The Gathering was hosted in safety and solidarity on Zoom and was our most ambitious Illuman SoCal event of the year, with Teaching Elders Belden Lane and Joel Blunk (two of Illuman's finest storytellers) joining Brothers from as near as SoCal and as far away as Ireland and Wales. The day connected the dimensions of Desert/Wilderness Spirituality with our current experiences of Separation/Disconnection and Community/Communion, resonant in our Coronavirus and Social Justice moment. A powerful ritual grounded the Work in the shared, human experience of Breath.

And, on December 21, Winter Solstice eve, our Illuman SoCal community gathered on Zoom for Advent/Christmas. On this longest night of a difficult year, our Brothers shared their Presence and Light with one another, in Joy, Solidarity, and Gratitude. The evening closed with a profound Las Posadas ritual, re-enacting the Holy Family's Christmas Journey. The Posadas ritual mirrored every man's spiritual journey, and the Christmas invitation to all of us, to bring the Divine Presence into the world.

Brothers, the pandemic has intensified our world's need for compassion, presence, and community. Over the past year, I've experienced men listening deeply, being present to the pain of the moment, caring for the sick and homeless, and supporting the vulnerable with open hearts.

Illuman SoCal is committed to being part of this healing work. We're a community of hope, holding the tension of these troubled times and acting from a shared, sacred ground of grace and deep love.