

Conveners Corner

By Arturo Diaz, Co-Convener of Illuman SoCal

INTRO

My name is Artimus Edrimus Meridiaz, commander of the Armies of the North, General of the Luminous Legions, loyal servant to the true emperor, Marcus Aurelius. I always wanted to introduce myself that way. In reality, I am Arturo Edrei Diaz Albornoz, a new co-convener for the Southern California Chapter of Illuman, and I command no one (including myself).



I am honored to represent the Southern California region, birthplace of the Internet, Disneyland, Hollywood, In-N-Out Burger, and the Beach Boys. And oh yes, Umbrales, the Spanish ministry of Illuman (ya mero me olvidaba de ustedes). But who is bragging?

I was born in Veracruz, Mexico and grew up in the Yucatan Peninsula (land of the Mayas). I'm one hundred percent Latino. Well, according to Ancestry, I do have one percent Irish blood. In 1967, at the age of six, my family immigrated to the United States. I come from a good hard-working family of eight (two parents, three boys, and three girls): the Spanish Brady Bunch.

THE WOUND

To prepare for the Elders' Rites of Passage (EROP) in 2021, I was asked to write two obituaries, one for the public and one for the soul. This was such a fun exercise (NOT!). After completing the exercise, two thoughts came to mind on what my tombstone would read. One is "He lived a beautiful life...in his head." The other is "What the F#@K happened?!!" or "Really, God?" (Ok, three thoughts). I thought to myself, "This can't end like this!"

I am a 61-year-old young man. It is hard to imagine that I may start collecting Social Security at the end of this year. I am a retired civil engineer, living the dream—or should I say, living in the dream...? I consider myself a type Nine on the Enneagram. If you are familiar with the passion of the Nine, sloth, the following will make more sense.

There are certain events that marked my life and left an indelible imprint on how I see God, myself, and the world. The loss of my older brother Monchito (my companion and father figure) at the age seven, and Dad's subsequent rage, created a lot of pain and a deep void for the healthy masculine in my life (father wound).

Underneath it all lies a terrified little boy who learned to perceive the world as unsafe and that no one can be trusted (especially men). To cope and meet the needs for brotherhood and safety, he created a world of make believe. My little boy made assumptions and took on limiting beliefs that created a life of hiding and illusion. I became invisible (my super power) and reached for the wind in the hopes that something would change, but little did. Isolation, illusion, and analysis paralysis became my go-to coping mechanisms.

On the outside, everything appears fine. On the inside, it feels as though I have been sleepwalking through life; stuck in an endless loop of illusion, waiting for someone or something to save me from myself. I have lived BIG lies: the lie that I was inherently broken (I am not enough) and the lie that God was holding out on me and can't be trusted (God is not enough). I paid a high price for my safety/security: my sense of Self.

The biggest mistake I made was to not be honest about my wounding and go it alone. Richard Rohr writes, "When we don't give other people any power over our lives, when we block them by thinking we can stand alone, or that otherness can't change us or teach us anything, we are spiritually dead."¹ Amen.

Eventually, as Fannie Lou Hamer said, "I am sick and tired of being sick and tired."² I began my inner work journey in 2005 with an organization called Living From the Heart, led by Bill Berry. Bill was the one who introduced me to the works of Richard Rohr. Since then, I have done many men's retreats, including ManKind Project, Marked Men for Christ, Noble Man, Wild at Heart, and the MROP in 2009. My wounds have been my teachers, and I am not my wounds.

¹ Richard Rohr, "We Are Made for Love," *Richard Rohr's Daily Meditations, Center for Action and Contemplation*, January 2, 2022, <https://cac.org/we-are-made-for-love-2022-01-02/>.

² Fannie Lou Hamer, "I'm Sick and Tired of Being Sick and Tired," Speech Delivered with Malcolm X at the Williams Institutional CME Church, Harlem, New York, December 20, 1964, <https://www.crmvet.org/docs/flh64.htm>.

On occasion, I still look back with sadness for all the years I lived in the prison of my own making. I think now, looking back, I did not fight an enemy. I fought myself, and the enemy was in me. The war is over for me now, but IT (ego) will always be there, for the rest of my days...fighting for the possession of my soul (inspired by Chris Taylor's speech in *Platoon*).

Yes, I will die someday, but not yet. Some part of an awakened self still breathes life into the deep, dead spaces of my being and calls out to me, saying, "Wake up, I am not done with you yet!"

SOCAL CHAPTER

A few months back, the Southern California Chapter went through a lengthy process of discernment for new leadership. After the smoke cleared, and went through the Sistine Chapel (well, maybe not the latter), there were three new conveners left standing. We looked at each other with wide-eyed wonderment and asked, "What happened, and what do we do now?" It felt like we were put in charge of a spaceship that had no instruction manual, and this ship was part of a galactic fleet I knew little about. Obviously, my first instinct was to hit the autopilot button and pray we don't crash. I'm still looking for that button.

Over the past weeks, we have drafted a blueprint of what the Chapter organization will look like. In short, we are composed of four leadership bodies: the Conveners, the Board, the Wisdom Elders, and the Mission Teams. All will convene and do business in a space called the Guiding Council. We may soar or we may crash and burn. The SoCal Board has the power to fire me, so if you don't see me around, you know what happened.

As a new leader, some of the questions I'm grappling with are how we best accompany the men on the journey and nurture their souls. Another is how we attract new men to Illuman. What is ours to do? I think, in order for a man to consciously be on a spiritual journey, they must first wake up from their particular illusion and have a "God experience," an encounter with truth. Richard Rohr puts it this way: "Every man has to come to the God experience *on his own*. Conversion is a foundational change of position, perspective, and identity."³ It is not up to me whether a man gets converted. All I/we can do is try to create the space that welcomes curiosity and creates sparks for the unconscious to wake up to something greater.

³ Richard Rohr, *On the Threshold of Transformation: Daily Meditations for Men* (Chicago: Loyola, 2010), 99.

It will take some time for our new SoCal leadership to get grounded and fire on all cylinders. When that time comes, some of the events the Southern California Chapter will consider hosting include:

- Surfing Safari With God - Getting into the flow (bring your own surfboard)
- Building Sandcastles - Nothing lasts forever (bring your own shovel)
- Hollywood - Living the story you want to tell (there are no dress rehearsals)
- Exploring the California Missions - Were Mexicans really here first?

Hey, it can happen.

I am also aware of the importance that contemplative practices play in the spiritual journey. Rohr says, "Contemplation really is the change that changes everything."⁴ We (SoCal Chapter) need to emphasize this in our actions.

IDEAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

I am amazed at how many artistic and creative men there are in Illuman. I am saddened that these men have not been honored and given the forum to connect. There is a Spanish term called *Tertulia* which means a social gathering with literary or artistic overtones. Someday, I would like to see Soularize create a regular space for a *Tertulia* and invite all the poets, musicians, dancers, storytellers, and anyone who creates beauty to share their gifts. Wouldn't it be great to bathe in their creative energy?!

I love and appreciate Richard Rohr, all the Illuman Weavers, and the wisdom teachings they provide. I am also aware that there are many wonderful spiritual teachers in this country and abroad. It would be good to see some of these teachers invited to a Soularize event.

Since I have an audience, can anyone get me a breakfast or lunch appointment with Richard Rohr? It's a bucket list thing. Hey, I might as well ask.

In the spirit of fundraising, how about having a Convener of the Month Calendar (with the Convener of Conveners on the cover), or maybe a Wisdom Elder of the Month Calendar. Ok, I have digressed. My apologies.

⁴ Richard Rohr, "Contemplation: Finding Ourselves, Finding God," HuffPost, October 30, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/contemplation-finding-ourselves-finding-god_b_1035271.

CLOSING

When it comes down to it, we should be excited about sharing the “good news” of the Gospel. Rohr says, “What the Scriptures promise us is that we are *objectively and inherently children of God* (see 1 John 3:2). And you can’t change that! This is not psychological worthiness; it is ontological, metaphysical, substantial worthiness that cannot be gained or lost. When this given God image becomes our operative self-image, we are home free! Such a Gospel is just about the best good news anyone could hope for!”⁵

“Your image of God creates you—or defeats you. There is an absolute connection between how we see God and how we see ourselves and the universe.”⁶

“After transformation, God is not *out there* and we don’t look *at* reality. We look *from* reality. We’re in the middle of it now; we’re a part of it. This whole thing is what I call *the mystery of participation*. Paul is obsessed by the idea that we’re all already participating in something. I’m not writing the story by myself. I’m a character inside of a story that is being written in cooperation with God and the rest of humanity. This changes everything about how we see our lives.”⁷

Maybe the most important thing we can do for ourselves is to recognize the eternal well of love and compassion is already present within us. We have Divine DNA, an implanted position and power. Trust the source and tap in!

When I grow up, I want to co-create a world of freedom and simple beauty, by letting go and letting God. The religious word for letting go is forgiveness; giving up your investment in and identification with your own painful story.

Ultimately, I will be happy to die on the sword of “I lived the story I wanted to tell. I chose the game I lived to play. I trusted God, my gut (spirit), my network, and my values to show me the way, here and now.”

Peace and every wild thing.

⁵ Richard Rohr, “Finding Ourselves in God,” Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditations, Center for Action and Contemplation, November 29, 2021, <https://cac.org/finding-ourselves-in-god-2021-11-29/>.

⁶ Richard Rohr, “Creating God in Our Own Image,” Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditations, Center for Action and Contemplation, November 28, 2021, <https://cac.org/creating-god-in-our-own-image-2021-11-28/>.

⁷ Richard Rohr, “Being Instruments of God,” Richard Rohr’s Daily Meditations, Center for Action and Contemplation, September 5, 2021, <https://cac.org/being-instruments-of-god-2021-09-05/>.