

The Latin American Connection

By Bob Juárez, MROP Julian 1996, Wisdom Elder Council, Futuring Council, Illuman en Español

March 6, 2021

Since the establishment of Illuman en Español in 2016, we have conducted two UMBRALES in Southern California and have another underway in Texas. We host a monthly Concilio Virtual and several “regional” in-person and virtual Spanish-language gatherings. Now, Illuman is breaking new ground in the Latin American community.

These efforts are spearheaded by our brother Sergio López (MROP Ghost Ranch 2018), who is a field manager with the international humanitarian relief and development agency Catholic Relief Services (CRS). Dialogue has been taking place with Latin American CRS operatives. They are seeking to address the root causes of violence against women in developing nations by creating spaces that enable men to heal and transform cultures of machismo. This dialogue has opened new conversations between Illuman en Español, Fr. Richard Rohr through the Center for Action and Contemplation (CAC), and CRS.

On Friday morning, March 5, 2021, at the crack of dawn Pacific Time, about 100 people gathered through Zoom with transformational *Support Groups of Women* (in Spanish, *Grupos de Apoyo de Mujeres*, or GAM). The event, held to observe International Women’s Day, was called *Tejiendo Juntas: Construcción de relaciones justas y equitativas* (Weaving Together: Building just and equitable relationships).

GAM is led by Isabel Aguilar Umaña, a CRS Regional Technical Advisor in Peacebuilding. Participation in GAM has spread all over Latin America, including Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, and elsewhere. These women identify themselves as peace builders: *constructoras de la paz*. The power of partnering with an international organization like CRS facilitates amazing networking possibilities.

This regional community of peacebuilding women leaders is striving to share the wisdom of their journeys with the men in their lives. Having been introduced to Illuman through the work of Sergio López, our brother Giovanni Pérez (MROP Julian 2005) was invited to be part of a panel at this *Tejiendo Juntas* event, together with Fr. Jesús Mendoza of Acapulco and Dr. Solange Alvarado Espailat of the Dominican Republic.

Tejiendo juntas
 El 8 de marzo en la construcción de relaciones justas y equitativas

Con la participación de:

Día: viernes 5 de marzo de 2021
Hora: 6:30 am California,
 8:30 am Centro América / México
 10:30 am República Dominicana

¡Conéctate al Zoom!
 ID: 975 9645 4138
 Contraseña: SomosGAM

Giovanni O. Pérez Campos
 Integrante del Círculo de Hombres Illuman, Los Angeles, California

Presbítero Jesús Mendoza
 Asesor pastoral para la construcción de la paz de la Arquidiócesis de Acapulco, México

Solange Alvarado Espailat
 Psicóloga y Terapeuta Familiar. Es directora del Centro de Atención a Sobrevivientes de Violencia de la Procuraduría Fiscal del Distrito Nacional de la República Dominicana

Allotted 15 minutes, Giovanni gave his assessment of how men’s transformation happens through the work of Illuman, making reference to many of Fr. Richard Rohr’s teachings and his own experience and interaction with men in his experiences of ministry and the brotherhood of Illuman. Everyone was captivated. Even Fr. Mendoza, whose impressive work has focused on the importance of feminism while living immersed in a super *machista* culture and ecclesial body, was taken aback with the wisdom that Illuman has brought to the world. The women were astonished that Illuman has been able to break through so many of the cultural definitions and stereotypes that men have been forced to live up to, including addressing issues of violence—especially domestic violence, child abuse, and other violent behaviors in which men participate.

Most of the women present were from a Christian background (generally Catholic). Giovanni’s skillfully and gracefully crafted inclusion of Fr. Rohr’s iconic statements, and identifying him as a Franciscan, gave credence to Giovanni’s words. Fr. Mendoza was moved to say, “I find these strides in men’s transformational spirituality to be very interesting and new.” Participants wanted to know more about Illuman, and especially how Illuman gathers men. Giovanni brilliantly shared how the men come as they are, and often arrive because the women in their lives send them!

Just as Euro Illuman and Illuman Australia have grown into powerful movements, Illuman en Español anticipates a broad and exciting future as we move forward, thanks to the youthful minds and energy of brothers like Giovanni and Sergio. *¡Ánimo y Adelante!*

(Both Giovanni and Sergio serve in Illuman en Español, and Giovanni serves on the Wisdom Elder Council.)