

# Conveners Corner

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## **By Scott Klaverkamp, Convener for the Illuman of Pennsylvania Chapter**

Greetings from all of us in the Illuman of Pennsylvania Chapter. Illuman of Pennsylvania was incorporated as a chapter on December 13, 2013. The original board members were Paul Meister (Convener), Joel Blunk, Mark Weaver, Jim Herbert, Ken Nickell (Treasurer), and Jim O'Neill. All members live in State College, PA except Jim O'Neill.

Joel Blunk was the Associate Pastor at State College Presbyterian Church and he developed the Crossings Young Men's Rites of Passage, which was held every year on Memorial Day weekend. We have held retreats, sweat lodges, and gatherings in the central part of the state and some in the eastern part, near Philadelphia.

I completed my MROP in 2017 in Rolling Ridge, WV in an effort to change how I would be a parent to my soon-to-be-born child; I was dealing with father wounds, PTSD, and my recovery as an alcoholic. Once I received my rites—a significantly life-altering event—I continued to join my brothers in Council as often as possible but noticed that there was not much else offered afterward. I'm not sure what I was expecting, but I felt, after the MROP, there would be follow-up events that never materialized. I never asked why because, at the time, I was occupied with having a newborn child and a new career in outreach for homeless veterans.

Once my home life stabilized, I was able to attend more Councils. In 2018, I was asked to become the Convener for the chapter as Paul stepped down to take another path. My first reaction was, "Sure, what's that?" After our President, Jim O'Neill (who helped write this history of our chapter), provided me with a guide about the convener role and a transition ceremony, I assumed the role.

I have been viewing the Convener role as an outreach worker, which requires (as my former job duties required) going out to connect with people in need of services; the creation, development, and implementation of community events; being a liaison with community partners; creation of strategies to retain current partners, volunteers, and donors; the creation, development, and implementation of media campaigns; and more.

Unfortunately, we have struggled with men not showing up—except for a few dedicated men. We routinely have difficulty raising funds just to meet basic fees and I have had difficulty attracting men to our chapter for growing and encouraging deep inner work. In 2019, a small group from Pittsburgh made the trek to join a men’s one-day seminar on healthy masculine emotions, which was well-attended. Since then, the group in Pittsburgh has had a continuous gathering, but we have not found a way to join the groups together for Council or any other events. I recognize the difficulty with our geographic limitations—traveling from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh is a six-hour drive—and performing outreach has been very limited. Also, our brothers in New Jersey and Delaware do not have easy access to connecting with us, though they are much closer than Pittsburgh.

Since we do not have many men, it has been difficult to accomplish all that is required to become known in the state. As an outreach worker, I remember something Father Greg Boyle from Homeboy Industries states in his work with gang members: “Stop trying to reach them. Can you be reached *by* them?” I ask myself, “How can we be reached by men?” One answer is to reach out to chapters all along the east coast to join in efforts to connect with men during this pandemic, as many may look for a connection online. In outreach, making a connection is easy; maintaining the relationship is the difficult part. It requires continuous effort and flexibility as needs continuously change. There is no exception with the work of Illuman.

As COVID-19 has altered many lives, mine included, finding ways to be reached by people is our goal here in the Pennsylvania chapter. We are excited to be a part of Illuman as the work is so important, and more excited that Illuman National is growing and adapting to the current needs of men globally. We strive to be open to new ways and accept the challenges to connect with men “where they are, not where we are,” as it were, and to “grow deeper in love with the Divine,” as Jim Taylor said so well at Soularize 2020.