

Conveners Corner

By Rich Gierak, Northern California Chapter

I'll write a bit on the only topic I'm remotely qualified to chime in about: my own journey. Since childhood, I've had a sense of the sacred and some degree of spiritual awareness—an inkling, like a splinter in my mind, that there is more to reality than what we can see, touch, and taste. My family of origin didn't embrace any particular faith tradition, though I loosely identified with Christianity.

In my early twenties, while living with my grandparents (most other family had had enough of me), I was confronted with the question, "What are you?" My Grandfather wanted to know what I would say when the ambulance raced me to the ER and they asked, "Religious preference?" OK, I didn't have an answer that satisfied him, and thus began my first attempt at the Rites of Catholic Initiation for Adults (RCIA).

I learned a bit, including the Roman Catholic tradition (not practiced in my childhood home) of my family of origin. The mother of my daughters was also from a (practicing) Catholic family and thus I entered the church. Fast-forward about 15 years and I found myself singing in the choir of the Catholic church and becoming active in the Men's Spiritual Network that hosted an annual weekend retreat.

One of our parish deacons had given me a book, *The Wild Man's Journey* by Richard Rohr, which sat on my shelf for a year or so. I brought it along on our annual retreat in March 2005 and read it. I felt as though Richard Rohr had given names and context to many issues that seemed to derail my aspirations of being a simple, true, and worthy man.

I was inspired and energized to learn and grow more. I rode to Southern California to meet Richard and hear him speak on his *Adam's Return* book tour. I found the CAC website and registered as the 18th candidate on the waiting list for the May 2006 MROP at Ghost Ranch. I was delighted to clear the wait list, packed my motorcycle, and made the three-day ride to Ghost Ranch.

My experience there was (and continues to be) life-changing. I still consider the three-day ride home to be one of the best self-gifts ever—I really needed those three days of solitude to start unpacking and processing the MROP experience.

Since then, I've been involved with the Northern California region of M.A.L.Es (now Illuman). A group of us met with Richard Rohr in 2007 during a men's retreat in the Bay Area, where he encouraged us to jump in and form a chapter.

We have hosted four MROP weeks, a Firming, and developed the *Lazarus Journey* experience for men to walk more deeply into themselves. I also lead a four-day silent retreat for men annually, though we're forced to cancel for this year.

We're also sad to postpone our November 2020 MROP, though we unanimously agree it's the responsible thing to do. Joe Gabaeff, a member of our leadership Council, is working with a group of men to develop a virtual experience for men that we hope to offer in November.

I've been blessed to serve as convener of NorCal for the past three years, though I rarely feel I have any answers. The gifts emerging through and as me in recent times seem to be questions. And so, I'll offer you some questions:

- What does the Gospel According to [your name here] look like?
- What is the "Good News" you are compelled to share?
- How does the Gospel manifest in the experiences of your life? Challenge yourself to write a parable: It is like....
- Think about that which you *must* do—that which is not negotiable. Now ask yourself, "Why is that?"
- What is the underlying purpose of your "need" to do/say/share _____?

Some (marginally) helpful hints:

- Your gift is entangled with your brokenness.
- Become comfortable with stillness, silence, and solitude.
- Recognize and share the reality that I am saved by grace—and so it will be with you.
- Seek out and engage in experiences, like the Men's Rites of Passage, that create a suitable container and then proceed to shake us off-center from our day-to-day complacency.

It is my hope and prayer that you are well and curious, open and exploring, green and growing. I encourage you to find quiet space and begin writing your Gospel—knowing that it will change with time and experience.

Peace and wellness,

Rich