

Illuman and COVID-19 Protocols

By Terry Symens-Bucher, Steve Hicken and Brad Pickel

Dear Friends of Illuman,

May this message find you and your loved ones receiving all you need to navigate this unstable and uncertain time with purpose and care. We want to give you our thoughts from Illuman's perspective on this rapidly changing situation and how it affects our work together.

Illuman leadership—represented by the Board, Wisdom Elders, and Conveners—has already decided to cancel the in-person Oracle/Leadership gathering in Missouri that was scheduled for April 15–19 for 60 men. We are currently working on a "virtual Oracle" to be held during the same dates with the intention to address the current state of our organization, re-weaving Illuman, and future growth.

The Arizona Chapter has cancelled its MROP scheduled for April 22–26 and Illuman of SoCal has also cancelled their first all-Spanish-speaking retreat that was to take place this weekend, March 27 – 29. Illuman encourages other Chapters and Regions to review their scheduled in-person gatherings. Please inform Brad Pickel as soon as possible if an event is changed or cancelled so that the Schedule of Events on the Illuman website can be updated in a timely manner. We strongly recommend that Chapters and Regions follow the direction of local health officials and if direction from those authorities is unclear, then to follow the guidelines offered by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) found here: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/community/organizations/index.html>

As of this writing, March 23, 2020, cases of coronavirus and resulting deaths in the US are rising. As a result, several locations in the US have instituted "shelter in place," restricting transportation and travel to only those providing essential services. We know that the severity of the illness increases significantly in those over 60 and among those with other health complications. We surely want to consider this when we review our in-person gatherings.

The White House recommends avoiding gatherings of 10 or more people from March 16–30, 2020 https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/downloads/Mass-Gatherings-Document_FINAL.pdf. Your state or local government may have issued different and more stringent recommendations and/or directives.

Illuman's Administrator, Chair of the Board, and Vice Chair are always available to speak with any leadership involved with Illuman's work about plans you are making to gather in person or decisions you may make to cancel such events. Please reach out to Brad Pickel (administrator@illuman.org) to begin the conversation. As a community, Illuman also holds a wealth of experience and best practices through our Virtual Council program for virtual gathering and connecting.

On a physical level, beyond precautions and the social distancing recommended by authorities, we want to also say that the best defense against any disease is a strong immune system. We encourage each one of us to take stock of our health habits and to take every opportunity to support one another in strengthening our ability to withstand sickness and poor health. This might mean review of some of our most strongly held beliefs and practices around what we eat, where it comes from, what it contains, and its effect on the planet's health and our own. Many of us add supplements for what we are not receiving in our diets. As part of our reconnection with nature, some of us look to plant and herbal medicines to strengthen your immune system. Regular exercise is an essential way to maintain our health. Our work is done best with a healthy body.

On a spiritual level, our men's work continues, although perhaps in a different form. Our touchstones remain: Centering, Gathering, Connecting, Releasing, Serving. This uncertain and unstable time has invited us into liminal space and we know about liminal space. It is up to us to not distract ourselves from it or avoid it, with some idea that we are just "hanging on" until our "normal life" resumes.

As a suggestion, we encourage you to consider working with your emotional responses to our current situation, treating them as aids and steppingstones for spiritual work. This liminal time has perhaps raised some issues that we have been able to avoid in our normal lives. Meditating on five possible regrets can be a powerful source of information about the state of our spiritual life and indicate the direction we need to go:

1. I wish that I had the courage to live a life that is true to myself and not what others expect of me.
2. I wish I didn't work so hard.
3. I wish I had the courage to express my feelings.
4. I wish I had stayed in touch with my family and friends.
5. I wish that I allowed myself to be happier.

These are paraphrased from Bronnie Ware's book, *The Top Five Regrets of the Dying*. Whether you are "sheltering in place" or not, these possible regrets can be excellent starting points for reviewing our life and making necessary decisions in order to do what is ours to do in this life. This global pause, this collective shock to our sense of well-being, can focus our attention on perhaps the most important question: Am I living my soul's mission right now?

We end this message with the (slightly altered) words of the Irish poet John O'Donohue (from "A Morning Offering" in *To Bless the Space Between Us*):

*May we have the courage today
To live the life that we would love,
To postpone our dreams no longer
But do at last what we came here for
And waste our hearts with fear no more.*

In hope and solidarity,
Terry, Steve, and Brad