

Men Writing for Change

Brian Mueller is a member of the Ohio Chapter of Illuman and writes poetry as part of his daily meditation practice. Brian was asked the following questions.



What is Men Writing for Change?

Men Writing for Change is a poetry writing retreat I developed at the request of the Elders in Indiana-Michigan M.A.L.Es. The change referenced in the title is not so much external change, but rather the intrapersonal transformation that can take place through the process of writing, and also of sharing our words with others.

Why poetry?

Poetry is more accessible than people realize. There really aren't any hard and onerous rules to writing good poetry. We offer men some guidelines and suggestions before writing, but I'm also careful to emphasize that we must let go of the preconceptions as well as the many rules that we learned in the classroom about what is and isn't poetry.

Tell us more about how poetry transforms men.

A couple of years ago, during *Drawing from a Deep Well*, a part of Soularize 2016, Fr. Richard Rohr mentioned that, after participating in a Men's Rites of Passage, a lot of men take up writing poetry. He said that he wasn't entirely certain why but believed that, after a profound spiritual experience, the literal world doesn't make as much sense to men, especially when it comes to many of life's big questions. Of course, he added that very little of the poetry sent to him could be considered great poetry, but that the important thing was men were finding ways to express themselves and to understand this world in a more mystical way.

Do you write poetry?

Yes, I'm one of those guys writing poetry that Fr. Rohr mentioned. Though I began my writing before attending my rites in 2014, I committed myself even more fully after the MROP. For almost five years now, my morning routine involves meditation, reading different poets to deepen my presence and awareness, and then writing a poem of my own. This daily spiritual practice has become an essential part of my day and has helped to deepen my own understanding of life, love, and relationship.

Why did you start writing poetry?

I began writing more frequently a few years ago after my first marriage ended. I couldn't understand why my divorce had happened, and why I was powerless to prevent it. The realization that I had little control over life was a big blow and shook me to my foundation. I lost my bearings for a couple of years and began to wake in the middle of night in a full-on existential crisis. I heard voices telling me I had wasted my life and that there was nothing but darkness ahead.

Early on, I believed the negative voices and was convinced my future would be sad and bleak. But then I sought out other people who urged me to adopt some new perspectives. In doing this, I began to write about my pain and woundedness. My early poems were all very depressing, mostly telling the story of the numerous ways I had been hurt and disappointed. Yet, ever so slowly, those internal voices began to change, and I started to notice a completely different world. The words kept flowing and, before I knew it, I began to publish my poems, hoping that my words might help to heal and inspire others.

So, back to the retreat. How does it work?

Men Writing for Change works like a lot of Illuman gatherings. Men come together in Council, usually at a retreat center, surrounded by nature. We begin with drumming and our first session includes a ritual and short introduction to writing poetry. Again, I'm very careful to emphasize that poetry is everywhere and is our common language, accessible to everyone. I share some examples and present a fun exercise.

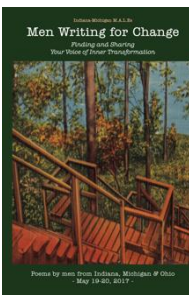
The first Council takes place in the evening and after closing we have a small social gathering where the men fraternize and share food and drink. The next morning, after meditation and breakfast, our work deepens as we gather in a large Council and enter into a program designed to stimulate creativity, emotions, and memories. We then break into small councils and the men write based upon a prompt given them by their council carriers. Afterward, they have the option of sharing what they've written with their brothers.

We repeat this process of meeting in large then small council and writing to prompts several times during the day, taking breaks for lunch and for time in nature. At the close of the retreat, we hold another ritual and send the men forth with a blessing and the suggestion that they continue to cultivate a writing practice in their spiritual work and meditation.

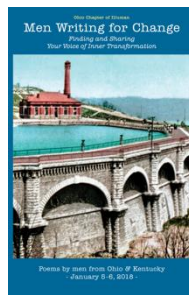
Where can I learn more about Men Writing for Change?

You can learn a little more about our next Men Writing for Change retreat, which will be held in Ohio on January 11–12, 2019, at our website: www.menwriting.org. Please also feel free to write to me with any questions you have about bringing this retreat to the men in your region. My email is menwritingforchange@gmail.com and I am glad to tell you more about this retreat.

Keep in mind, it is not necessary for me to be the retreat leader, though—if available—I'd be willing to do this. I can also provide the template for this retreat to individual Illuman chapters as way to extend the programs and services we can provide to men on their spiritual journeys.



Indiana-Michigan M.A.L.Es Edition Men Writing for Change: Finding and Sharing Your Inner Voice of Transformation (Volume 1)



Ohio Chapter of Illuman Edition Men Writing for Change: Finding and Sharing Your Inner Voice of Transformation (Volume 2)