

My Journey

By Mike Keller

I'm Mike Keller, one of the incorporators of Illuman-Missouri and the most recently elected member of the Illuman Board of Directors.

How and when were you introduced to male spirituality?

In 2008–2009, I was having a crisis of faith over what I viewed to be an increasing “feminization” of religion. While all my life experience told me that faith should be muscular, gritty, and earthy, I was increasingly encountering religion that was ethereal, devotional, and (for want of a better word) “pastel.” It offered about as much spiritual nourishment as cotton candy, and I was repulsed.

When I heard about Richard Rohr's work in male spirituality, I had to find out what this was about. That brought me to the life-changing experience of my MROP at Aravaipa Canyon in April of 2010. I returned the following year for Firming, and thereafter was privileged to be at Oracle when the men's work was handed over to the Illuman elders by the CAC. I've been at all the Soularizes since, and have been an MROP Initiator at Pilgrim Park in 2014 and at Aravaipa last spring. In addition to learning the Way of Council, I've been privileged to experience an intimate fellowship with other men—of many other denominations and none at all—who believe, as I do, in a truly “big tent” spirituality.

How has your participation in Illuman/M.A.L.Es fostered the use and development of your gifts?

Illuman has proven to me that all externals can be set aside. Race, creed, sexual orientation, and, yes, belief systems are as nothing in the face of our common humanity and the shared struggle to live in right relationship with a Higher Power and with each other. The hymn says it best: “The journey makes us one.”

Describe a recent Illuman/M.A.L.Es event you attended. What was the impact on you?

For much of the past year, my journey has been about retirement from a wonderfully rich career and how I would best now define myself as a “human being” rather than a “human doing.” Classic “second half of life” stuff, right? Sure, but I can attest that it certainly feels different when it's your life! Around Council circles of initiators at Aravaipa, and with the men at Soularize, I've profited from the rich experience of some magnificent souls who've been through that terrain, and I know I'm doing it a great deal better for the insights gained in those intimate exchanges.

What's one thing you'd recommend to a man starting on the spiritual journey?

Don't lose hope! After long, discouraging decades of drought, the last few years have shown fresh springs of promise in my Church. This is due in no small part to one man's modeling a "culture of encounter" that calls on us to accept each other where we are and move forward together from there. Ironically, this same period has given birth to a coarsened political climate (worldwide!) that is both fracturing and frightening. In the face of this, it's easy to feel anger, angst, discouragement, and disgust. But my heart tells me that hope, and personal witness, are a better, and ultimately more productive, response.

What's the best thing about doing this work?

The relationships formed with men from around the world whom I would never have known were it not for Illuman. In a Council circle, I connected with a man from half a world away whose story was eerily like my own. In our Missouri chapter, we have formed a beautiful connection with a group of Hispanic men in southern Illinois, many of whom are illegal immigrants. We've heard the heartbreaking stories of their migrations, family separations, and legal and financial struggles. The Missouri Chapter men are sponsoring three of them to attend the first bilingual MROP in Southern California this spring. I thank God for using Illuman to make these connections in my life.

Concluding thoughts?

It was great to be invited to reflect on some of what has come to matter most to me over these past seven years. What a sacred time it has been!