

rites of passage in 2021?

By John Ball, Convener, Illuman DC

Johnball0450@gmail.com

PLANNING FOR THE RITES OF PASSAGE

In the best of times, planning a Men's Rites of Passage is a big challenge. There are lots of moving parts to be considered and put into place to make it work well. Believe it or not, the MROP Planning Manual is 358 pages long, and the first 111 pages are devoted just to the minutiae involved in the pre-MROP logistical planning! Putting all the pieces together properly takes a Core Team of men and a support group of men working closely together for at least six months or more.

MROP PLANNING IN A PANDEMIC

The pandemic has made event planning even more complex—not only for the MROP, but for planning any event that brings people together in real time and space. While the stated mission of Illuman is, "We are men transforming men through a power greater than our own," our first priority is to ensure the safety and well-being of the men who participate in all Illuman-sponsored programs at the national, international, regional, and chapter levels. National events such as the Rites of Passage (YMROP, MROP, EROP), Soularize, and Oracle attract participants from all over the world. Talk about a potential for being "Super Spreader Events"!

LIVING THE HARD TRUTHS

Life is hard. My life is not about me. I am not that important. I am not in control. I am going to die.

With these hard truths in mind, I must accept that our work is about transformation, not infecting or killing anyone!

Illuman cancelled most of the Rites of Passage that were scheduled for 2020 and a few that were scheduled for 2021. Whenever possible, other large-scale Illuman events that would have normally been held in person were shifted to virtual, online gatherings. Even the small, local Council circles that normally meet in person pivoted to gathering by Zoom. In some cases, the decision to cancel was costly; deposits to reserve venues were lost, costing sponsoring chapters to lose money they couldn't afford to lose.

THE GIFT AND CURSE OF MODERN TECHNOLOGY

Online technology and the devotion of a group of brothers who worked tirelessly to figure out how to make things work have given us a great gift. Their efforts have made it possible for us to stay connected for these many long months and to continue supporting one another in this liminal time and space. Their efforts have provided a lifeline for sustaining our spiritual, emotional, and mental health. Thank you to the Virtual Council Guiding Circle, to Illuman Administrator Brad Pickel, and each and every one of our technical wizards who have made it possible for us to continue our work together. Yet, at the same time, many of us are “Zoomed Out” and yearning for being together again in real time and space.

SO, WHERE ARE WE IN OUR PLANNING RIGHT NOW?

First, we have been closely monitoring the sometimes confusing and contradicting guidelines and reports from the Centers for Disease Control, the White House, and state and local health authorities. We have been watching the numbers of new cases, hospitalizations, and the vaccination rates, all of which factor into our decision to go forward with our plans to gather in person, or not. The most recent data suggest that holding gatherings of participants who are all fully vaccinated poses a low risk of spreading the virus. As with anything else, there is no 100% guarantee that someone who is fully vaccinated for COVID-19 won’t experience a breakthrough infection. Considering the data, Illuman has set a policy that all participants attending an in-person event must show proof of being fully vaccinated. Certainly, that policy will most likely change as the guidelines and policies change and we eventually get the “All Clear.”

BUT WHAT IF I HAVE HAD COVID-19 AND HAVE THE ANTIBODIES?

That’s a hard question! Opinions from the scientific community vary. Some medical authorities have stated that antibodies developed from a COVID-19 infection will provide sufficient immunity, comparable to having received one of the vaccines. Others say that is not the case and encourage those who have had the infection to get the vaccine, too. Given the conflicting opinions, Illuman leadership has decided to come down on the side of prudence and, for now, limit our in-person gatherings to fully vaccinated men. We continue in that liminal space.

WILL ILLUMAN BE SPONSORING RITES OF PASSAGE IN 2021?

Unless something changes, forcing us to cancel, the answer is YES! The good news is we will be hosting Rites of Passage, Soularize, and other in-person events this year! On one hand, Soularize will be a hybrid event that will

allow fully vaccinated men to attend in person in New Mexico and others to attend virtually. On the other hand, participating in a Rites of Passage is a different experience, which must be done in person. The YMROP, MROP, EROP experiences do not lend themselves to online participation.

There are five MROPs currently scheduled for 2021, only two of which will be held in the United States. There will also be one Elder's Rites of Passage (EROP) held in Washington State. We ask you to mark your calendar to pray for the initiates, as well as those conducting the Rites.

- **Australia MROP**, August 10 – 14, at Camp Somerset, Queensland: <https://www.centreformenaustralia.org.au/events/mens-rights-of-passage/>
- **Ireland MROP**, August 18 – 22, at Kiltegan, County Wicklow: <http://malejourney.ie/what-s-happening/list-of-events/event/164-men-s-rites-of-passage-kiltegan-2021/>
- **Czech Republic MROP**, September 8 – 12: <http://chlapi.cz/>
- **Illuman of Washington EROP**, September 15 – 19, at Ekone Ranch, near Goldendale, Washington: <https://www.illumanoftwa.org/elders-rites-of-passage/>
- **New Jersey MROP**, September 29 – October 3, at Johnsonburg Camp and Retreat Center in Johnsonburg, NJ: <https://www.illumandc.org/mrop-2021/>
- **Northern California MROP**, November 3 – 7, at the EverGreen Retreat Center, Oak Harbor, California: <https://illumannorcal.org/>

WE NEED YOUR HELP TO SPREAD THE WORD AND ENCOURAGE VACCINATED MEN TO REGISTER

Chapters and regions sponsoring the Rites of Passage cannot do it alone. We need your help getting the word out and encouraging vaccinated men to consider signing up to participate this year. We will take every precaution to ensure the safety of all our participants; however, despite our best efforts, there are no guarantees. Men who are considering registration need to know that.

You may know men who would benefit from participating in the Men's Rites of Passage. We appreciate your assistance in recruiting men to sign up for

the upcoming September 2021 MROP in Johnsonburg, New Jersey, and for the November MROP in Oak Harbor, California.

INITIATING A CONVERSATION ABOUT THE MEN'S RITES OF PASSAGE

The information below provides a variety of questions, ideas, and topics to help you with talking about the MROP experience. We suggest you simply invite men to consider and investigate this unique opportunity. Begin the conversation with a few gentle, non-agenda-based questions.

- Where are you on your spiritual journey?
- How would you describe your understanding of and relationship with the Divine or a "power greater than yourself"?
- Do you have some regular spiritual practices to help you grow spiritually? What are they? In what ways are they helping?
- What is the next work for you to do to go deeper in your self-awareness?
- What assistance do you need that could help you on your spiritual journey?
- Would you be interested in hearing about a Men's Rites of Passage, a nature-based retreat run by men for men?

DESCRIBING THE MROP TO AN UNINITIATED MAN

The Rites of Passage are based on a series of carefully designed rituals, confirmed through 25 years of delivery, to help men go deeper in understanding themselves and their relationship with the divine.

- Each man comes to the event and works on aspects of his life and stage that are particular to him. The rituals help break open the shell that keeps us thinking and acting in a mostly automatic manner.
- Many men tend to live in their heads. The Rites of Passage help men learn to listen, speak, live, and love from an expanded heart.
- Men often operate from an over-controlling ego. The Rites of Passage help men discover their true self that balances the constricting elements of ego.

- Many men experience and carry fear, shame, and anger throughout life—often unconsciously—all of which reduce our ability to live a fully human, loving, and generative life.
- Franciscan theologian Richard Rohr says, “Pain that is not processed and transformed is transmitted.” The Men’s Rites of Passage help us connect with our wounds, which are the source of pain, fear, anger, guilt, and shame. The Rites of Passage help us transform the negative thoughts and feelings into our greatest gifts.

SPECIFIC AREAS TO REFERENCE, ENCOURAGE REFLECTION, OR DISCUSS (*As May Be Appropriate*)

- **Authenticity** – How do you feel about your level of authenticity, otherwise known as your true self? What gets in the way of expressing your true self in the deepest and most authentic ways?
- **Inner Freedom** – How would you characterize your degree of inner freedom? Have you been able to free yourself of the hurts, guilt, shame, or other deformative aspects of your life (your False Self), and embrace who you truly are (your True Self)?
- **Addictions** – What do you see as your biggest, most constricting addictions?
- **Love** – What is your experience of love—how you give and receive it?
- **Relationships** – How deep and rewarding are your relationships with family, friends, colleagues, the broader community, and creation?
- **Death** – Have you processed the reality of your ultimate (if not imminent) death? In what ways do you use the awareness of your mortality to inform your perspectives, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors?

In the first chapter of his book *Finding God at Home: Family Life as a Spiritual Discipline*, Ernest Boyer, Jr. began with a prayer that has touched my heart and best describes our work and the kind of man I want to be. I hope it touches your heart and calls to you, too.

Dear God, kindle a fire in me, kindle it and let it burn to a white heat. Kindle a fire and let it rage inside me to feed itself on my bone and blood and sinew until I am consumed and only the fire remains. Turn my soul into a blaze, God, a blaze so bright and hot that it can be felt right through me to warm with your warmth all who come near.