

Walking in the Dark

By Mike Anderer, Illuman Co-Vice Chair

I'll start by checking in.

I have cried every day since I woke up the morning of Thursday, January 7, usually while I sat in Council with my Illuman brothers.

Why?

I am still unpacking all the experiences, relationships, and events that are contributing to my current grief.



Is it that I wake up every morning next to a woman who walks (joyfully) through the world knowing that many of her white colleagues and some white friends do not comprehend white privilege and white supremacy, which means they don't really see her in her fullness as a human being?

Is it that I am a father in a blended, mixed-race family of seven children between the ages of 16 and 30, who have variable access to resources, social networks, meaningful support, and work opportunities simply based on the color of their skin and the curl in their hair, which prevents many people from seeing their fullness as human beings?

Is it because I work daily with a group of transformed human beings who are transforming public places and vulnerable people across California simply by their full-bodied, attentive presence, a presence that was refined and alchemized by decades in prison, an experience that causes most of society to turn a blind eye to their diaphanous fullness as human beings?

Is it that I have spent the better part of a year striving to hold space for my family, for my workplace, and for Illuman during a global pandemic, a (partial) awakening to historical and persistent racial discrimination, and a political and social bifurcation of our families, communities, and country?

Is it that last week I witnessed a protest in which a man who looks like me literally sat in the primary seat of the legislative branch of our government with the confidence and entitlement I thought our country only affords to the leaders of our democratically elected representatives? (I never seem to reach the bottom of the container of privileges my whiteness provides for me and for those who look like me.)

Needless to say, I am weary, troubled, and attentive. In the words of a wise teacher and friend, ["all I can surrender is my helplessness."](#) I am walking in the dark.

I would like to introduce myself as the Co-Vice Chair of the Illuman Board. You see my partner, Monique, in the picture. To fill in the picture of our family, four of our seven children are still in high school, one junior and three seniors, two of whom are twins; one young adult child moving through college; and two adult children building their towers that, in their wreckage, will become the containers for their authentic selves.

My relationship and engagement with Illuman began in 2010, when I read *From Wild Man to Wise Man* and, later that year, attended the Men's Rites of Passage in Pilgrim Park, Illinois. I remained active in Illinois M.A.L.Es until I moved to California in 2012. Three weeks after my move, I attended the Shadowlands FIRMeing hosted by the NorCal MALEs chapter of what is now Illuman. In the intervening years, I have been blessed and honored to serve as convener of NorCal MALEs and as MROP Coordinator for two Rites in 2015 and 2017. In addition to serving on the Illuman Board, I serve as Co-Chair of the Futuring Council with Tom Reid of Illuman of Washington.

The charge of the Futuring Council is to carry forward the "Reweaving Illuman" process. Reweaving Illuman is an organizational change process in which we are striving to renew the founding vision of Illuman that we received from Richard Rohr, OFM, when M.A.L.Es split from the Center for Action and Contemplation and formed Illuman in 2012. That Illuman vision points toward what type of man is needed for the world today. The Reweaving "process" surfaced for the first time at our annual leadership gathering (known as Oracle) in 2019. Among other interventions at that time, Terry Symens-Bucher, former chair of the Board, expressed the [creative tensions within a growing Illuman](#). Without boring you with all the details of our progress since then, the ongoing work of Reweaving Illuman is also like walking in the dark.

As I reflect on what it means to walk in the dark, I don't think of being lost in the dark. I remember and call to mind my first solo night in the wilderness on that Shadowlands FIRMeing in 2012. As the sun went down and I settled in on a ridge by myself in the central Sierra Mountains, I was unsettled and, if I

am honest, fearful, anxious, and unsure of myself. That experience, that night, mirrored what I was experiencing and feeling in my everyday life at that time. For me, that night, that darkness became a well of creativity and new life. I began to release my feelings of fear and anxiety, and trust the darkness. And the darkness became my companion and friend.

As I witness my own reflection, I recognize today that the life of Illuman is a reflection and teacher for me. I recognize that the events of our country are a reflection and teacher for me. We are all walking in the dark.

I close with these words that echo the Illuman call to inner work that makes a difference in the world.

We but mirror the world.

*All the tendencies present in the outer world
are to be found in the world of our body.*

If we change ourselves

the tendencies in the world would also change.

*As a man [sic] changes his own world
so does the attitude of the world change towards him.*

This is the divine mystery supreme.

*A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness.
We need not wait to see what others do.*

—M.K. Gandhi