

# Young Men's Rites of Passage

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We are often asked whether Illuman offers Men's Rites of Passage for younger men. While we do not offer Young Men's Rites of Passage (YMROP), many of our Chapters and Regions do hold YMROPs. This month we asked two of our Chapter Conveners to offer some reflections and insights based on their personal experiences with the young men's rites.

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*This first piece is by Peter Fishpool, the Convener for the United Kingdom. His desire to help younger men led him to discover the rites for himself and enter into a deeper, personal spiritual journey.*

## **By Peter Fishpool, UK Convener**

My first enquiries about Men's Rites of Passage in 2007 were made out of concern for two young men who appeared trapped in a reclusive gaming existence. How would they ever break into adult society? I wished I had more to orient these seemingly angry and frightened guys to find their way out towards maturity.

A colleague suggested I look up Richard Rohr, whom he had heard speaking about Rites of Passage. Via the Internet and CAC, I found there were to be Rites in England in July 2008 and took myself there to satisfy my curiosity.

It proved to be life-changing, helping me process my own emotional turmoil. The Grief Ritual granted me space for my own anger as my beloved wife grappled with the brain tumours which kept re-colonising her skull. That winter of 2008 I managed Jenny's care at home as her life spirit slowly seeped away, crowded out by the invading cancers. She died peacefully at home on Mothering Sunday, 2009.

In 2010 I arranged the hosting for one of Richard Rohr's talks on his last tour of the UK and the following year joined the Elder team for the UK Rites. My 'gifts' were noted; I was given work on the Ritual team. I now serve as one of the two Ritual Elders in the UK and as national Convener for the UK partner of Illuman, The Male Journey.

In 2013, spurred on by Marty Togher, one of our Elder team working in youth work, we started looking at how to make a Rites appropriate for younger men. There was dialogue with those in Pennsylvania who had developed a programme for adolescents entitled Crossings. In early spring 2014, a small group of us, including Stephen Gambill, Andy Raine, Adrian Scott, Jim Taylor, Marty Togher and myself, got together and developed the outline of a Young Men's Rites of Passage.

In July 2014 we ran the programme for the first time with nine participants. This July I served as Ritual Elder on the second Young Men's Rites of Passage for 22 young men, ages 18–28 years, from Bulgaria, England, Ireland, Lithuania, Scotland and the United States. As before, we 'rough' camped on a wilded quarry, sharing a rich time together.

The programme is more active than on the second-half-of-life Rites. The intention is to help the young men make space to re-examine their inner life. At the start, we present each with a hand-bound Journal in which to explore their experience. It contains stimulus material, sealed in sections, which they break into at intervals. This sends them back into the experiences to mine for further gold.

Rather than three longish Teachings, for this version the Elder team shares stories around the campfire. Studded into the programme are succinct mythic tales and personal testimonies of the Elders' own tanglings with the 5 Hard Messages.

This storytelling models to the young men the idea of delving deeper, so that in their Council Circles they begin to recognise their own baggage. It is an exercise in trusting each other to listen from the heart, bearing witness as each begins to examine 'our own shit' and find new ways to face the future.

The Rites are a rebirthing. In the Young Men's Rites we take the party down to the river towards the end of their Day of Grief for them to wash themselves clean. They are each invited to step forward and submerge themselves – for the Weaver to pull them back out of the water to breathe in New Life. It is a return into the 'waters of the womb' and then a being pulled out into the world – into the wonderland created for us.

I, who can beat myself up with my shortcomings, need this reminder that maturity is not a land of separation from the Holy Spirit; I am not cast out of paradise for my 'sins'. It is an invitation to live in the Divine rule, in the here-and-now.

Hermann Hesse finds Siddhartha at the end of his story, sitting at the ferry crossing, listening to 'the many-voiced song of the river':

From that hour Siddhartha ceased to fight against his destiny. There shone in his face the serenity of knowledge, of one who is no longer confronted with conflict of desires, who has found salvation, who is in harmony with the stream of events, with the stream of life, full of sympathy and compassion, surrendering himself to the stream, belonging to the unity of all things.\*

On my day in the wilderness in those 2008 Rites, I chose 'River' for my Initiated name. What I wish for the men on subsequent Rites is that they too cease to fight against destiny, are filled with compassion, and find communion with all things in the flow of life.

*\*Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha, trans. Hilda Rosner (London: Picador/Pan, 1974), 108.*

For more information on the UK Young Men's Rites: <http://malejourney.org.uk/rites/young-mens-rites>

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*This second piece is by Chuck Rihm, the Convener for Ohio Illuman. He describes the origin and process of Crossings Ohio. Chuck also shares his experience of participating in the YMROP rites and how this has deepened the lessons from his own MROP in 2008.*

## **By Chuck Rihm, Ohio Convener**

I recently participated in Crossings Ohio, a young men's rites of passage, at a former Boy Scout camp in central Ohio. I was one of nine elders who helped five young men mark the move to manhood through ritual, time in nature, and contemplation. Crossings is a program developed by Weaver Joel Blunk for young men aged 18–30 that is based on the five truths outlined by Fr. Richard Rohr in *Adam's Return* and utilized in Men as Learners and Elders' (MALEs) Men's Rites of Passage (MROP) sponsored by numerous Illuman regions around the world.

For those of you who have attended an MROP, you would recognize what we do at Crossings, but we do it in ways that help young men in their first half of life, who may not have experienced as much pain or suffering in their shorter lives. The elders share stories and examples of how we learned the five core teachings of male initiation, and then we invite the initiates to do so as well. We provide experiences to help teach the initiates each lesson experientially, in their flesh and bones; in their hearts as well as their heads. We give them time to share in Council what they are experiencing, and we introduce them to periods of contemplation.

This is the fourth year that Ohio Illuman has hosted this four-day program, and each year it is always challenging and rewarding to be involved. Each year I am reminded of my MROP in 2008, held in Frost Valley, New York. I learn again each of the five truths; I experience them in my body. Again this year, when I was tired, hungry, hot, and stressed, I had to learn again that I am not in control and that I am not that important. I share from the darker times in my life when I have failed but, in doing so, I actually win. We do our best as elders to model what healthy masculinity looks like. We work alongside the initiates. We fast with them. We undergo the same ordeals that they do. By using mud, blood, ash, fire, water, and oil, we usher young men into what it means to be a man, to be the best men that they are called to be. And I think we are successful, in spite of our shortcomings, because the initiates have returned in following years to function as elders, giving back what they have received, serving each other.

For more information on Crossings Ohio: <http://www.crossingsohio.org>