

MaleCall



Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Men's Network
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Volume 11, Number 1

Autumn 2004

“We Need Men”

A sermon excerpt by the Rev. David Boyer
Interim Minister, First Parish in Lexington
(May, 2004)

It was my first church some 18 years ago: a small stone Universalist church in a small country town. Our choir was also very small. Seldom were there more than six or seven folks singing, all women. They decided, perhaps wisely, to find new members and grow the choir. One Sunday the choir leader, Barbara, asked to make a special announcement.

The usual appeals were offered: “You don’t have to be an expert”; “Being able to read music is helpful, but not required”; etc. Then, just as she was about to finish, Barbara ad-libbed in a loud voice, “And most of all, WE NEED MEN!” As she walked down from the chancel towards the back of the church, she heard the chuckles and realized how what she had said could have a double meaning.

After church she met me in my office. “You know, we really do need men, just not in the way folks were sniggering... It didn’t used to be this way, no male voices,” she added. (Barbara was right—I had seen photos of the choir in the 1950s and early 60s. It was much bigger and filled with men. Then, in just a few decades there were none.)

Her statement—“We need men!”—was more than a comment on that particular empty section of the choir. It was also indicative of what might be considered by some to be a “feminization” of liberal church life in general. One might ask, what happened to the men?

Now, church has long had a strong involvement of women. Of course, until the last few generations, it

was only men who were considered for the high status positions of the Governing Board, Parish Minister, etc. But that was not to say that women were without significant influence in church affairs.

Although historically it was men who did the standing up and talking, it was women who did a great deal of the shaping of church life. It seems that until the last few decades there was a kind of unmentioned gender balance in our churches. Men filled the elected leadership positions and women did the work of the church, by and large. For instance, the “Sunday School Superintendent” was always a man (useful when bargaining for resources from the all-male board), but women did the teaching, planning and running of the church school.



Steering Council member and General Assembly "Boothmeister" Dave Woods (IL), chatting up a visitor to the 2004 exhibit in Long Beach, CA, last June. See more about GA on Page Two!

Inside this issue:	
President's report	2
Men in Young Adult NetW	4
Brother-Spirit Fund News	4

(Continued on page 5)

About UUMeN

The Unitarian Universalist Men's Network is a continental membership organization for UU men (which also welcomes other gender allies). Our purpose is to build and sustain a mature, liberal religious masculinity. Our primary objectives are to: develop a continental resource network; support the personal and spiritual growth of men at the local, district and continental levels; and collaborate with other UU groups who share our interests and commitments. Members receive a quarterly newsletter, may vote at our Annual Meeting held in June at General Assembly, and are eligible for discounts on materials.

2003-2004 Steering Council

Neil Chethik (KY), president, 2004
Jim Jaeger (WI), treasurer, 2004
Bob Hospadaruk (MI), 2004
Kenneth Beldon (FL), 2005
Frank Robertson (MA), 2005
Dave Woods (IL), 2005
Drew Johnston (WA), 2006
Todd Strickland (CO), 2006
Dick Whitaker (IL), 2006

Tom Owen-Towle, President Emeritus

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MaleCall

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

*Neil Chethik
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It's been another successful year for UUMeN at General Assembly!

Most of you probably know that General Assembly (or GA) is the annual gathering of Unitarian Universalists, held each June in a different city. This past summer, we met in Long Beach, Calif., with 5,000 UUs in attendance. For five days, we attended workshops, worship services, social events, and other gatherings. Perhaps more importantly, we made personal contacts with like-minded brothers and sisters in our movement with whom we share our passions and aspirations.

Here are a few personal highlights from my experience at GA 2004:

- Listening to the Revs. Todd Strickland and Drew Johnston at their UUMeN-sponsored workshop, "Between the Lines: Gay and Straight Men in Dialogue." Before a large audience, Todd and Drew shared the details of their relationship – how they met and became friends at seminary; how one came out to the other; how the two men struggled with that revelation; how they have maintained their friendship in the years since. I was particularly moved by a question from an audience member who identified himself as the father of a 7-year-old boy. He wanted to know how best to let his son know that if the boy turned out to be gay, that was OK with Dad.



Revs. Drew Johnston
and Todd Strickland

- Watching the Rev. Ken Beldon lead a conversation at his workshop, "Putting Away Childish Things: Transitioning to Young Manhood." Ken spoke eloquently of the struggles he's experienced in work, love, and friendship during his young-adult years. This was the first time that UUMeN has sponsored a workshop for young adults, and it inspired more than a dozen young people to join the organization. We look forward to integrating their ideas and energy into our organization.
- Chatting at the UUMeN booth in the Exhibit Hall with scores of men who were thrilled to learn we exist, and that we have resources that can help them in their congregations. I remember a long conversation with a man who has been in a men's group at his church for several years, but is no longer enjoying it. He told me that the group had become "too chatty" – little attention was given to looking beneath the surface of the men's lives, he said. I was able to share some of my own experiences, as well as UUMeN resources. He left the booth energized and hopeful. Another man told me how much his young son complained about going to church because his religious-education was "boring." I was able to offer him a copy of our material on "How to

(Continued on page 3)

("From the President" Continued from page 2)

Make RE More Boy-Friendly."

- Surpassing our goal for the Brother-Spirit Fund in Honor of Tom Owen-Towle, a founder of UUMeN. You may recall that UUMeN started this fund drive in early 2003, with a goal of \$10,000. The money, our Steering Council had decided, would be used for initiatives that Tom had championed: starting men's groups, creating gay-straight and male-female dialogues, developing RE materials for men and boys.

- In the weeks leading up to GA, we were still \$1,500 short of our goal. But then I called John K. Davis, a former member of UUMeN's Steering Council from San Diego, where Tom had served as a minister until 2003. Right there on the phone, John pledged to make a significant donation. More importantly, he promised to telephone a dozen men and women that would, in John's words, "feel left out" if they weren't invited to honor Tom by giving to the Brother-Spirit Fund. Suddenly, the checks started rolling in.

- Within two weeks, we had not only reached our \$10,000 goal, we had passed it by \$2,000. Then, at a reception held for Tom, we received cash and pledges of \$4,000 more. UUMeN now has a fund that will help us make a big impact on the quality of the experience UU men and boys will get in their churches.

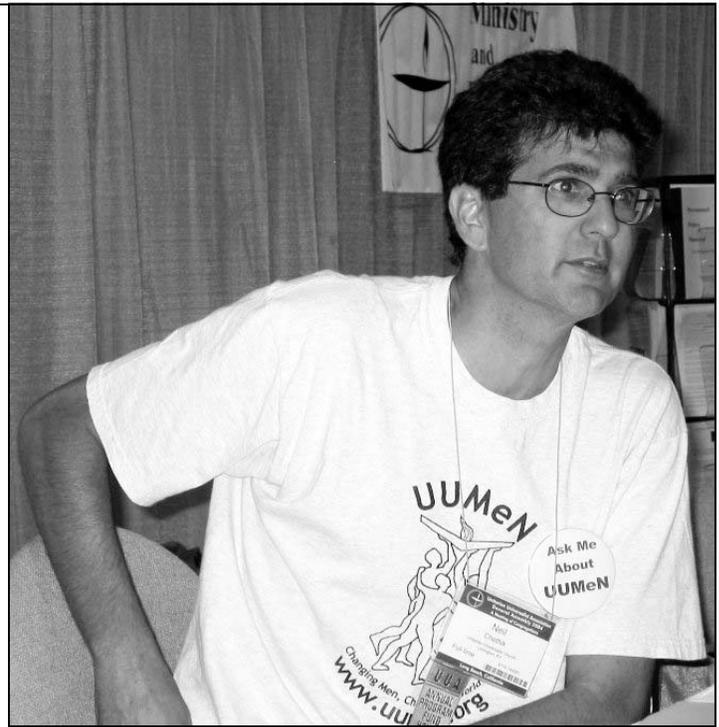
- Seeing another couple of dozen "pins" go up on our Map of Men's Groups. For the past three years, we have invited GA attendees to put their church men's groups on the North America map we put in our booth. Each pin represents a church men's group. With the new pins from this year's GA, we now have identified more than 150 men's groups at UU churches.

Next year's General Assembly will be held in Forth Worth, Texas, again at the end of June. UUMeN will be there with workshops, resources, and manpower. We'd love to see you there too. Let us know if you decide to go so that we can make contact with you. Already, we are generating ideas about what workshops to offer. We may even sponsor a daily men's group to share the stories or our lives, and model how to create a group that has meaning for the participants. If you have ideas, send them our way.

In brotherhood,



P.S.: If you'd like to be one of the Brother-Spirit Fund's charter givers, there's still time! Send a check to our Madison, WI, address, listed on the front of this newsletter. Make the check to UUMeN, and mark BSF in the memo line. Some of us have a vision that one day, the Brother-Spirit Fund will grow large enough to become an endowment fund, from which we will only spend the earnings. If that happens, the fund, and the legacy of Tom Owen-Towle's men's work, will continue on indefinitely.



UUMeN founding member and current president, Neil Chethik (KY), intent on "Changing Men, Changing the World" (his t-shirt slogan)

Men in the Young Adult Network

By Michael Tino

Director of Young Adult and Campus Ministry, Unitarian Universalist Association

Part of the young adult experience is the developing and maturation of our various identities, including gender. Young adult men are faced with the challenge of developing a positive gender identity that includes understanding ourselves and our male privilege in the world, but it also involves interacting with healthy role models. In recent years, the Continental Unitarian Universalist Young Adult Network (C*UUYAN) has focused a lot of energy on gender identity, and I can see how an active collaboration with UUMeN would be fruitful in at least three ways.

First, we would like to work together to involve more young adult men in UUMeN. Thanks to your generosity, we were able to sign up members for free at General Assembly this year. Young adults—especially younger ones—need mentoring and affirmation of who they are, and I believe that UUMeN can help give this to young adult men so they can develop positive gender identities directly connected to our faith.

Next, I would like to work with you to help older UUMeN members be stronger allies to young adults. Young leaders of all genders are too often dismissed as they try to work their way into important positions. With support from UUMeN, young adults could have significant allies for becoming leaders in our movement.

Finally, I believe that a dialogue between C*UUYAN and UUMeN would be helpful in assisting UU men who see themselves as allies to women and transgender people. In a world riddled with male privilege, it is sometimes hard to recognize when we must stand up and when we must step back. C*UUYAN has looked a lot at how different forms of oppression are linked, and is actively developing anti-oppressive identities. I believe a creative collaboration could strengthen both our networks.

UU young adults of all genders look forward to working together with UUMeN, as we also develop relationships with the UU Women's Federation (UUWF), Interweave, and Diverse & Revolutionary UU Multicultural Ministries (DRUUMM) to develop programs that will support everyone. If MaleCall readers would like more information on C*UUYAN programs and how to get involved, please visit our website (www.uuyan.org) or contact me (919-401-9944 or mtino@uua.org).

BROTHER-SPIRIT FUND SUPPORTS YOUNG UUS' MARCH ON WASHINGTON

By Ethan Field

Youth Office Assistant, Unitarian Universalist Association

This past spring, the UUMeN Brother-Spirit Fund provided a generous grant that helped about 30 young people come to the historic gathering called "The March for Women's Lives" in Washington, DC. With this support, organizers from the UUA's YRUU Office (Young Religious UUs), Young Adult/Campus Ministries Office and Washington Office for Advocacy and Witness were able to secure free housing at a local church, feed marchers through out the weekend, and bring in a volunteer to help organize the programming.

The weekend was a great experience for these young UUs showing witness to our faith's commitment to justice. Participants in the Youth and Young Adult presence were able to attend any of dozens of workshops on women's issues, race, reproductive health, advocacy, organizing, etc. During this time, three participating youth from First Parish in Cambridge, MA, and a local member of the YRUU Steering Committee were interviewed on camera for "Now with Bill Moyers," and got about 30 seconds of air time on national public television that Friday!

Saturday night we enjoyed a moving program at All Souls Church in DC, featuring keynote speaker Carol Mosley Braun. We spent the night at Cedar Lane UU Church in Bethesda and

on Sunday after breakfast, we returned to All Souls for a moving sermon by Rebecca Parker, president of Starr King School for Ministry. The march itself was amazing; there were an estimated 2000 UUs present.

This collaboration was a great success. The UUA Staff involved with this project feel that this is just the beginning of helping engage young people (particularly young men) in gender issues and justice. We look forward to more chances to work together!

All in the family...



Steering Council treasurer Jim Jaeger (WI), holding his grandson Lorn accountable for male-positive values.

(*"We Need Men" Continued from page 1*)

Until recently, called ministers were almost exclusively men. We were the first denomination to ordain women in this country, but the fact remains that 99.9% of ministers throughout the 19th and 20th centuries were men. This of course, has changed dramatically in recent years—very dramatically. Many of our congregations went from patting themselves on the back for considering a woman for the senior position to discovering that their entire list of candidates was female.

During this same era women increasingly were interested in lay leadership positions on church boards, programs and committees. And they were accepted. Not a few churches found themselves in the novel situation of having all the senior leadership positions—Minister, Assistant Minister, Board chair, DRE, RE chair, treasurer, moderator, etc.—held by women.

Some said, "Good, it's about time." Others weren't so sure.

Some of my female colleagues say that lay women leaders are far more competitive and less deferential with women ministers than they would be with male ministers. Whether my female colleagues are right about this, I have no way to know. But it is clear is that we have gone from a conversation about equality and non-discrimination to one of concern about vanishing males.

Unitarian Universalism has been a good place to be a religiously searching female. And this is good. But it may be worthwhile to consider whether we have taken the men of the church for granted during this time of empowerment and righteousness.

One of the important reasons for church and a religious life in general is to have an ongoing examination of what gives one's life meaning. Now for some this might mean worship services. It might also be found in social action involvement. Or you might find it teaching children, singing in the choir, or in a covenant group or adult education class.

But how would we feel if we woke up one day and realized that all the church's services, programs and meetings failed to serve a significant number of people who might walk in our door? Well, I'd wager that if you suddenly realized this sort of indifference or deficit in our program, you might say "You know, we need to do something about this."

I know what you are thinking. Hey, there are plenty of men around First Parish. And you are right. But sometimes perceptions are faulty. We know that slightly less than half the general population is male. However, our church directory reveals that men comprise only a third of our congregation.

That means if you a member of First Parish you are at least twice as likely to be a woman than a man. And these numbers reflect our *total* membership, including all husbands who signed the book but were never seen again. The ratio of active involvement is more like 3 to 1.

Just so you know, this is actually better than the ratio I have seen in other churches. But it begs the question: "So, where are the men?" Some might assert that church just isn't for men, that the pursuit of spirituality is more of interest to women. I've heard this offered up as an explanation.

It would be difficult to make this case historically, for clearly, men have played a significant role in religion throughout the ages. But even if you were to accept this assertion—that men were somehow less innately drawn to matters of religion—might we not want to reach out to them in some manner?

Or do we just have church for those for whom it comes easily? Do we really only preach to the converted? What of the idea of putting our efforts into—using theological language—"saving the lost sheep." Men as "lost sheep"? Really, could that be the case? Strong, stalwart, self-confident men—lost?

Daniel Levinson speaks of the sort of despair that overcomes some men in their 40s: "A man at 40 may have been so beaten down by an oppressive environment, or so consumed with the struggle for survival, that he cannot make the developmental effort to give his life new meaning. The inner flame exists without hope or sense of value... (N)either he nor society can make a space for him to live..."

Here in a short capsule is a typical crisis that faces some men in our society. Success symbols wonder as they approach mid-life, "Did I make any difference?" "Who am I?" "Where am I going?"

Is this aberrant or typical? Should we be surprised? Not

(Continued on page 6)

"It is clear is that we have gone from a conversation about equality and non-discrimination to one of concern about vanishing males."

("We Need Men" Continued from page 5)

really, not if we've been paying attention. Such mid-life bafflement and despair has been portrayed in numerous screenplays and novels. (See Chekhov, Ibsen, or Eugene O'Neill's "The Iceman Cometh.")

And if we think about it for a moment, we realize that we did know all along that men have periods in their lives when religion could make a big difference. It's worth asking ourselves, why don't we reach out to such men? What do we offer them? (Do they have to come with a family to be adopted into our church culture?) Shouldn't we be concerned about such men, especially when we know they are dealing with issues of the meaning of life as much as anyone else?

I am increasingly coming to the conclusion that we have *not* done well in our religion with the men we could reach. We routinely have ignored them in church life, unless they are the sensitive types who also prefer group discussions to action.

Masculine traits are not antithetical to religious life. In fact, human history has shown there is a great value in both the feminine and the masculine—and a creative tension between the two that offsets their extremes. This is not just a matter of men and women, for each of us has some of each in us. But between the two is a lot of energy. I have come to believe that any religion that cannot draw power and meaning from the masculine-feminine polarity isn't worth its salt.

A male church member recently, and without my knowledge or consent, posted a picture of me with my new motorcycle. And I thanked him for that, especially for not asking me. Had he done so, I probably would have erred on the conservative side and said, "Let's not put that up." The silent statement would be that a motorcycle is somehow not appropriate for church life.

However, now that it is done, it has had a very interesting effect on me. This picture, appropriately framed and hanging in the parish hall, has helped integrate a very masculine part of my life with my ministry—a ministry that, I have to admit, has relegated some of parts of me as somehow "unchurchlike." I realize that I have personalized this splitting off of the male from things spiritual.

The motorcycle is not the exclusive domain of men, of course. (My sister introduced riding to me.) But the motorcycle has many aspects that resonate with my understanding of being masculine. It has a motor, and since I

"I realize that I have personalized this splitting off of the male from things spiritual."

was a little boy I have been drawn to things with engines. The motorcycle has a gritty symbolism, a sense of individualism, the outdoors, leather, helmets, gloves, bugs—it all comes together in a way that makes me feel alive—and male.

The Christians know this. They have big rallies of motorcyclists with huge outdoor worship events. Earlier this month, chapters of the Christian Motorcyclist Association rallied nearby and hit the road in their annual pledge ride

for money to buy Bibles and *motorcycles for pastors of small rural churches.*

The Christian Motorcyclist Association has 750 chapters nationwide.

Its motto is "Changing the World, One Heart at a Time." In the past three years it has doubled the number of chapters in Massachusetts. This is not a deep or profound theological statement on the part of conservative Christians. It is, however, a move into the realm where a lot of men live, pulling the tent of religion just a bit wider to include them.

Now, I am not suggesting that we need a motorcycle ministry. But this is an example of how our notions of "church" could stretch to be more inclusive than we had assumed. A sense of balance between the feminine and the masculine could only make us stronger. Besides, as Indira Gandhi once said, "Men are no more liberated than women." They need church as much as women.

It is time for us to seriously consider what sorts of programs and ways of being might be useful to the missing men. We need to think about how men network with one another, what their needs are for mentoring, and what aspects of their masculinity could be included in our understanding of church program.

We need to do this not just because "We Need Men" (which we do), but because we can provide meaning and community to a large group of people who live around us—and with us.



BOOKS AVAILABLE FROM UUMEN

SAVE THE MALES: Changing Men Changing the World

Is the latest book by Tom Owen-Towle, president emeritus of UUMeN.



SAVE THE MALES boldly tackles urgent topics such as:

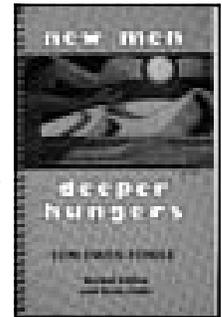
- men choosing to be brothers;
- men as religious beings;
- men joining ethics and power;
- men saying “yes” to aggression;
- men saying “no” to violence; and
- men graying gracefully as elders.

SAVE THE MALES is available for \$14.95 plus \$2.00 (shipping/handling) directly from Tom Owen-Towle, 3303 Second Ave. San Diego CA 92103 (uutom@cox.net)



A Community of Men: A Guide to Men's Programming in UU Congregations is available for \$5—free to new members. *For your copy, contact us at UUMeN@usa.net, or at our mailing address on the front page of this newsletter. There is no shipping or handling charge.*

For a book with dozens of conversation-starters related to men, get *New Men, Deeper Hungers*, for \$15 (only \$10 for UUMeN members). *Shipping and handling is \$2 per book. Make checks payable to UUMeN, and send to our address.*



A third book, *FatherLoss* by Neil Chethik, focuses on the father-son relationship. It comes with a study guide for men's groups. *To order, make your check for \$14 to Neil Chethik, and then send to UUMeN/FatherLoss, PO Box 8071, Lexington, Ky. 40533. There is no shipping or handling charge.*

2005 Sermon Award Now Open \$500 Award

Plan to offer a sermon on men's issues during the next year—or encourage your minister to do so! Anyone (lay or clergy, any gender) can submit a sermon for the annual UUMeN sermon contest - and maybe win \$500. The sermon should explore a men's issue related to the purposes and objectives of UUMeN (see page 2). It must be delivered in a UU congregation between April 1, 2004 and March 31, 2005. The submitted text should be single-spaced and less than 2,500 words.

Mail two hard copies (with a cover letter but no identifying mentions in the sermon copies) to UUMeN, PO Box 3070, Madison, WI 53704-0070, by the deadline of April 15, 2005. Rotating men's groups (supervised by a UUMeN Steering Council member) conduct the judging process.

The award winner will receive \$500 and recognition at the 2005 UUA General Assembly in Fort Worth, TX (but need not be present). See last year's winning sermon at www.uumen.org !

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Membership is valid for twelve months following the date of dues donation. Please also consider making an additional tax-deductible gift.

Annual Dues:

- () Individual Member, \$25
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- () Other, \$ _____

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Members receive *MaleCall*, a quarterly newsletter, may vote at the UUMeN Annual Meeting and are eligible for discounts on UUMeN materials and event registrations.

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() I support the purpose and objectives of the UUMeN and hereby apply for UUMeN membership.

() Please renew my UUMeN membership.

Make checks payable in US funds to UUMeN. Send this form together with your tax-deductible dues remittance and any supporting gift to UUMeN, P.O. Box 3070, Madison, Wisconsin 53704-0070.