

MaleCall



Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Men's Network
UUMeN, P.O. Box 3070, Madison, Wisconsin 53704-0070
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Volume 10, Number 3

Spring 2004

A Dialogue on Men's Rights...

Background

The UU Men's Network Steering Council received a provocative letter last November, which stirred a few council members to exchange comments in writing. A slightly edited version of the letter and subsequent dialogue follows.

Dear UUMeN,

I have been a UU for over 25 years, but only recently became aware of and joined UUMeN. I received your brochure and "Community of Men" book and I applaud all your efforts to develop and enhance a UU men's community.

I would like to know if UUMeN is interested in working to support men and boys on a broader level. There are, in my opinion, substantial areas where men and boys suffer indignities and oppression. These include:

1. Widespread ridicule and debasement of men that pervades mass media;
2. The lack of any effort to increase men's participation in nurturing professions, such as nursing and grade school teaching;
3. Unequal treatment given to men in child custody cases;

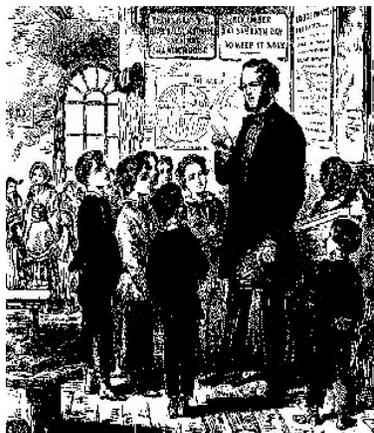
4. Inadequate concern for the countless boys who fail in school;
5. Cultural exclusion of boys (and men) from life

(Continued on page 4)

"Boy Friendly" RE is Nothing New!

by Frank E. Robertson

(Retired Minister of Religious Education and Steering Council member, UU Men's Network)



The picture on the left is taken from the front page of the December 24, 1858 issue of "The Sunday School Gazette," the children's bimonthly magazine of the Unitarian Sunday School Society. The first few sentences read:

"No reader of the Gazette, old or young, need be informed that this picture represents a Sabbath-School Class of boys listening to their teacher's earnest words. The influence of one devoted teacher is immeasurable. It goes on increasing, widening, extending in this life and forever."

The magazine was very popular and was distributed to most Unitarian homes from 1849 to 1935. The name was changed to "Dayspring" in 1872, to "Every Other Sunday" in 1885, and to "The Beacon" in 1912.

From time to time, the records of the Unitarian Sunday School Society mention the challenge of teaching religious education to boys. For example, the

(Continued on page 6)

Inside this issue:

Diversity in Boys RE	3
Books from UUMeN	7
UUMeN Sermon Contest!	7

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

*UUMeN is a Sec. 501(c)(3)
organization.*

MaleCall

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Please send all submissions and concerns via e-mail (info@uumen.org) to:

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WWW.UUMEN.ORG

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

The UU Men's Network has entered a new phase:

GRANTS AWARDED

After 11 years of building our name, structure and reputation, this year we began granting money to worthy individuals and groups who are promoting healthy, liberal religious masculinity. At our annual winter meeting in January, the UUMeN Steering Council approved three grants totaling \$650. The grants go to:

- Linda Ann Scacco of West Hartford, CT, to help develop a father-son curriculum for UU churches;
- Rev. Daniel O'Connell of St. Louis, MO, to develop a six-session curriculum that outlines how to start a UU men's group on a foundation of trust and support;
- The UUA Youth office, to help support UU young people in attending the April 25 "March for Women's Lives" in Washington D.C.

BROTHER-SPIRIT FUND

All three of the grants above were financed by the Brother-Spirit Fund, which was created last year in honor of one of UUMeN's founders, the Rev. Tom Owen-Towle.

The Brother-Spirit Fund currently has about \$10,000, and our initial money-raising drive continues through June of this year. *We continue to need your help.* You may support UUMeN and projects such as the ones mentioned above by sending your tax-deductible check to Brother-Spirit Fund, PO Box 3070, Madison, WI 53704. If you think you have a project worthy of our support, send a grant request to the same address, or to our e-mail address at uumen@usa.net.

WINTER MEETINGS

This year's three-day Steering Council meeting in Clearwater, Fla., was the 10th for our all-volunteer board, whose members paid their way to the meeting, as usual. We were hosted by the UU Church of Clearwater and its minister, the Rev. Abhi Janaman-chi, a former member of the Steering Council. Thanks to Abhi and the many members of that congregation who fed, housed, and ferried the nine Steering Council members.

GENERAL ASSEMBLY WORKSHOPS AHEAD

At the meeting, the Steering Council gave final approval to two exciting workshops to be presented at the UUA General Assembly in Long Beach, Calif., in June. One, called "**Between the Lines,**" will facilitate a gay-straight dialogue, led by Revs. Todd Strickland and Drew Johnston. The second workshop, called "**Putting Away Childish Things?**" focuses on the transition from late adolescence to young manhood. It will be led by Rev. Ken Beldon. Check our website (www.uumen.org) or the UUA website (www.uua.org) for information on the times and dates of these workshops.

SPECIAL FREE MEMBERSHIP FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Also, the Council approved a **one-time, free-membership plan for UUs between the ages of 18 and 35.** Those young adults who come to California this June for General Assembly and attend our "Putting Away Childish Things?" workshop will be eligible to receive a free one-year membership in UUMeN.

As you can see, UUMeN continues to forge a vital path in bringing programming and support to men, boys, and others throughout our association. Thank you for your continuing interest in and support of our work!

In brotherhood,



From Neil Chethik, Lexington, KY (nchet@aol.com)



DIVERSITY ISSUES IN BOY-FRIENDLY PROGRAMS

By Frank Robertson, Plymouth, MA

The center of gravity of boys' groups is far more physical and outwardly competitive than girls' groups. As a Minister of Religious Education, I have seen that very thing again and again in church school classes where boys are present in large numbers or in the homes of families where children happen to be boys. Generally, most boys are out there attacking evil as Spider-man or going directly to the toy trucks. Most girls are dancing with a ribbon or going directly to pick up a doll.

The UU Men's Network has been trying to help congregations understand what it means to be boy-friendly and provide more active, physical, outwardly competitive opportunities for boys. Our programs seem to need that encouragement right now because so much of church school is centered on activities in small rooms where discussion and the arts are high priorities. Our men's movement is calling us to get more active in those rooms and organize more trips outside with muscle-centered programs.

In the midst of this encouragement, all of us know that a few of the young males listen to the sound of a different drummer. They are the boys whose central being propels them to dance with a ribbon or play house. They also soon learn to hide themselves somewhat from other children - and, of course, a few girls hide their longing for rough play, too. As we strive to become more boy-friendly in our churches, we should continue to affirm the unusual boys and girls, but also recognize their natural tendency to hide who they really are. Perhaps we should also recognize that most of the boys feel confined in a passive RE program and may be hiding their true feelings in order to "behave" as they think they should.

Added to the challenge is the inevitability of a few children with special needs in most of our church schools. Boys with special needs seem to stand out the most because their behavior can be *too* physical, sometimes even violent. In training sessions during

the last few decades religious educators have been seeking advice about how to understand and minister to the needs of such children. A lesson learned from this training is that one should be careful not to assume that a more active program will, by itself, meet the needs of a boy who is uncontrollably active.

Keeping all this in mind, the following are some further suggestions for a more boy-friendly church school program:

1. Organize a progressive dinner to three or four of the homes of children (about age 7 to 10) where at least two of the host families have boys in the group. The meal is served in stages at the various homes in sequence and each host child and family is responsible for some sort of game or activity for the group.
2. Plan a game where everyone can participate regardless of their skill level but which welcomes muscle use, such as volleyball, broom ball, or a tug-of-war.
3. Hold a "Boys and Men's Night" at the church but plan it well in advance so that boys whose dads may not be able to attend can still be involved by coming with a mentor. Keep the diversity of boys in mind but plan some physically active parts of the program.
4. Take the group on a hike on a nature trail or up a small mountain.
5. Rent the use of a pool for a church school class for an hour and arrange to eat lunch together at a theme restaurant.
6. Arrange a trip to another UU church, especially where there is a bell tower to climb. A video of that bell tower and the group's visit might be fun to share with the congregation during a coffee hour.
7. Help a group of dads and their sons make a cabinet or bookcase for one of the rooms of the church.
8. Try games where kids pick up teams and run around in the classroom related to a curriculum



(Continued on page 6)

(A Dialogue on Men's Rights Continued from page 1)

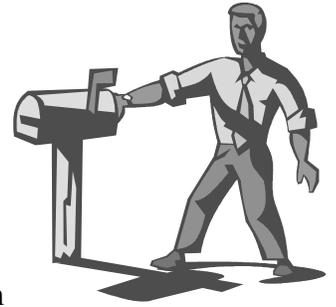
enhancing activities such as dance and yoga.

I head a very small Men's Group in my UU congregation and have raised these issues there, but they have been received without enthusiasm and have gone nowhere. Is there a place in UUism for the advocacy of men's rights, or is the fear of being politically incorrect too strong to overcome?

American men today are in crisis. They are unorganized, unaware, not respected, confused and hurting. If we indeed respect the "inherent worth and dignity" of all people (men as well as women), we need to address this crisis.
—Dan Colodner (thecolodners@aol.com; UU Congregation of Somerset Hills, NJ)

RESPONSES from UUMeN Steering Council Members:

1. I feel somewhat ambivalent about this letter. It seems to me that we have already been working on these issues, but it is great to have them pointed out again by a relative newcomer. Also, the letter has somewhat of the tone of an "us-vs. them" tactic. In many ways we are striving to reform our churches and society in general and urge men to reclaim their manly courage and voice, but we are also aware that our UU women are ahead of us in human liberation issues and our work WITH them brings the best results.



An example of the work with women is certainly in the area of boy-friendly religious education. Our friends in groups like LREDA [Liberal Religious Educators Assoc.] have been working on how to minister to the needs of all kinds of boys for a long time. None of us would suggest that anyone has already transformed UU RE programs to where they should be, but there is a sincere welcome of our input and our mutual ongoing learning processes toward the goal of a more dynamic boy-friendly RE curriculum and leadership training process.

When I began to write in the boy-friendly RE area, I went to some of my top LREDA women colleagues and asked for help. They were right there on the growing edge of the issues where I am trying to be.

Nevertheless, let's welcome another helpful voice to our cause and encourage Dan to share some more specific insights and experiences with others as much as seems good to do. —Frank Robertson (Plymouth, MA)

2. While I agree with Frank that we have had good cooperation with women's groups, at the same time I sympathize with Dan's concerns. We need to remember that there are many men in our movement who have concerns that need outright advocacy and I believe that we need to take that role, in a respectful but outspoken manner. Thus, I would be more inclined to take the lead on some of these issues. —Jim Jaeger (Madison, WI)

3. The more closely I read this letter, the more the red flags go up. The issues sound real at first reading; they appeal to something in my gut but then they start to lose their power and sound whiney when I look at them more closely. I will admit that I probably tend to err on the side of overcaution against anything that appears to be taking this movement toward the realm of "men with an ax to grind."

So I read with puzzlement the line about the cultural exclusion of men from dance and yoga. As someone who takes tap dancing class on Tuesdays, yoga on Thursdays, and dances most Friday nights, I think that what excludes men from those things are their own insecurities. So, the letter lost quite a lot of power in that line.

I would agree that the cultural position that raises up women as perfection and men as buffoons doesn't do the human cause any good, but then neither do the men that give them fodder for the argument. And like the NFL that just needs to get over itself in its protests about the show "Playmakers" on HBO, I think we need to keep in mind the distinction between comedy and reality. It has been funny from the dawn of culture to tell a story of a man who was full of himself making a fool of himself. Just read the Bible.

I imagine that if women had more power, we would see more "women who are full of themselves making fools of themselves" themes. And we do, just not as often. Whether it's (TV character) Jack Tripper tumbling

(Continued on page 5)

over a couch because he was overly distracted by a gorgeous blond in the doorway, or Adam, Noah, Abraham, Joseph, Moses, etc., insisting that he understood God's plan—men are fodder for drama. I don't want to join the ranks of the thin-skinned.

Someone with legal expertise will have to speak to the issue of child custody. Most of the women I know live in fear that their ex-husbands with their (typically) greater financial resources will try to get full custody. And I see more mediations and divorces ending in agreements that keep the children's needs in priority and yes, sometimes that means one residential parent and a visiting parent. So, I don't know if I want to just nod my head and go “Yes” when I see the kind of statement made in this letter.

And again, are men being excluded (by being powerless) from nursing and teaching or is it perhaps that those professions tend to be overworked and/or underpaid and men choose (because they're powerful) not to take those jobs?

I guess I'm wondering. Are we not empowering men and speaking for men by creating a wider space for men to be men by their own definitions? Or do we need to become advocates for one person's agenda? Whenever someone tries to manipulate me by splashing on an accusation of “political correctness,” again I get weary and see red flags.

Should we ignore these issues? No, but I don't know if I want to run out and organize a General Assembly workshop around them. And as I have stated, I'm not entirely certain I buy into any of them upon closer examination. I just think that we have better options for empowering men than taking up this particular flag and we ought to focus on the positive.

—Todd Strickland, Golden, CO

4. I must respectfully dissent. When I read “The Myth of Male Power,” I tended to find Farrell a bit whiney. However, as I thought about it, there was merit in many of the issues Farrell raised. While I don't agree with all of it, much of it rings true.



Similarly with Dan's letter, there is certainly a core of truth, especially in our movement effort to be “pro feminist,” is sometimes too timid in raising issues—both within the movement as well as in the wider community—of concern to men.

For example, while I do not practice in the area of family law, I think it is demonstrable that there have been biases against men in the area of child custody. Issues relating to abuse of men (by men and women) are often swept under the rug. Within our own movement, it is acceptable in many settings to promote stereotypes of men that would never be tolerated if the stereotype were reversed to show women in a similar light.

I think as an organization we need to speak out on these issues to the same extent that we do on issues of male violence, etc. This may not be comfortable and may ruffle some feathers, but frankly some of those feathers need to be ruffled.

—Jim Jaeger (Madison, WI)

5. Dan Colodner should be thanked for bringing to light some important differences between us in perspective and background. As feminism has revealed, healthy and provocative social movements aren't monolithic and neither should be the men's movement, of which UUMeN is a part. The complexity of the reality we face as men isn't served by the idea that we're all of one accord at every moment, and our response to the issues and problems that men face will, I think, in time be strengthened by the experience of creative conflict.

My own response to Dan's letter is ambivalent. I was put off by its ax-to-grind tone and its universal assertion of things not universally true. For instance, the college from which Todd and I graduated, Oberlin, has a historical bias in favor of men in admission policies in the interest of maintaining numerical gender balance. Other areas already addressed (regarding lifestyle and interest choices) that the writer implied are the result of social oppression are more likely the result of internal male repression. Not everything has a primarily political nature or solution.

(Continued on page 6)

(A Dialogue on Men's Rights Continued from page 5)

Yet, I've heard through anecdote and news media that there is a persistent prejudice against men in custody hearings. Another issue that Dan doesn't raise but should be of concern is the existence of male sexual abuse and rape in prison. A recent soft drink commercial even pokes fun at the existence of such, but certainly men who suffer such a fate are the victims of not only sexual violence but a systematic blindness to their plight.

The point is that there are real world examples of the oppression of males, and this exists side-by-side with the continuing reality of male dominance and sexism. I don't think the complexity of the world that we face is served well by our movement playing the victim card, but neither is it served well by shying away from tough-minded advocacy, even when it might upset some folks.

It strikes me that this open conversation amongst us, revealing some of seams between us, would make for an excellent workshop at an upcoming General Assembly. Not a debate, but a dialogue. UUMeN is just past our 10th anniversary, and the ability to address difference in a healthy fashion is a sure sign of institutional maturity. It also would be a fine re-affirmation of the "need not think alike to love alike" ethos that is the UU experience at its best.

—Kenneth Beldon (Hollywood, FL)

(Boy Friendly Continued from page 1)

Minutes of the Annual Meeting of 1871 include a series of questions taken from the Question Box, the first two of which read as follows:

The details of the discussion are not recorded but the questions

"How are the big boys to be kept in the Sunday School?"

and

"How can a class of little active, kinky, five- and six-year-old boys be interested in Sunday School?"

could very well be raised at a teacher-training conference today.

Perhaps helpful answers to those questions would have been given by the Rev. Charles Francis Barnard (Unitarian) who founded the Warren Street Chapel of Boston as an outreach to poor children in 1835. He advised teachers to teach while holding an object in their hands illustrating their lesson. He also organized field trips, invited leaders of various trades to speak before the children, involved the children in gardening, and instituted a woodworking shop and sewing classes at the Chapel. The minutes of the Unitarian Sunday School Society indicate that he spoke before various conferences during the 1840–1870 period. Copies of the minutes and the magazine can be viewed at the Andover-Harvard Library of Harvard Divinity School where the archives of the UUA are kept. Also, a story about the Warren Street Chapel can be read at the UUA's web site (www.uua.org) under REACH and UU Faith Works.

For further information about the history of Unitarian and Universalist religious education, please contact the UU RE History Group, tel. 508-224-5282 or robertsonfe@aol.com



(Diversity Continued from page 3)

theme. For example, develop a series of about twelve sentences with key words missing that retell the story for the day. The teachers hide those words about the classroom in advance of the session and two teams try to find the missing words around the room. The team that gets their sheet completed first wins. (Include a code number with each word and require that all of the words be found with their code numbers.)

I hope that this short list will be helpful and inspire folks to dream up more ways to affirm boys in our RE programs.

Frank Roberson attends First Parish, Plymouth, MA and is Chair of the UU RE History Group

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.

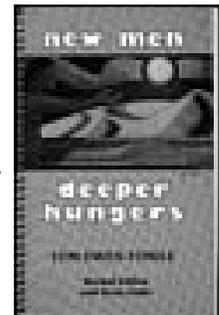
Thandeka, Associate Professor of Theology and Culture at Meadville Lombard Theological School, praises the book with these words: “Owen-Towle's passion, presence and his radical attentiveness to men's stories shine from every story in this book.”

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.

2004 Sermon Award Now Until April 15—\$500 Award!

Ministers and laypersons of all genders are invited to submit sermons for the next annual UUMeN sermon contest. (Two of the last three winners have been female ministers.) 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, 2003 and March 31, 2004. The submitted text should be single-spaced and less than 2,500 words.

Mail two 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, 2004. Rotating men's groups (supervised by a UUMeN Steering Council member) provide the judging process. The award winner will receive **\$500** and recognition at the UUA General Assembly in Long Beach, CA (need not be present).

See last year's winning sermon at www.uumen.org !

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UUMeN Membership Application and Renewal Form

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
- () MaleCall Only or Student, \$15
- () Supporter, \$100
- () Sustainer, \$150
- () Other, \$ _____

Please check each category above that applies to your tax-deductible financial contribution to UUMeN, and then complete the information requested to the right.

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.