

MaleCall

Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Men's Network

UUMeN P.O. Box 5069, Evanston, IL 60204

Web: www.uumen.org E-mail: info@uumen.org

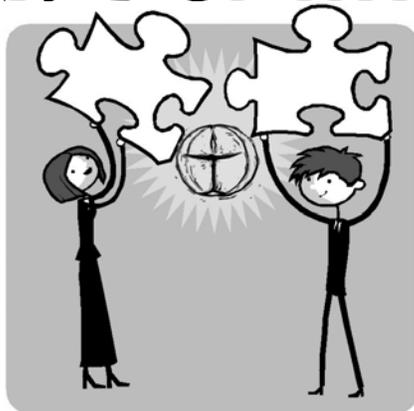
Phone: (800) 227-6670

Summer 2006



Is Feminine the New Normal?

By Doug Muder



This morning the female student minister at my Unitarian Universalist church told a heart-warming story of how her previous church had welcomed a woman in distress.

The woman's partner had died three weeks before, and she came to this church looking for the kind of community support she could not find anywhere else in her life. At the door the greeter recognized her as a newcomer and started a conversation, during which the whole story spilled out. Some empathic parishioner was found to sit with her through the service. Afterward she was introduced to other sympathetic members, who let her cry when she needed to and supported her in letting her emotions out. Having been met with this kind of acceptance and compassion, the woman joined the church and was last seen singing in the choir.

This positive example of seeking support and finding it was contrasted with congregations where it is necessary to "wear armor." In congregations like this, everyone pretends to have life well under control and engages in all sorts of do-good projects to help unfortunate others -- who of course resemble ourselves not at all.

I understood the point our student minister was making, and in fact I sympathize with it. We UU's do have paternalistic tendencies, and we sometimes project our own pain onto distant others rather than deal with it in the first person. But I had trouble listening to

the point of the sermon because I couldn't get past the story. My wife has survived two different cancers over the last ten years, and has come close enough to dying that I could easily identify with the story's recently bereaved woman.

And I thought: I hope to God no one treats me that way.

Because no matter how politically or socially liberal I may be, I am a man, and I deal with my emotions in a masculine way -- alone, or in front of at most one very trusted person. When hurt, my greatest fear is not that my pain will go unrecognized, but that having once plunged into the overwhelming depths of pain, I will never come back up. I fear being so broken that I will never stand up again and take my place in the World.

I think that's pretty normal for a man.

And so, if I am ever bereaved, my showing up at church will be a sign that I think I'm done processing my emotions, at least for now. It means that I believe, or at least hope, that I'm ready to take up my role again in some limited form. I'm going to show up with a few extra plates of armor that day, and be glad to have them. My goal will be to have more-or-less normal interactions with people, ones that don't revolve around my woundedness and inability to function.

People who want to support me that day can do so by creating social situations that are easy to handle. Let's talk about sports or the weather or whatever cute thing your kid did this week. I'll be like a racehorse newly recovered from a leg injury. I'll want to trot around the track gingerly and make it back to the stable without incident. Help me out. Don't create any special opportunities for me to cry. If I break down,

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.

2005-2006 Steering Council

Dave Woods (IL), president, 2007
Jim Jaeger (WI), VP/Sec, 2007
Dick Whitaker (IL), treasurer, 2006
Bob Hospadaruk (MI), 2007
Rev. Drew Johnston (WA), 2006
Rev. Todd Strickland (CO), 2006
Jack Ripple (AZ) 2008
Roy Schwartz (FL), 2008
Neil Chethik (KY), Immediate Past President
Rev. Tom Owen-Towle, President Emeritus

*UUMeN is a
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*Please send all submissions and concerns via e-mail (info@uumen.org) to:
Editor: Ken Beldon
Layout: Bob Hospadaruk
Address Changes: Drew Johnston*

WWW.UUMEN.ORG

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From the President...

Hello MaleCall recipients:

I'm coming to the end of my first year as President of our nine-member Steering Council, and I'm planning to complete another year if you want to accept my offer.

At GA2006 in St. Louis, there will be two workshops that UUMeN will sponsor. The first will be led by our immediate Past President Neil Chethik called "VoiceMale" It will be held on Thursday, June 20th at 9:45am and will provide some interesting information about how men do marriage.

Then on Saturday at 11:00am, Reverends Tom Owen-Towle and Jacob B. ten Hove will conduct another interesting workshop with the subject being, "The Feeding of Men's Souls". Prior to it, UUMeN will conduct its' Annual Meeting at 9:45am in the same room. There are some openings on our Steering Council for both Ordained & Lay members. Consider joining our worthwhile organization. We need your talents and can discuss the obligations further with you at our exhibit booth prior to the Annual Meeting

We will have our Exhibit Booth throughout GA and one of our focuses this year will address the timely topic "The Boy Crisis" (see Jan 30, 2006 Newsweek article about how our public education system is short changing our boys. They are falling behind in every area of education). Stop by the Booth and visit us to discuss this, and other matters of current interest .

Lastly, you can now pay your \$25 annual contribution via "Pay Pal" on our website www.uumen.org. Also, consider a "Life Membership" for only \$300, as some of our members have done over the last year. Any other additional donation to enhance our good work would also be appreciated

My Best in the Brotherhood,



President, UUMeN, dnwoods@ameritech.net

Open Call for MaleCall

This newsletter is accepting articles, reviews, and original poems relating to mens' experiences for our upcoming quarterly edition.

If you have something to share with your fellow readers, please submit your writing to our editor at:

revksb@yahoo.com

Thank you!



Great Song for Men's Voices!

"Men Sing Now Together" has an uplifting message and fits a familiar melody (found in Hymns 67/349 in the Unitarian Universalist hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*). It debuted on March 5, 2006, in the Sunday service at Paint Branch UU Church (Adelphi, MD), where author Michael Leger (pronounced "lay-zhay") is a member of one of the church's two men's groups.

In that service—on the theme "We've Got Male: The Measure of a Man"—a chorus of men sang the song, but it could also be used as a congregational hymn sung by all male voices present (with the new words printed in the Order of Service).

Leger said his "inspiration was in listening to the stories of the men presenting that service, stories that including struggles with depression, with self-definition, and with the imposition of standards of masculinity from without."

"Men Sing Now Together"

words by Michael Leger

*We sing now together of shackles unbinding,
Of freedom from burdens our fathers fought through,
Reclaiming emotion and pledging our devotion
To march on with our brothers and manhood renew.
We sing of the freedom to open our hearts to
The partners we choose and the families we build.
Embracing relation in sadness and elation,
Supporting comrades searching for meaning fulfilled.
We stand by our visions and nurture our wisdom.
We stand against violence, facing our fears.
Embracing each other as fathers and as brothers,
We celebrate our joys and we honor our tears.
We sing of community now in the making,
Built strong by all spirits shared freely with all.
Our hearts we throw open to welcome love and hope in
And pledge ourselves to follow the note of love's call.*



UUMeN at General Assembly 2006:

Two Workshops That Will Inspire and Challenge

"Feeding the Souls of Men" Leaders: Jaco B. ten Hove & Tom Owen-Towle

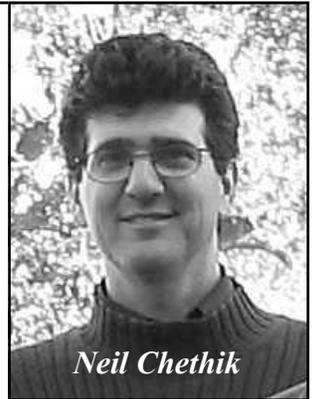
The spiritual growth of men can be intentionally encouraged in the UU culture, bringing us to consider things of worth and meaning as we increasingly embody a vibrant future. Hear and tell about how UU men have deepened their awareness and fed their souls, perhaps even doing that together here.

"VoiceMale: What Men Really Think About Their Relationships" Leader: Neil Chethik

Join UU author Neil Chethik in a lively conversation about men and relationships. For his latest book, *Voice-Male*, Neil surveyed more than 350 American men to learn what attracted them to their partners, what they like most and least about their relationships, and what they think about sex, housework and other issues. This workshop will include a special guest appearance by folk guitarist Joe Jencks.

In addition to the UUMeN workshop at GA, Neil is also offering a second "ad-hoc" workshop at 1:45 p.m. on Thursday, June 22, called: "How to Get Your Book Published." It'll be at the UUA Bookstore booth in the exhibit hall. For more information, Neil can be reached at www.VoiceMaleBook.com or at 859-361-1659.

INTERVIEW: NEIL CHETHIK



Neil Chethik

Author of "VoiceMale: What Husbands Really Think About Their Marriages, Their Wives, Sex, House Work And Commitment"

Q: Neil, you were recently out on the road talking about your new book. What portion of the book or your presentation drew the strongest response?

A: People were, of course, fascinated when I told them that there appears to be a direct relationship between sex and housework. The more satisfied a woman is with the division of housework, the more satisfied her husband is with his sex life. I'm not saying to men, "Get out the Hoover," but.... Actually, I think both women and men reacted most strongly -- and positively -- to the fact that someone had finally succeeded in getting men to talk openly about their relationships.

Q: What was the most frequently asked question you received?

A: Women asked: "Why won't he talk?" Men asked: "Why do women want to talk so much?" Despite a few thousand years of marriage history, we're still trying to understand each other at a basic level. When it comes to improving communication, I try to encourage men to listen, and to learn to identify their emotions. I encourage women to talk to men using male oriented language. When questioning him about something, she should avoid asking: "How did you feel?" Instead, she can ask: "What did you think?" "What did you do?" "How did you react?" Men will get to their feelings if prompted in this way.

Q: What was the breakdown of the attendance at your presentation in terms of gender? Were women's responses markedly different from men's?

A: Audiences were about equally divided between men and women. Their reactions were different. Men tended to thank me for telling "their side of the story." Women appreciated getting a window into the minds of men. A few women volunteered their husbands to be interviewed!

Q: From your own perspective, what aspect of your research most surprised you?

A: I had always heard that if you want to know how a man will treat his wife or girlfriend, look at his relationship with his mother. I was surprised that I found no statistical connection between a man's relationship with his wife and his relationship with his mom. On the other hand, I found a strong connection regarding fathers. In fact, if you want to know how a man will treat his wife or girlfriend, look at his relationship with his father. In retrospect, this shouldn't have been such a surprise. Men learn how to be husbands by watching their fathers. If a son sees a loving, strong, and empathetic husband when he watches his father, the son is more likely to be the same way.

Q: Are you hopeful about the state of marriage for men in America after writing VoiceMale?

A: I'm very hopeful. The institution of marriage has changed radically over the past 50 years - first because of the women's movement, and now because of the gay-rights movement. And yet, most people are still looking for one person they can share their life with. I think coupling is a fundamental human desire, and as long as that continues to be the case, marriage will continue to be viable.

EEE GADS!

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It's now *easier than ever* to join, renew, contribute, **ONLINE** at www.uumen.org

Just use your credit card thru our secure PayPal service. Or, mail in the form on the back of this newsletter. **THANKS, Brother (or Sister) !**



"BRING A MAN SUNDAY"

By Rev. Dr. Daniel O'Connell

Men who do find their way to church sometimes find their gifts and styles don't make a good fit. Church can feel alien to them. As one wag put it: "the church and the Titanic have something in common: it's women and children first."

So, let me ask you this: if you had to pick— is church a man's world or a woman's world?

Some men won't go to church for the same reason they won't wear pink— it's "unmanly." Of course, that's a short sighted view, but it's out there.

And you and I know that all our volunteer positions are open to either men or women. Why would some men think there's not much for them to do at church?

Many jobs in church stress verbal and relational skills men may feel they don't possess. "They demand proficiency with children, music, teaching, hospitality, or cooking, areas where women typically have more experience."

Fortunately, lots of liberal religious men rise above that. I have seen Eliot men visiting others in the hospital. I have seen Eliot men working at our *Room at the Inn* program where we house the homeless right here in church 3 Thursdays a month. I have seen Eliot men who are not fearful about their masculinity do the various ministries that make up the church.

But I also know that the culture outside our walls is different than the culture inside it. And the outside culture can make it tough for men to discover us, to find a spiritual home.

Men avoid church, and they are worse off because of it. How do I know this? Statistics tell me so.

Men are more likely than women to be arrested, die violently, commit and be victims of crimes, go to jail, and be addicted. They die more often on the job, have more heart attacks, commit suicide in greater numbers, and live shorter lives than women. I could go on.

If men want to avoid these pathologies, they [c]ould go to church. [One study] found that churchgoers are more likely to be married and express a higher level of satisfaction with life.

Church involvement is the most important predic-

tor of marital stability and happiness. It moves people out of poverty. It's also correlated with less depression, more self-esteem, and greater family happiness.

Religious participation leads men to become more engaged husbands and fathers. Teens with religious fathers are more likely to say that they enjoy spending time with their dads and that they admire them (36).

So, men are a minority in church, and we've heard some reasons why. We have also heard some ideas on why participating in a religious community is good for men.

Is what we might call "male energy" good for church? That energy can promote church health:

- An expansionist outlook (they seek to grow our influence)
- Orientation toward risk (risk is what produces reward)
- Focus on the outside world (some of the work of the church is like manure: keep it to ourselves, and it begins to stink; spread it around outside and it makes things grow)
- Concern with rules and fairness
- Pragmatism brings innovation to the church (how we can do things better)
- Men bring strength to the church
- Men bring money to the church
- Men bring women to the church
- Men bring their families to the church

Let's just highlight two of those: money and families. One pastor put it this way: "When she comes to church and he doesn't, you get the [pledge] off the grocery money. When they come together you get the [pledge] off the paycheck." I have to say, that for heterosexual couples I have found that to be true; it seems less true for gay and lesbian couples, in my experience.

As far as families go, the indications are pretty clear: "when a mother [becomes active in church] the rest of her family follows 17% of the time. But when a father [becomes active] the rest of the family follows 93% of the time".

We might not like that statistic. We might say it's sexist. But it is reality. We'll talk about "make believe" versus "reality" next Sunday. But if it's true that the family follows Dad to church 93% of the time, then this has implications for us.

Here's another thing I didn't expect in researching

(Is Feminine the New Normal? ... Continued from page 1)

I'll have failed in my mission. And the more people who see me fail, the longer it will be before I dare to come out again.

Last summer I read the book "Why Men Hate Going to Church" by David Murrow. Murrow is a Christian, and his book examines a paradox: Why does a church founded by men, whose ministry is overwhelmingly male, attract about twice as many women as men to most of its activities? He finds a self-reinforcing cycle, in which the church's message, environment, and activities are geared for women because they're the ones who show up. (This matches my experience programming UU adult education classes. My wife once joked that the reading course I was leading was my "night out with the girls.")

Murrow's book is populated with many semi-fictional characters, including the Christian couple Greg and Judy. Judy loves their church, but Greg hates it. Partly, it's the way the message is pitched. "Greg," Murrow writes, "has no desire to fall in love with a wonderful man, even one named Jesus." Hearing this message preached by a man every Sunday does not make it any more palatable. Worse, the whole church environment is stacked against Greg. The skills their church needs and rewards are typically feminine skills that Judy has but Greg doesn't. "To really [succeed] at Judy's church, Greg would need more than a conversion experience; he'd need a personality transplant."

Murrow characterizes the men who fit in well at churches as feminized:

"Men's ministry so often falters for this simple reason: it's actually women's ministry for men. When Christian men gather, they're expected to relate like women and to enjoy the things women enjoy. Men's ministry is built around the needs and expectations of women -- or more precisely, the soft men who show up for men's ministry events. So the men's retreat features singing, hugging, hand holding, and weeping. Men sit in circles and listen, read, or share. We keep our conversations clean, polite, and nonconfrontational. While there's nothing wrong with men doing

these things, it feels feminine to a lot of the guys. So they stay home."

Murrow is describing Christian churches, which are bastions of the Patriarchy by UU standards. At the Boston General Assembly a couple years ago, I attended a panel discussion on UU men's groups. Someone in the audience commented on the difficulty men's groups had addressing standard male topics, like sports. One of the panelists had an answer: A UU men's group could discuss how it felt to be the last kid picked.

That's great. Just fabulous. Hey, guys! Were you always the last kid picked? You ought to be a UU! We're all losers too!

A couple years before that, the Massachusetts Bay District organized a meeting to promote the new Small

Group Ministry program for UU churches. The male minister of a church in Maine told us how the program had revolutionized his church and could revolutionize the UU movement. Like the men's ministry Murrow describes, SGM has a lot of quiet talking and sharing of emotions. It is supposed to build intimacy and relationships, two words men use only when they're

"The problem I see is that feminine has become the new Normal. More and more often femininity is the assumed common ground, and I find myself having to make excuses or beg exemptions for my perverse masculine reactions."

trying to impress women.

I had my hand up, but somebody else asked my question first: How did this minister get men to join the program? The answer, after a lot of hemming and hawing, was that he didn't. "It's hard to get men to talk about their feelings," he explained.

So apparently the "revolutionized" UU movement doesn't need men.

Almost a decade has passed since I heard the claim that UU's had achieved gender balance in our ministry. I assume that is ancient history by now. Our older generation of male ministers is being replaced by a younger generation of female ministers; for a brief moment eight or nine years ago it all balanced. In my church, the senior minister is male and about my age (49), but for many years our student ministers have all been either female or gay. The only straight male I can remember left without completing the program.

What's wrong with that? There's nothing wrong

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with the individuals. I imagine our previous students are all top-flight ministers now, and I see no reason why they can't or shouldn't minister to heterosexual men, just as male ministers have served female parishioners in past generations. (The only reason I'm being so hard on our current student is that I think she has what it takes to benefit from criticism. She will no doubt have an excellent career also.)

The problem I see is that feminine has become the new Normal. More and more often femininity is the assumed common ground, and I find myself having to make excuses or beg exemptions for my perverse masculine reactions. Look back at the story from this

morning's service. Can you imagine any of the characters in that story as men? I can't. Even the deceased "partner" seems to be female. It's a story about women helping another woman in classically feminine ways. And it's a story about how church is supposed to be.

And someday soon it will probably be that way. But don't feel sorry for me, I'm sure I'll be OK. I am unusually verbal and empathic for a man, so I should do well. No doubt the feminized UU church of the future will welcome men who know their place.

This piece was excerpted from a post at the blog "freeandresponsible.blogspot.com".

(Bring a Man Sunday Continued from page 5)

this topic. An evangelical writes:

If you want your church to attract men, you must put a high priority on developing leaders, especially male ones. Men are not looking for theologians, teachers, or facilitators. They are looking for *men who will lead them to greatness*.

Whoa! That last sentence got to me. I know that I look to men in this church to lead me to greatness. That language sounds a little strange but I think it rings true for me.

I look to my elders in this church for the big picture, and for patience.

I look to my peers in this church for new perspectives & for solidarity.

I look to those younger than me to remind myself of where I used to be, to remember to minister to boys, youth, and young adults in their journey.

I look to some Eliot men to lead me to greatness. In the UU tradition, there is not just one exemplar we should all follow. We are a community of all souls— if not all saints— and we each have something to offer each other. All of us have different strengths to model.

Of course, I learn things from women too. For example, my spouse is a constant source of illumination. Oh yes.

When we think about attracting people to church— which frankly— is not something we speak of very often— we sometimes think about the complexity of explaining who we are & what we're about. Sometimes there is an inclination to make it as easy as possible for people to fit in.

But that may not always be the right way to go. Consider Antarctic explorer Ernest Shackleton. He

posted this announcement in 1913 for his expedition:

Men wanted for hazardous journey. Small wages. Bitter cold. Long months of complete darkness. Constant danger. Safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.

More than 5,000 men applied for 26 positions.

I must admit, I would not have been one of them. But contrast that message with the idea that if we want to recruit for the church, we have to market our religion like Tylenol: an antidote to spiritual suffering.

The depth oriented path to Unitarian Universalism requires something of us. It requires us to really think about what we believe and why we believe it, and what difference it makes to us and the people around us.

Unchurched men and women wonder: what are we about? If we're not heading to the Antarctic, where are we heading? What is our mission? "Eliot Chapel, a Unitarian Universalist community, gathers to foster free religious thought, nurture spiritual growth, and act for social justice". That's our mission in life.

In some ways, UUs have it harder than creedal religions. We don't get the certainty of a creed. We don't get the velvet coffin, the velvet coffin of a sealed revelation. Our revelation is still open.

To be perfectly honest, Unitarian Universalism, properly practiced, can be— dangerous.

Our religion is not an insurance policy for the after-life. Our religion is a ticket to spiritual adventure.

Rev. Dr. Daniel O'Connell, from his sermon for "Bring a Man Sunday".

Given at Eliot Unitarian Chapel in St. Louis, MO.

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