

# MaleCall

Journal of the Unitarian Universalist Men's Network  
UUMeN, P.O. Box 3070, Madison, Wisconsin 53704-0070  
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Winter 2004

## The Spiritual Needs of Men

by Howard Dana

The days of men attending church because of familial obligations are over. There are enough "worthy" distractions on a Sunday morning for any man who wants to weasel out of coming to church. There has to be something in the worship service that feeds men, or they will find little reason to attend. They have to be able to get from church something that they cannot find elsewhere. They must see themselves as a part of this institution. Congregations must be attentive to the spiritual needs of men and boys.

Of all the things that draw men and boys to church, I think there are two critical ways that congregations can support their male members: Churches can provide a place for men to feel and to surrender. Feeling and surrender. Very few places in our culture encourage men to be in touch with their feelings and to surrender control. Rarely do men have the healthy opportunity to express sorrow, anger, fear, or joy in public.

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## Male Spirituality?

By Jim Jaeger

Recently, I was asked by a friend of mine to make a presentation on "male spirituality" to one of our church's Coming of Age classes (9<sup>th</sup> graders), which happened that day to be made up of all males (and one female teacher). In anticipation, I became aware of two things. First, I didn't really know what "male" spirituality meant; and second, I wasn't sure there was such a thing.



My primary experience in men's work in the past few years, outside of UUMeN, is a group called Male Spirit. This is an interfaith group that meets monthly at our church and conducts "seasonal celebration" retreats twice a year. We have a very structured ritual for our meetings, which are designed, as one of our members put it, to create

a "vessel" to hold the content of our meetings. So, I decided that while I didn't really know what "male spirituality" meant, I did know that men could relate to the world in a spiritual fashion. Since I also feel that experience is the best teacher, I couldn't think of a better way to comment about male spirituality than to practice it, even (or especially) with ninth grade boys.

We started with an opening ritual, a circle in which we acknowledged that we are part of a greater universe

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## 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.

### 2004-2005 Steering Council

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## 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

## From the President...

Our winter issue this year focuses on male spirituality, which for me is about removing walls.

As a boy, I was spurred to create protective barriers. "Don't act like a girl!" "Don't cry!" "Don't be a mama's boy!" "Never let 'em see you sweat!" These messages encouraged me to wall off parts of myself. I shouldn't show fear or sadness or pain -- or I would be labeled as unmanly. So I learned to hide myself from others.

In my early adulthood, I experienced the limitations of this approach. I felt isolated. I was distant from other people, both women and men. I put on a stoic face. One way I coped with my isolation and repressed inner life was to take up addictive behaviors.

Eventually, I stopped those behaviors, and began a spiritual journey. By attending a UU church, I advanced on that journey. By participating in a men's group, I continue it to this day.

My spiritual work has been about dissolving those isolating walls. When I allow myself to experience pain (particularly emotional pain), a wall dissolves. When I allow myself to be vulnerable with others, another wall dissolves. When I allow myself to receive rather than control, still another wall dissolves.

Many of these walls rebuild themselves (or I rebuild them). So my spiritual work is never done. But as time goes on, I am gradually getting closer to what I regard as my personal "heaven": a state of connection -- connection with myself, with other people, with the rhythm of the earth.

You'll read elsewhere in this issue of MaleCall about male spirituality. After you do, send us a note about your spiritual journey. You can reach us at [info@uumen.org](mailto:info@uumen.org).

On the journey,



*Neil Chethik*



Plan ahead to attend a powerful event, tentatively titled:

## FEEDING THE SOULS OF MEN

*A workshop for men who wish to deal deeply with their inner and outer lives, exploring issues of intimacy and ultimacy.*



April 29-May 1, 2005, at Rowe Conference Center ([www.rowecenter.org](http://www.rowecenter.org)), in the beautiful Berkshire Mountains of western Massachusetts, led by two former presidents of the UU Men's Network, **Tom Owen-Towle** and **Jaco B. ten Hove** (both UU parish ministers).

Together, through talks and dialogue, poetry and song, play and journaling, we will address issues of men and health, religion, power, violence, aging, etc., in an effort to feed the often under-nourished male soul. There will also be resources and conversation around issues of men's programming in local congregations, as desired.

# SYMBOLS ON YOUR JOURNEY: A GROUP EXERCISE

By Daniel Ó Connell

The following is from a forthcoming curriculum on Men's Spirituality entitled, *NuuMen*, due out by June, 2006. This is good for a warm-up or as an exercise when you are doing work around the "big picture" of a man's life. It can be used as a journaling exercise, followed by small group discussion.

**WARNING:** If you want to try this yourself, which is also recommended, respond to questions 1-5 below BEFORE you read the interpretations at the bottom of the article.

**Exercise:** Write answers to the following questions. You are on a Journey.

1. *What is your mode of transportation?*
2. *You are traveling along and you see a cup. Describe the cup and what you do with it, if anything.*
3. *You continue along and you see a body of water. Describe the body of water.*
4. *Further on your journey, you see a bull grazing in the field between you and where you are headed. What do you do?*
5. *Finally, you come to a great white wall. It stretches as high as you can see and as far to your left and right as you can see. You must choose one of three options: you can try to go over it; you can try to go around it, you can try to go back. Which do you choose?*

When everyone has finished writing, go round the circle and share all answers to question number one. After that round, the leader can offer the respective interpretation below. Then go around again, sharing each man's response to number two, and so on, until you finish the exercise.

The following interpretations come from Jungian psychology, and of course, your mileage may vary as to their utility. Usually, some men will find a ringing chord in how their responses match their actual life.

Your mode of transportation is how you see yourself moving through life. The cup is how you view friendship. The body of water is your sex life. The bull represents difficult problems. The wall is Death, hence the 3 options. You may find there is a healthy dose of laughing and crying at the responses.

**FURTHER EXPLORATION:** Invite each man, or small groups, to write a short myth based on the five questions above.

*The Rev. Dr. Daniel Ó Connell is Lead Minister of Eliot Chapel, St. Louis, MO, and a former member of the UUMeN Steering Council.*

*(Male Spirituality? Continued from page 1)*

that brought us together to this particular place and time as these particular people. We also honored the reality that we were part of the earth—our home and sacred space.

We then used a "talking stick" that encouraged us to check-in. We each answered two questions: "How do I come here?" and "What do I come here for?" After I modeled the check-in, each participant in turn gave his or her own answers. We didn't have a talking "stick" so we used a talking "monkey" (stuffed variety) to hold while we spoke our individual truths. Somewhat to my happy surprise, the ninth graders were willing and eager to share their lives with the others in the circle.

We then discussed what it means to be spiritual. While I don't remember the specifics, I do recall that the tenor of the conversation was deep and serious. Most of the youth engaged enthusiastically and shared their own views. It was exciting to see them participate.

We concluded the circle with one of my favorite meditations, a Thich Nhat Hanh "mindful eating" ritual, in which one slowly and mindfully first experiences and then eats a piece of fruit.

From this experience I learned that when you offer young people, including boys, the opportunity to engage in a spiritual experience, rather than simply talking to them about it, the response may be more than you bargained for. Give it a try. It was really a lot of fun and makes me remember why we do this. And we figured out, sort of, what Male Spirituality means—something different to each of us.

*Jim Jaeger, of the First Unitarian Society, Madison WI, is treasurer of UUMeN.*

## ***Most Boys/Some Boys***

by Frank E. Robertson

There he was on home turf  
Leaping from sofa to stool  
Defending his Ottoman rule  
From all that's evil and cruel.  
Oh, the delights this five-year-old  
Brings forth from imagination's sight!

Now it was my turn:  
Hand-in-hand we play-fought.  
He shrieked with joy as I gave in.  
Like most boys, muscle-triumphs  
Are all that matter.  
He knows my giving in is love, rather.

But consider this other boy,  
Running about the garden paths.  
"Yes! That rose is my favorite too,"  
I said, happy to give encouragement.  
Then with a five-year-olds whisper he said:  
"A butterfly! See Mister?"

Later he came to sit with us adults.  
Like some boys, that's where he gets results.  
We were charmed by his style.  
Oh! But soon he was off again,  
Running about the paths with a wide grin.

*Frank Robertson is a retired minister  
of Religious Education, living in Plymouth, MA,  
and a member of the UUMeN Steering Council.*



BOOK REVIEW...

### **THE EVERLASTING STREAM:**

**A True Story of Rabbits, Guns, Friendship, and Family**  
by Walt Harrington, 2002, 223 pp. (Hardcover from Atlantic  
Monthly Press; paperback by Grove Press.)

**Reviewed by Gregg Grisa**

What picture appears in your mind when you hear the word  
"hunter"?

I'd envision a man who works in a trade (a plumber, or car-  
penter, maybe), dressed in blaze orange, a guy who guzzles beer,  
and keeps a collection of rifles in the basement. He'd be a man  
who uses foul language freely, almost the antithesis of the sort of  
man I strive to be, a walking stereotype of the worst of masculin-  
ity. Or so I thought.

Enter Walt Harrington, a writer and one-time member of the  
UU Church of Annapolis. Now chairman of the Department of  
Journalism at the University of Illinois-Urbana/Champaign, Har-  
rington offers a challenge to me with this book that is part mem-  
oir, part philosophy, and part instruction.

Mr. Harrington grew up poor in the Midwest. His father taught  
him basic gun-handling skills as a boy, but never took him hunt-  
ing. That introduction occurred many years later during a yearly  
Thanksgiving visit to the home of his in-laws. He joins a group of  
two older male relatives and a couple of their contemporaries for  
an annual rabbit hunt. These pilgrimages continue over the course  
of a decade. During this period, the level of intimacy among the  
men deepens and the author's teenage son Matt begins to hunt  
with the group.

In addition to providing food and companionship, the hunt  
also serves as a rich source of evolving story and lore. Although  
the four older men rely upon each other for support, they express  
their affection for each other through verbal barbs and insults.  
Among these men, more direct expression would be judged bi-  
zarre. The author, raised to regard words of affection as hollow,  
finds that the men's deep concern (expressed through their acts of  
kindness to him and each other) feels very genuine and under-  
standable.

He writes, "I want my son to know that real friendships among  
men are forged in shared experiences of a lifetime and require  
few words as proof of intimacy." The author mentions historians'  
findings indicating men's friendships are often based on pursuing  
common interests, whereas friendships between women are more  
likely to be based on shared feelings and emotions.

Although this may be changing, and may be truer for non-gay  
men than for those of us who are gay, it's hardly surprising. Har-  
rington's book provided one of the most meaningful accounts of  
love between men that this gay vegetarian has ever read.

*Gregg Grisa is an active UUMeN member from the  
River Road Unitarian Church in Bethesda, MD*



*(The Spiritual Needs of Men Continued from page 5)*

turning his desire to succeed toward cooperation, by acknowledging his gentleness, by listening more than speaking, serving more than being served, feeling more than thinking. Anyone who has ever experienced personal power can tell you that a person's greatest strength comes through vulnerability. The ability to surrender often leads to the greatest opportunities for growth. Church is a place where a man need not prove himself in macho ways. It is a place where he can set down his worldly responsibilities, if only for an hour, and worship among equals.

At its best, church will ask of a man the very things the secular world claims to have little time for. At its best, church will ask a man to team his heart with his hands to help build community. In church, a man can listen to other people's children and interact with them. In church, a man can talk with other men and women across generational lines without needing to prove himself. In church, a man can learn to love his neighbor and his God.

My family has long understood "churchmanship" (I will leave the sexist nature of this term alone for a moment, acknowledging that I have known many women who exhibited fine churchmanship.) By "churchmanship," my family has traditionally understood the way a man could serve his congregation and also remain open to its faith-forming influence. A churchman knows the inner workings of the church. He also keeps an eye out for visitors to see that their needs are met and that they feel at home.

My great grandfather, grandfather, and father were churchmen. And I was one, too, until I joined the ranks of the clergy. One of the greatest griefs of my life came when I gave up my lay status and my churchmanship. For to be a churchman was to love my religious institution and serve it well. It was a place of honor and service. It asked me to be responsive to my own feelings as well as the feelings of others. It asked me to submit to my larger faith tradition while caring for it on the local level. Churchmanship helped fill my spiritual needs as a man. I



wish its blessings on any of you—men or women. Its honor and its service will add much to your life. Many churches are blessed by a number of churchmen and churchwomen. But this role is especially important for men.

I can think of nothing more healing for the world than a man in church. A man who will sing hymns and pray prayers. A man who will come to church with his family. A man who will come to be with his friends. A man who can acknowledge the pain of the world and not have to excuse it away. A man who can open his heart to feel a full range of emotions. A man who can rest for a while in grace and be free. If

you are a man, nurture this healing in yourself. If you are a woman, help the men in your life nurture their faith. For by doing so, you change the world. You right wrongs. You participate in the act of creation.

Let me speak plainly to my fellow men. It is important that you are active in your church. Women need to know that men are on their side in the continuing struggle against sexism. They need

you to help them stand proudly as religious liberals, especially in religiously conservative areas. Our children need you to be in church. They need to know that men care for them. They need men to teach them and listen to them. They need to know there are men with whom they are safe. Our children need you to be role models as they grow in their faith and maturity. Our youth need you to be in church so that when they are in need, there will be sympathetic men to turn to.

Gay men and straight men need each other. Black men and white men need each other. Churches need men just as much as men need churches. It is important that you are active in your congregation. Be proud of your role there. Be grateful for the path that has brought you into its realm. Believe in yourself. Work for justice. And believe in the power of love to change the world.

*Howard Dana is minister of the Unitarian Church of Harrisburg, PA. This piece is excerpted from a sermon he delivered there on April 7, 2002.*

## 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](http://www.uumen.org) !

### BOOKS AVAILABLE FROM UUMEN

**SAVE THE MALES: Changing Men Changing the World**  
by Tom Owen-Towle, president emeritus of UUMeN



SAVE THE MALES boldly engages with stimulating 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.

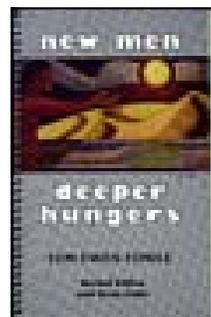
\$14.95 plus \$2.00 (shipping/handling)—order directly from Tom Owen-Towle, 3303 Second Ave. San Diego CA 92103 (utom@cox.net)



OTHER GREAT BOOKS from UUMeN:

*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](mailto:UUMeN@usa.net), or at our mailing address. There is no shipping or handling charge.

For a book with dozens of worthy conversation-starters related to men, get *New Men, Deeper Hungers*, by Tom-Owen Towle, for \$15 (\$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: How sons of all ages come to terms with the deaths of their dads*, 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. Proceeds from sales will be donated to UUMeN. There is no shipping or handling charge.

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- ( ) Individual Member, \$25
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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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