

My Journey

By Ned Abenroth

Ned Abenroth is Convener for the Washington State Chapter.

How and when were you introduced to male spirituality?

I spent my twenties doing typical first-half-of-life activities: traveling, grad school, building a business, starting a family, buying a house, getting ordained, and doing ministry. But, by my early thirties, I was wondering, "Ok, now what?" I sensed a need for spiritual renewal and, having heard about the MROP through Richard Rohr's writings, I attended the 2012 MROP in Arizona, not knowing a soul.

How has your participation in Illuman fostered the use and development of your gifts?

By the end of the MROP, I was asking how I could bring Illuman home to Washington and had a list in my mind of men back home whom I wanted to include. Those grand plans were delayed as, within months, I began a battle with cancer. I'm deeply grateful for my MROP, which has been the key that prepared me for this chapter of my life.

Much of the past three years has been living in the paradox between the beautiful flourishing of life in and around me, and the deep grief I feel about my potential death and leaving four little children and my amazing wife without a father or partner. Yet, so many of my bitter tears have become the water that has nurtured new life; I can't help but feel that cancer has been more of a gift than anything else.

The perspective: to live into my wounds, and to settle neither for a dark fatalism nor an optimism untethered from the reality of suffering; to live with open hands, not demanding things go my way, while also not giving up hope; to surrender, but not give up...to be able to do all this is one of the gifts/giftings that has been honed by Illuman.

Starting a chapter and creating several events from scratch has been a tremendously rewarding experience; I've always loved startups, and this one is no different. We have a long way to go, but great things are happening in Washington, and I'm lucky to find myself in the room with some remarkable men.

Describe a recent Illuman/M.A.L.Es event you attended. What was the impact on you?

In our latest Washington retreat, we did a ritual where we used cloth and wove major themes, moments, and people from our stories into one large tapestry. To be a part of sacred space, where men were simultaneously celebrating deep gratitude and reliving trauma, experiencing amazing joy and grievous rage...all in the same space...we created something sacred together, and it will stay with me for a long time.

What's one thing you'd recommend to a man starting on the spiritual journey?

Embrace, honor, and listen to your wounds...and grieve deeply.

What's the best thing about doing this work?

The sense of brotherhood I have with men from all over, seeing lives transformed and healed—including my own—and deepening my own connection with God in a manner unlike any I've ever experienced anywhere else...these are amazing gifts, and I am so grateful.

Concluding thoughts?

I'm so grateful for the brothers around the world I've come to know and love, for the community overall, and the Spirit that is clearly moving in, through, and around all of us. Ho!