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Doctor of Ministry Project Final Approval

To: The Members of the Doctor of Ministry Faculty

I hereby submit the signatures of approval from my advisors and Rabbi Bennett Miller for my completed Doctor of Ministry Project.

The title of the completed Project is:

MEN AND BROTHERS ... BECOMING MORE OURSELVES
A MEN'S GROUP

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MEN AND BROTHERS: BECOMING MORE FULLY OURSELVES

A MEN'S GROUP

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Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of
Requirements for the Doctor of Ministry Degree

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I’m exhausted from not talking.

Sam Goldwyn

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CHAPTER ONE:

ISSUE AND PROJECT

The ministry project taken up in these pages attempts to address the profound malaise of men observed among congregants and counseling clients through the formation and conduct of a supportive group for men.

The sullen and forlorn face of that malaise has for some years sat opposite me, both in the pastor's study of congregations I have served as in the counseling center where I minister as a pastoral psychotherapist. I readily recall Russell, a soft-spoken, agreeable congregant who left most things unsaid, tightly wound except for the protruding vein on his left forehead that betrayed the depths of emotion (anger? panic?) repressed within. Even near the end, he fought back long-held tears and prevailed over them, if not the brain cancer that took him at 47 years of age. There was Gary, another congregant, outspoken and intent on wielding control, who threw himself into the "externals" of church life (administration, property, finance), then hesitantly opened the door to his vague feelings of lost meaning and passion before slipping, like so many men in our day, into irregular participation and finally disappearance from church life altogether. Then there is John, a burly 45-year old sitting beside his loquacious wife in marriage counseling, hurt and bewildered by unanticipated spousal roles and overwhelming expectations, responding with the proto-typical male "I don't know" when asked how he feels, how he'd respond, what he wants. Many more come

to mind, men unsure of what their identity as a male means, out of touch with their emotions and inner selves, isolated and in psychic pain, and vacuous and longing in their spirituality. It is from these men—past, present and future—that this special ministry initiative sensitive to their needs and aspirations draws its inspiration and focuses its design.

Men are indeed in a tailspin. Abundant evidence of this exists in both our society and our religious institutions, and has given rise to an increasing amount of clinical observation and analysis. Rather than mere biological necessity, the essential shape of manhood is viewed as primarily a cultural construct variable over time and place. Chief among the factors attributed to what has been termed "male gender dysphoria"[1] are the models of male identity equated with masculinity in Western, and particularly, American culture. Sam Keen in his landmark *Fire in the Belly* lays out the modern myths of war, work and sex that predominate in masculine identity development.[2]

Work in particular is a "teasing drug…that guarantees well-being,"[3] confirming men in the conviction that "doing becomes the way to be"[4] and imposing work postures and patterns on non-work areas of life such as family, leisure and faith. From boyhood on, males are oriented to work and career ("what do you want to be when you grow up?"), to "make a living" and be providers for spouse and family. Work is expected to provide meaning in life, routinely becoming an end in itself rather than a means. Meanwhile, the lack of a sense of

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[1] Philip Culbertson, "The Things We Do!" Nurturing the Authority of Men in Ministry," in The Spirituality of Men: Sixteen Christians Write about Their Faith ed. Philip Culbertson (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 221.
[2] Sam Keen, Fire In the Belly: On Being A Man (New York: Bantam Books, 1991), 34.
[3] James E. Dittes, Men At Work : Life Beyond the Office (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 43.
[4] Ibid., 41.

abiding meaning, of true vocation and purpose, gnaws at men as a prime source of their alienation and discontent.

The recent economic downturn has only aggravated and highlighted the work-centered malaise around male identity. With men losing their jobs and livelihoods, many losing their homes and in some cases even their families, with the loss of dignity and self-respect, the male tendency to withdraw and to isolate in the face of life's problems and the difficult emotions they arouse becomes all the more pronounced.

"Real" men are expected to control their emotions ("men don't cry"), resulting in an undeveloped affect, repressed feelings and a generalized emotional unavailability and numbness. Men are oriented to an instrumental (content) rather than an expressive (affective) communication, with diminished self-disclosure, trust and vulnerability essential to forming and sustaining close interpersonal relationships.[5] Men are expected to be stand-alone individuals, fearless and adept at power, competition and control. As a corollary, in an outer-directed culture that "rewards [men] for remaining strangers to [themselves,]" they carry the special burden of leading an "unexamined life, of unconsciousness, of ignorance of the self."[6] And they are lonely: "men," laments one cleric, "are God's loneliest creature." [7]

Socialized in our culture to be the "strong, silent type," stoic and self-sufficient, males have been suffering the consequences of their isolation and repressed affect in compromised well-being and decreased lifespan as compared to their female counterparts. The customary

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[5] James M. O'Neil, "Gender Role Conflict and Strain in Men's Lives," in Men In Transition: Theory and Therapy , eds. Kenneth Solomon and Norman B. Levy (New York: Plenum Press, 1982), 25-26.
[6] Keen, p. 65.
[7] Steve Leder, Reform Jewish Magazine, 1993, quoted in Doug Barden, Fighting the Flight of Men: A Modern Day Crisis for the Reform Movement (New York: North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods, 2005), 30.

American model for the masculine self-as symbolized in the lone cowboy (e.g., the Marlboro Man or the Lone Ranger), the mountain man, the business exec or the entertainer who "did it my way"—insists on a forced choice between the individual and the communitarian, the personal and the social.

But in what Keen cogently calls the "shifting of the tectonic plates,"[8] the massive cultural changes relative to gender roles and relationships, such received notions concerning masculinity are no longer ironclad. Robert Bly in his *Iron John—A Book About Men* writes that

> "…the images of adult manhood given by the popular culture are worn out; a man can no longer depend on them. By the time a man is thirty-five he knows that the images of the right man, the tough man, the true man which he received in high school do not work in life. Such a man is open to new visions of what a man is or could be."[9]

Traditional understandings of masculinity are being re-examined and challenged, leaving men uncertain of who they are and their habitual ways of being and acting.

Much of this re-examination has been spurred on by the feminist movement and women's assertion of their own identity as equals in selfhood, rights and power. The assumptions underlying what has been termed "the masculine mystique," positing the biological and genderal superiority of males in human potential, power and intellect, have been largely contested and overturned.[10] Changing gender roles and expectations for relationships between the sexes have left many men confused, fearful, angry and hurt. They experience great difficulty in communicating with women, in understanding and being understood by them. Deborah Tannen, a feminist linguist, has suggested men and women's difference carries over even to the point of speaking a different language, where "each

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[8] Keen, 5.
[9] Robert Bly, Iron John: A Book About Men (Reading, MA: Addision-Wesley, 1990), ix.
[10] O'Neil, 25-26.

partner is operating within a different system, speaking a different 'genderlect,'"[11] a part of each 's social construction of gender. The upshot is that the vast majority of men feel as powerless and as victimized as women have felt. Raised to embody the masculine traits that society increasingly derides and rejects, men are the "lonely warriors and desperate lovers,"[12] attempting to remain numb and unaware of their pain.

Male isolation and emotional disconnectedness directly impact spiritual life and its expression. Because self-awareness and vitality as a spiritual being presupposes some degree of emotional connectedness, this inability to relate to one's feelings and to others through them constricts spiritual development. And far from serving to remedy this condition, many churches and religious institutions have remained what Mark Muesse terms "co-conspirators in masculine conditioning." [13] They do so not only in largely ignoring the specific needs and spiritual longings of men in their corporate life and programs, in effect, maintaining the status quo. They also aggravate that status quo, as many churches (most evangelical and many Lutheran and other mainline denominational churches) emphasize correct belief and proper doctrine as key to salvation and wholeness, reinforcing male propensities to hyper-individualism and rationality. They also restrict positions of power and leadership to men only, further buttressing the notion that control is appropriate for men and men only. There is no doubt that the Christian faith tradition encompasses resources invaluable for men as men, as do other faith traditions as well, but these have not been prominent nor offered, especially

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[11] Deborah Tannen, You Just Don't Understand: Men and Women in Conversation (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), 297.
[12] Stephen Boyd, The Men We Long to Be: Beyond Domination to a New Christian Understanding of Manhood, quoted in Mark Muesse, "Don't Just Do Something: Sit There: Spiritual Practice and Men's Wholeness," in The Spirituality of Men: Sixteen Christians Write About Their Faith , ed. Philip L. Culbertson (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 5.
[13] Muesse, 6.

at the "grassroots," congregational level. On the contrary, in my experience of late, it is men themselves who are seeking specialized ministry designed to address their needs. These are men of varying degrees of involvement in their congregations. But their involvement devoted largely to maintenance, administration, and service projects has been mainly other-directed and has not provided opportunity to share their own feelings and needs, to explore their own identities and spiritual lives. Not a few congregants and a goodly proportion of my male counseling clients have been very welcoming of the idea of meeting with other men to talk of what it is, and could be, to be a man in these days. And indeed, several took the initiative themselves to suggest a group of this kind, to give voice and substance to their longing to share the pain and promise within them, and to be heard.

MINISTRY NEED

I agree with James Nelson who describes the fundamental affliction of masculine men as disconnection.[14] Men today often live separated from women, children and other men, from their bodies and affect, from nature and the created order, and indeed, from their sense of the sacred, from God. As a result, men who embody masculine qualities find themselves isolated and lonely, yet inwardly desperate to know and enjoy a deeper connectedness. Yet the very qualities that may empower a man in the public sphere—his armor of rationality, competitiveness and control—tend to disable him in the realm of relationships and spirituality. And in a cruel irony of the masculine condition, not only does the disconnection isolate, but it prevents seeking relief or succor, since a man who is supposed to be strong and dispassionate won't risk being vulnerable enough to share his suffering with someone else, or

[14] James B. Nelson, The Intimate Connection: Male Sexuality, Masculine Spirituality (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1998), 38-43.

even with himself. Often it takes a breaking point—a personal loss or crisis—or the patient accompaniment of like-minded men, to bring awareness of one's pain and disconnect, if not immediate transformation.

This disconnect is manifested in our churches and religious institutions in a worsening and worrisome tendency of male members to withdraw into relative silence and non-participation. The tendency toward emotional and spiritual unavailability, deeply-entrenched and perpetuated as noted by social stereotypes and cultural conditioning about what constitutes genuine masculinity, is increasingly seen within our congregations and affiliated organizations, with serious repercussions for their strength and vitality. Many of the men in our religious assemblies and agencies are silent and isolated in their feelings, struggles and needs. Many have become inactive in congregational life, and of those who remain active, many do so perfunctorily, out of a sense of duty, obligation or tradition. Some have given hints of the struggles they face: dysfunctional childhoods; problems in relationships; addictive behaviors; work-related stresses and upheavals; and overwhelming feelings of shame, humiliation and worthlessness.

Rather than seek to deal directly with this range of clinical issues, symptomatic of the deeper anguish of male (and human) nature, this ministry project will attempt to address the core need of the contemporary male, that of his root disconnect and chronic sense of isolation and loneliness. Men feel alone, with no one to talk with as a man. Their customary activities with other men—work, sports and recreation, even clubs and church life—do not normally afford an arena where men can speak from the heart, examine their life and pursue the inward journey, but tend to confirm and reinforce them in conventional masculine expectations and behaviors. While some men do have an inkling, an initial vision that the voyage of self-

discovery, of self-knowledge and self-acceptance to be taken is solitary in nature ("no one can do it for you"), fewer still are those who dare to hope and understand that it needn't, and indeed, cannot be taken alone. As Keen observes, "The most powerful resource we have for transforming ourselves is honest conversation." [15]

Calling men together, then, to sit and talk with one another, to tell their stories and express their feelings, to be honest to themselves and to the men in the circle, serves to counter this sorry reflex of isolation, enabling growth in self-awareness, in authentic community and in a deepening spirituality. This will be the purpose of this ministry project. The group to be recruited, formed and conducted for generally middle-aged men (25 to 60 years of age), will not be a therapy group so much as a supportive "koinonia" (fellowship) group whose primary agenda is to talk, to talk about oneself and hear one another, and in so doing, counter the deep isolation that thwarts men's personal and spiritual development. A working hypothesis for this project would then be as follows: because men are socialized in our culture to become providers, independent and self-sufficient, they become increasingly isolated in their adult lives, which in turn leads to an increasing degree of spiritual barrenness; by its structure and intent, the men's group is a de-isolating mechanism, in which by a contagion factor men's discovery that other men share similar experiences and feelings precipitates progressively greater degrees of trust, self-disclosure, mutuality and affirmation that significantly lessen isolation and its obstacles to personal and spiritual development.

RELEVANCE TO MINISTRY

This ministry project holds especial relevance and importance for me on several levels. I write as a middle-aged (aging!), white, heterosexual, married male, for whom many of the

[15] Keen, 234.

aspects of male experience and of a much- needed re-examination of male gender identity ring resoundingly true. I have felt the injury and shame of a rigid masculinity with its super-sized expectations and caste-system conformity and have known the deadening pain and isolation of being a male with seemingly no one to talk to and understand me. But the project is also compelling for me on a professional level. In my ministry I have seen, with what I take to be every-growing acuity of vision and insight, the numb and isolated man, the troubled man, to whom I offered ministry in isolation, one-on-one for the most part, without ever bringing hurting and isolated men together. I have facilitated a wide variety of groups—congregational, therapeutic, bereavement and support, and clinical pastoral training—without ever organizing or leading a men's group. This will be a new ministry venture for me, and one that I feel is very much needed. It is also the first men's group offered under the auspices of our Lutheran Counseling Center of Metropolitan New York, a regional care and counseling agency with seven centers and sponsorship by area Lutheran judicatories and an association of congregations numbering some sixty local churches. The Center has organized a number of ministry initiatives—seminars, groups and retreats—for women and girls, but with this project comes recognition of the demonstrated needs of men as well.

I also believe that initiatives of this type, geared to men and with recognition of their urgent needs, are of critical importance to ministry in a wider context, across the religious spectrum. Our religious assemblies, be they parish, synagogue or masjid, are confronted with what Doug Barden of the Union of Reformed Judaism calls "male flight," the disengagement of men from religious life and, perhaps worse, from consideration of the local assembly as a venue in which to engage their spiritual journey, if they even consider

such a journey at all.[16] Not only are the heads in many of our congregational pews grey-haired, they are overwhelmingly female heads. In the three congregations (Lutheran) that I have served in the last decade, the percentage of male members (active *and* inactive) was 30, 20 and 27, respectively; the number of male members serving on the church council—an indicator of active involvement and leadership—averaged 3 out of 8, 3 out of 11 and 4 out of 10, respectively. Such proportions, of females in attendance outnumbering males 2 to 1, 3 to 1, even 4 and 5 to 1, are the reality in religious communities of whatever confession across the land.[17] Some decry the "feminization" of the church or synagogue, with the perception that men's spiritual needs and interests are ignored, if not demeaned entirely, their involvement unsought and unappreciated.[18] Either men have heard the call for transformation, for male gender identity change, from their churches and have exited in protest, or else their own needs as men have gone unmet. I believe the burden of responsibility lies with the latter. Ministry initiatives specific to men, to their psychic and spiritual well-being, need to be generated and can be shown to be feasible, and welcomed, in the local or congregational setting.

The burgeoning men's movement in all its various manifestations has been with us since the early 1960's. It is in large part a response to the women's liberation movement and feminism overall. Some have clung to a "hegemonic masculinity,"[19] marked by an abusive,

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[16] Doug Barden, Fighting the Flight of Men: A Modern Day Crisis for the Reform Movement (New York: North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods, 2005), 4.
[17] Ibid., 39-45. Barden provides figures and documents from a variety of Christian denominations.
[18] Ibid., 5. Barden cites one response to a Unitarian Universalist minister to her query why men were not participating in religious life: "…because we feel that what we have to offer is not considered important or valid."
[19] Culbertson, 225. An impassioned trans-Atlantic example of this reaction is Eric Zemmour, Le Premier Sexe (Paris: Editions J'ai Lu, 2009), 118, who writes, "In being feminized, men

insensitive and disempowering patriarchy. The men's/father's rights movement (National Congress for Men, 1981) focuses on a core issue of parental rights, while the men's recovery movement has mobilized millions, but with limited attention to men's restrictive affect or overall system change. It has been the mythopoetic movement, with its emphasis on man's individual life nourished by mythic wisdom, and the more activist pro-feminist movement (National Organization for Men Against Sexism, 1982), that have staked out more intentionally transformative pathways for men and society at large.[20]

There is rich material from these movements for pondering men's issues. When Robert Bly was asked what he would suggest for a parallel national day for boys equivalent to "Take Our Daughters to Work" day, he suggested that fathers take their sons to the library and show them the books they love, commenting, "I think it's just as likely now that men will be shut out of the inward world, the literature world."[21] I believe that this is what is at stake, the inward world, the inward look, at once both clinical/psychic and spiritual. But the point is, where is the church? The men's movement has been active for nearly half a century outside the church; it is time to see work with men and the pilgrimage to a new masculine identity taking place within the church, within the religious community.

And that such initiatives, as this present project, should be a "men's only space"—potentially a matter of controversy and debate within religious communities striving to be egalitarian—brings us back against to the feminist movement with its decided conclusion that gender is not, and cannot be, eliminated, that gender is of importance, to men as it has been

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render themselves impotent; they forbid themselves every audacity, every innovation, every transgression." [my translation from the French]

[20] The "Men's Movement," www.menstuff.org/pov/povs/mensmove, 2009

[21] Thomas R. Smith, "Praising the Soul in Women and Men: Robert Bly and the Men's Movement," www.menweb.org/blysmith, 2000.

to women.[22] "Men's only space" is a recognition that male spiritual energy, though inclusive of both masculine and feminine components, is different than women's and requires separate attention tailored to men. When clergy and congregations seek to meet and minister to their male populations where they find them, both adult men and the developing males that are boys, with opportunities for gathering and mutual ministry that counters the isolation and "male flight" that impedes male growth and well-being, then this project and its working hypothesis, I believe, will be of pertinence and value to them in their ministry.

[22] Barden, 23.

CHAPTER TWO:

THEOLOGICAL AND CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

A ministry project seeking to gather men together to share their selves and needs might easily confound its original simplicity of purpose and clinical focus. Seeing as how it would engage men in all the dimensions of their lives, it could, implicitly at least, take up any number of important themes which humankind has pondered over for millennia, including of course the nature of human beings and of maleness and masculinity, but also the relationship between the sexes, love, marriage, family and parenting, the nature of work, meaning and destiny and many more. It is important, therefore, to clarify the theological and clinical principles that will guide the project and provide an orienting framework to sharing and interaction that while centered and grounded can go "deep" to engage and benefit the psyche, the soul, the totality of the person in relationship.

THEOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

As I envision men talking about their life experience across the span of all their years, I draw on theological principles derived themselves from the great themes of life and the witness of the scriptures: creation, redemption, faith development, community and service.

From the creation account comes the recognition that human beings are created for relationship. This is the essential meaning of the *imago Dei*, the creation of humankind in the image of God, and an essential focus of this ministry project. In the Priestly account in Genesis 1, only in this case of the creation of the human is God depicted as so immediately

involved, even to the point of alluding to the thought of God prior to the act of creating:[23] "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness…So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:26-27).[24] Male and female are complementary and together reflect the image of God; the idea of "human" finds its full meaning not in the male alone, but in man and woman.

In the verses that follow, God speaks for the first time, "to them," addresses them ("I have given you..."), and in so doing, establishes the possibility of relationship. The human created in the image of God is of such a nature that he or she can enter into a relationship with God, that God can speak and he or she can respond. Invested with unique status, worth and dignity, humankind is to be God's representative on earth, upholding and actualizing his "dominion" over the earth.[25] (or, more accurately, in recent interpretation, his "care" over the earth). To do so, the human will recognize his dependence on God and maintain relationship with him. As the reflection of God on earth, "man is not to be concerned about graven images—he is to be concerned about the image of God, namely, people…what God is in his nature is what man is to be in his; because God is merciful, man is to be merciful."[26] Wolfhart Pannenberg concludes that "basic to the personality of each individual is the

[23] Terence E. Fretheim, Creation, Fall, And Flood (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1969), 62.
[24] All Scripture citations are from The New Revised Standard Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1989).
[25] Gerhard von Rad, Genesis—A Commentary, trans. John M. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 60.
[26] Fretheim, 65-66.

destiny of fellowship with God."[27] Humans made in God's image are "built" for relationship with God, and with one another, since nothing exists outside God's creation and care.

The Yahwist account of creation in Genesis 2 emphasizes this further relationality, relating God's pronouncement that "it is not good for the man to be alone." Solitude, in the sense of aloneness, is helplessness; God, portrayed as the "Helper" in Torah (cf., Deuteronomy 33:7, 26), provides a "helper" to be a representative of God at man's side. She is "fit for him," a mirror of himself ("bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh") in which he can recognize and know himself.[28] In relation, the self is forged and known. Relationships with one another are the meeting ground for our relationship to God and our continuing knowledge of ourselves, of each other and of God. Martin Buber underscores this primacy of relationship: "There is no I taken in itself, but only the 'I' of the primary word I-Thou and the 'I' of the primary word I-It. All real being is encounter."[29] I find Douglas John Hall's argument then that the basic ontological category is not "being" but "being with" compelling: "…all being, from the Being who is the source and ground of being to the smallest of created things, is being-in-relationship."[30] In being-with, the individual discovers the uniqueness of self, personhood, identity. In relationship, as Pannenberg writes, "the ground of my existence meets me in the person of the other. Encounter with the other can thus stimulate inner awareness of my own personality."[31]

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[27] Wolfhart Pannenberg, Systematic Theology Vol. II (Grand Rapids: Eerdman's, 1994), 202.
[28] Von Rad, 82.
[29] Martin Buber, I And Thou, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 62.
[30] Cited in John Patton, Pastoral Care in Context: An Introduction to Pastoral Care (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 23.
[31] Pannenberg, 199.

In our Lutheran tradition, the emphasis is on the "now" of creation, *creatio continua*. Luther's Small Catechism, on which generations have been schooled in the faith, locates God's continuing work of creation not in a primordial state, but in the present and the personal, where the process of rendering *tohuvebohu* into cosmos, order and life continues apace. The key passage comes in Luther's Explanation to the First Article of the Apostles' Creed on Creation: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that he has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life."[32] We could add "friends and family, the neighbor and all other relationships," an emphasis that comes in Luther's meaning ("What does this mean?") to the Fourth and Eighth Commandments.

God continues to create through these gifts, through his being-with and being-through others. In that sense, it is important to recognize that the relational work of the men's group is God's ongoing creative work, God at work in and through the relationships that develop. Our mandate is to provide through relationships the gift of self that can counter the helplessness of solitude, provide help that is congruent to the human need, that is "bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh;" that presupposes human presence, touch, voice and affect, as vehicles for God's own. Our religious tradition requires therefore that these relationships be nurtured and honored as extensions of our relationship to God. Indeed, out of our connection to others, we discern our connection to God, our creaturely identity, our vocation or calling from God (as opposed to simply an occupation or employment), our meaning and

[32] Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation (St. Louis: Concordia, 1991), 15.

purpose in life. As we discover and tell our stories, our life narrative, we develop our own theology, our way of dealing with the basic questions of who we are, what we can know, and what we can hope for.[33] And we relate and interweave our story with others in our group circle, with the larger story of our people, of faith, of the biblical witness. In this way, creation and the relationships it engenders are created anew.

A second theological principle, that of the primacy of gift over duty, of promise over law, demand or commandment, is at the heart of the evangelical/Lutheran tradition, its first and defining "word." It is also underlies the stance of hospitality and acceptance in welcoming group members and developing a working alliance with them, where they are extended understanding, respect and warmth and may speak freely without fear of being judged or ostracized. In Lutheran parlance, this first "word" is "justification by grace through faith," or in the more accessible terminology of Paul Tillich, "the gospel that God in Jesus Christ accepts the unacceptable."[34] It conveys the encounter of human brokenness, sin and rebellion with the holy God of everlasting love (*hesed),* as reflected in God's redemptive acts in "holy" history—the Exodus of Israel or the "new Exodus" of the ministry and passion of Jesus of Nazareth—as well as in personal history. It translates as an acknowledgement of human worth, acceptance and potentiality by God, the triumph of God's mercy and compassion. It also correlates with an image of God that is warm, close and caring rather than a stern and distant judge, a dear father who is "for us and for our salvation" (*pro nobis).* It is not expected that all group participants would share this God-image, and in any case, it will be important to ferret out how each imagines God and the impact that has upon them.

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[33] Carol Ochs, Our Lives As Torah: Finding God in Our Own Stories (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2001), 33.
[34] Cited in Martin E. Marty, Health and Medicine in the Lutheran Tradition (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 13.

The Lutheran Confessions (*Book of Concord*, 1580) are explicit in locating this reversal not as the result of human renewal or improvement but as the prior declaration of a loving and redeeming God (i.e., sanctification—a new and faithful life—does not precede justification, but follows upon it as its full flowering):

> "It is also taught among us that we cannot obtain forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God by our own merits, works, or satisfactions, but that we receive forgiveness of sin and become righteous before God by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith…[35]

Martin Luther and the first generation of Lutheran witnesses and founders were consistent amidst the multitude of their writings in appealing to this central tenet (later generations admittedly less so). A Swedish theologian, Einar Billing, contends,

> "Whoever knows Luther, even but partially, knows that his various thoughts do not lie alongside each other, like pearls on a string, held together only by common authority or perchance by a line of logical argument, but that they all, as tightly as petals of a rosebud, adhere to a common center, and radiate out like the rays of the sun from *one* glowing core, the gospel of the forgiveness of sins."[36]

Out of this "glowing core" of forgiveness, of reconciliation, of utter gift and grace comes as its corollary what our tradition has to say about psychic and spiritual health, about wholeness and well-being; precisely, that if "confession is good for the soul," then forgiveness, and shared forgiveness in the form of mutual absolution and encouragement of the brethren even more so. Equally, this principle of promise and grace requires us to see and hear group participants with whatever they share as God sees them, as objects of his promise and grace, as "put right with him," not by personal merit or performance, as indicated, but by his call

[35] Theodore G. Tappert, ed. The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1959), 30.
[36] Cited in Marty, 13.

and favor. As recipients, too, of "amazing grace," we find added impetus for a stance of empathic presence, of a Rogerian unconditional positive regard toward group members.[37]

A third theological principle would hold that although faith is divine gift, it develops in conjunction with human development and ministry for faith must take that development into account as well as contribute to it. This means that ministry to the individual cannot be envisioned without consideration of the individual's unique physical, psychological, social and moral development at that point in life---a development that despite normative stages of development will always be unique because subject to individual variables and influences. The tradition holds that faith, or trust, is the gift of God's grace bestowed through Word and Sacrament. Yet that Word is active in a given context, in the community, and through the community, in the life of an individual at a particular stage of his or her physical, psychological, social and moral development. The theological stock phrase is "grace in nature," or more accurately for the Lutheran tradition, "grace through nature," and not "grace opposed to nature." The tradition has recognized this development of faith astride human development through age-appropriate rites, education and service. In the evangelical/Lutheran tradition, these stages of faith development are marked by the sacraments and rites of the church: Holy Baptism at birth/infancy, First Communion and Confirmation at adolescence, Holy Communion in adulthood.[38]

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[37] Howard J. Haas, Pastoral Counseling with People in Distress (St. Louis: Concordia, 1970), 50.
[38] Marty, 151-156.

Numerous efforts have been made to relate faith development with the physiological and psychological growth of the human being.[39] A more comprehensive treatment that transcends the Lutheran/Christian or any other particular faith tradition is Fowler's *Stages of Faith*. Fowler examines the relationship between psychosocial development and structural-developmental stages of faith, of which he delineates six. His stages three to five, "synthetic-conventional faith (adolescence), individuative-reflective faith (young adulthood) and conjunctive faith (mid-life and beyond) will be most applicable to expected participants of the men's group. However, in keeping with this third theological principle, Fowler himself cautions that the stages of faith are not to be viewed in isolation as some kind of achievement scale for evaluative purposes, nor chronologically-fixed goals which individuals must attain. Rather, correlated with psychosocial development, the stages give a sense of the impact of variables such as time, experience, challenge and nurture on the growth of faith. Such variables must be kept in mind as individual men join together in a men's group. Ministry to the group involves ministry to the individuals who make it up, which in turn requires taking into account each individual's specific psychic and spiritual development,

A fourth and foundational theological principle for this ministry project is the nature of community as "koinonia," defined as a fellowship around that which is held in common, hence, "having in common." This constitutes a spiritual fellowship in which members---persons in all their diversity—live out their interdependence, mutuality and unity in and through what is experienced and held in common. In the New Testament, Paul describes the fellowship as the "Body" " to designate the community that God gathers, specifically, the

[39] A good example from recent Lutheran tradition is Thomas A. Droege, Self-Realization and Faith: Beginning and Becoming in Relation to God (Chicago: Lutheran Education Association, 1978).

church as the Body of Christ (especially 1 Corinthians 12:12-31 and Romans 12:4-8). Ironically, the Greek *soma* originally designated a carcass or cadaver in earlier classical Greek, but was to take on the sense of the living human body, with the head being the most important member.[40] In Hebraic thought, "body" means "self," as we might speak of "person" or "personality." The Hebraic notion of the one and the many lies behind Paul's use of the term: as the individual Israelite was a member of Israel, and Israel incorporated within itself the many Israelites, so the individual Christian is a member of Christ, and Christ is a 'one' who includes within his body 'the many.'[41] Paul contends that the community is not like a body, it *is* a body. The body is always the community and never the sole individual. And it is a given, a gift, not the product of fellowshipping, but that which gives rise to it.[42]

Parker Palmer questions the easy "ideal family" imagery that surfaces when we speak of the "Body" and community. Distance, critique and conflict as seen in society are avoided and ruled out in favor of "warm fuzzies." Such a 'body' cannot welcome the stranger nor allow the stranger within each of us to emerge. He likens community rather to a "'company of strangers'—a place where people confront the stranger in each other and in themselves and still know that they are members one of another."[43]

The Apostle Paul appeared to be very aware of "ideal family" distortions as evidenced by his exhortations to bear with one another and to speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4: 1-16). Though there are many members and each has a different function, all

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[40] Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds. Theological Dictionary of the New Testament Volume VII (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1971), 1025.
[41] Alan Richarson, An Introduction to the Theology of the New Testament (London: SCM Press, 1958), 254-55.
[42] Kittel and Friedrichs, eds., 1071-72.
[43] Parker Palmer, The Company of Strangers (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 125.

are needed for the health of the body. And even though the tension between relationality and individuality would always remain, there is unity, not in spite of, but precisely within this diversity. Equally, each individual is mediated divine acceptance, worth and purpose through the body (Galatians 3:26-29), and this, too, not in spite of, but more precisely, in the midst of personal conflict and brokenness.

In gathering men together who initially will be but a "company of strangers," participants will be encouraged to see signs of their unity that encompasses their diversity, a whole greater than the sum of its parts, as they seek to be guided and permeated by spirit and truth. The resulting 'body' will be a de-isolating agent, elastic in incorporating a diversity of individuals, of contributions, perhaps of differing masculinities. This body, too, will have to balance relationality and individuality as its members seek to grow in their group and individual identities. The need is clear; as Keen cautions, "Virility involves life in communion…manhood can only be defined in relational terms."[44]

In this endeavor it is important to remember that the anthropological importance of the Body as community finds its source and sustaining parallel in the community of Persons in the Godhead, in the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity. Juergen Moltmann, one of a number of prominent theologians who have sought to renew the Christian doctrine of the Holy Trinity, writes of the *perichoresis* or mutual indwelling and communion of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Each of the three Persons is subject in relation to each other in complete and fulfilled love. It is a unity in diversity which in creation and redemption opens itself to and includes the world within itself.[45]

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[44] Keen, 103.

[45] See Juergen Moltmann, The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God. trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).

A final theological principle concerns facilitation and leadership of the group. Because our faith tradition embraces the model of leadership of Jesus, a tradition that identifies him as both Master and Suffering Servant, and enshrines his example (for example, his kenosis, or self-emptying, Philippians 2:5-11) and teaching (for example, "whoever would be great among you must be your servant," Mark 10:43); and because the nature of the group requires clear boundaries and a safe, secure and hospitable environment for it to proceed with its work, a servant leadership mindful of its stewardship, limitations and responsibility to group and spirit is required. I will not serve in my usual role as a preaching and teaching pastor nor is this a therapy group per se, although these other roles will be known to participants before our sessions. The presence of a servant-role exuding a different sort of authority—one invested in the person and personal presence rather than solely office or role-invested—can help the group to begin to focus less on problems and pathology per se and gain in awareness of the value of helping relationships.

Servant leadership involves both seeking to discern participant needs and mobilizing individual and group to meet them. It helps appropriate the tradition's wisdom about life's meaning and assists in filling traditional symbols with personal meaning. It also invites shared leadership by group members, this in keeping with our tradition's emphasis—an ideal not always realized—of the free and individual agency of each one, the "priesthood of all believers."

Above all, I believe the ethos of servant leadership is perhaps best exemplified in Gabriel Marcel's concept of "disponibilité," which can be understood as spiritual availability—an openness to the other, a readiness to respond, a forthrightness. Marcel also speaks of "creative fidelity"—maintaining oneself actively in a state of permeability, of

receiving and welcoming from the other. Their importance in a servant form of leadership within the group is palpable, where one is bidden to serve, and not be served, to relinquish control and self-isolation that have been integral to traditional understandings of masculinity.

CLINICAL PRINCIPLES

Clinical insights from psychoanalytic theory, self-psychology, developmental theorists and group psychotherapy will be of value in guiding this ministry project psychodynamically, in keeping it attuned and relevant to participant needs and the development of a group process, and hopefully, contributing to its being a rich experience of self-discovery and exploration of growth in positive male identity.

Freudian psychoanalytic theory has been much debated, especially as regards the presence of instinctual drives and their role in the differing psychological development of males and females. But it remains foundational for any attempt to understand human suffering—including males in their self-identity and experience—as a result of intrapsychic processes and conflict, and not merely environmental and socio-cultural factors. Besides working with awareness of the twin pillars of psychoanalytic perspective on human thought and behavior, those of psychic determinism[46] and the unconscious,[47] I will want to be alert to the powerful and lasting effects of the Oedipal complex and its resolution in the development of participant gender identity and functioning. Each participant will have had some degree of

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[46] Charles Brenner, M.D., An Elementary Textbook of Psychoanalysis, rev. ed. (New York: Doubleday, 1973), 2-3. Gary Ahlskog, "Essential Theory and Technique," in The Guide to Pastoral Counseling and Care, eds. Gary Ahlskog and Harry Sands (Madison, Connecticut: Psychosocial Press, 2000), 41, presents an appealingly simple definition: "Psychic determinism means that the psyche, the makeup of the individual's personality , inevitably determines how the person experiences life."

[47] Brenner, 4-14.

sexual longing as a young boy to be his mother's exclusive love object and of an aggressive drive to eliminate the father as rival. Each participant will bring a deep memory of this early drama lodged in their unconscious, uniquely their own as influenced by variations in environment (family make-up, parental responses, abuse) and instinctual predisposition (greater or lesser degree of sexual interest and of bi-sexuality). And because the Oedipal conflict is resolved with identification with the father, each one as a son will carry the father's imprint, imitative of his behavior and socialized into patterns of chronic emotional unavailability and disconnect in which he shared.

Different theorists have looked at the Oedipal complex in various ways. Brenner emphasizes what is often lost or overlooked in these theoretical formulations of the Oedipal dilemma: the very real and intense feeling states of love and hate, longing and envy, fury and annihilation that rage within the child in the phallic phase;[48] conflictual feelings that are resolved only with their renunciation and repression and subsequent identification, in the case of the male child, with the father. Repression has been characterized as a "merciful neurological event"[49] that keeps memories, perceptions, impulses and desires that have occasioned hurt, pain and anxiety out of awareness. It can be expected that there will be resistance to stirring up the seabed of these memories and conflicts, and the strong and often difficult feelings associated with them, even in participants whose development can be considered "normative" and not pathological (neurosis or psychosis).

Resolution of the Oedipal crisis establishes gender identity via identification with the same-sex parent and sets the stage for the formation of the super-ego, with its internalized injunctions of right and wrong. Yet the Oedipal resolution is neither definitive nor airtight.

[48] Ibid., 106.
[49] Haas, 27.

While the original Oedipal fantasies are repressed, Brenner notes, "disguised versions of them persist in consciousness…and continue to exert an important influence on nearly every aspect of mental life."[50] Along these lines, the theory of transference would hold that elements of this original Oedipal drama and subsequent re-editions of it might be played out in the group, in a participant's greater interest in me as the group's "father" or in particularly aggressive or positive feelings toward another member. These could then be pointed out to be investigated by the group, particularly as to their impact on understanding of self and masculine identity.

Bettelheim finds Freud's choice of the Oedipal myth to designate this pivotal period in human development extremely apt, for it is the story of a man who kills his father because he does not know himself. In so doing, he lifts up a primary objective of a men's group as it seeks to overcome isolation and promote growth in identity and well-being, that of helping participants make conscious their unconscious feelings. Bettelheim writes:

> "This is a crucial part of the myth: as soon as the unknown is made known…the pernicious consequences of the Oedipal deeds disappear. The myth also warns that the longer one defends oneself against knowing these secrets, the greater is the damage ot oneself and to others. The psychoanalytic construct of the Oedipus complex contains this implicit warning too…when one has the courage to face one's own unconscious patricidal and incestuous desires—which is tantamount to purging oneself of them---the evil consequences of these feelings subside. *Becoming aware of our unconscious feelings—which makes them no longer unconscious but part of our conscious mind—is the best protection against an Oedipal catastrophe.*"[51]

As participants tell and amplify their stories, they can render more and more of their hidden feelings as parts of their conscious selves. For men, this is counter-cultural and counter-intuitive. Keen laments that men are "committed to remaining unconscious, out of

[50] Brenner, 111.
[51] Bruno Bettelheim, Freud and Man's Soul, quoted in Berzoff, Flanagan and Hertz, 38.

touch with [their] deepest feelings and experience."[52] In urging the journey inward to self-discovery, Keen hails Freud's call back to the psyche as a reminder "not to lose ourselves in the world of action…that healing the wound of manhood involves remembering our fathers and mothers…."[53] We seek to help men become acquainted with their own subjectivity, to gain an appreciation for their own ways of experiencing and processing their experience, to take notice and embrace the stories of their lives.

As an outcome of the resolution of the Oedipal events, the male child not only identifies with the father and other male objects, but represses his femaleness (Freud contended that all human beings are innately bi-sexual to some degree). Aided by anatomy, the choice is clear and definitive: to become a male, the boy must identify with another male, and repress much of what is female in himself. As they grow in trust of one another, group participants may risk discussion of the loss or underdevelopment of qualities considered feminine in themselves, qualities or characteristics that do not square with traditional or socialized constructs of masculinity.

Jung contended that health and wholeness came through the development of both feminine (the anima) and masculine (the animus) archetypes, or inherited tendencies, in each individual. The archetypes derived from a collective or universal unconscious that was to be distinguished from the closed-energy Freudian unconscious of repressed personal material. The female archetype Jung saw as primarily a "connecting" one, oriented toward interpersonal relationships, emotionality, spontaneity and sensuality; the male archetype a tendency toward abstract, analytic thought. Failure to integrate the unconscious anima into the personality with the dominant animus will result in the man appearing detached, abstract

[52] Keen, 15.
[53] Ibid., 110.

and rational, with conflict and fear of women onto whom he projects his unconscious feminine side.

In similar vein, Levinson sees the integration of what he defines as the masculine/feminine polarity as a principle task of midlife individuation. Men must come to terms with the coexistence of masculine and feminine parts of the self, without which patterns of undeveloped affect and restrictive emotionality continue and congeal. Levinson recognizes that "feelings are important to the whole sense of who the man is, who he wants to be, and who he is terrified of being,"[54] yet since feelings are associated with femininity and threatening to masculine roles, men avoid their expression. Men's fear of femininity and associated inability to disclose feelings need unraveling and exploration. If men in telling their stories can relate such fears (being taunted as "soft" or a "sissy")—in itself an expression of a feeling—they can begin to de-couple emotional communication from what is considered feminine and therefore threatening, and begin to experience it as acceptable, even normative for a revised understanding of masculinity. Men's diminished self-disclosure and ability to trust and be vulnerable impede intimacy and close relationships and perpetuate isolation. This pattern can be attenuated and reversed by modeling and facilitating trust, giving up control and sharing of feelings as marks of manhood able to encompass a full range of human qualities and emotions.

Stoller upends Freud—"anatomy is not really destiny; destiny comes from what people make of anatomy"[55]—in regarding the socialization role of the mother and the boy's struggle to separate-individuate from her as preponderant in his gender determination and

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[54] Quoted by O'Neil, 24

[55] Robert Stoller, Sex and Gender: Vol.II The Transgender Experiment (New York: Jason Aronson, 1975), 292, quoted in Martin Wong, "Psychoanalytic Developmental Theory and Gender Indentity," in eds. Solomon and Levy, Men in Transition, 93.

development.[56] This is the dilemma of the modern son, who wins the Oedipal battle, gains mother from the absent father, and then, overwhelmed by her, struggles to separate with defiant cries of "I'm not you! I'm not feminine!"[57] Chodorow writes from within a Freudian perspective about the object relations inherent in this male separation from mother. She suggests that because boys develop gender identity by separating and individuating from their primary love objects, their mothers, a self with strong ego boundaries results. Boys grow up with greater differentiation and autonomy than that of girls. In denying their attachment to their mothers for the sake of their masculinity, often pre-maturely so, boys repress or deny affect states forged in close contact with their mothers but now considered feminine. Girls' sense of self doesn't require this degree of separation. Their continuous relationship with mother sees them develop stronger relational skills and grow to exhibit more permeable ego boundaries as well as a greater capacity for empathy than their male counterparts.[58]

. Chodorow reasons that because most parenting is done by the mother, with father absent from the home, boys must derive notions of masculinity from the mother and the culture at large, resulting in more of an external orientation away from the family. Girls, on the other hand, with a personal face-to-face relationship with the mother in the home, take on a more interactional orientation to the family. Since boys are not closely tied to their fathers, and deny attachment to mother for the sake of their masculinity, they will emulate the emotional distancing of their fathers and pass it on to their own sons. Thus, the same process

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[56] Ken Corbett, Boyhoods: Rethinking Masculinities (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), 6-7.
[57] Keen, 20.
[58] Nancy Chodorow, "Family Structure and Feminine Personality," in Woman, Culture and Society, ed. M.Z. Rosakdi and K. Lamphere (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1974), cited by Berzoff, Flanagan and Hertz, 251.

that produces mothering in girls reduces men's parenting capacities, breeding distance and inexpressiveness. Mothers' turning to their sons as surrogate husbands to meet unfulfilled emotional needs reinforces male inexpressiveness, as sons unleash defensive assertion of ego boundaries and repress their own legitimate emotional needs.[59] Chodorow's penetrating analysis provides insight into the roots of male isolation and emotional inexpressiveness. She infers some of the variables—absent father, single-parent family and cultural context—which may apply to participants' experience.

A final clinical insight derived from psychoanalytic theory concerns the super-ego, established in the resolution of the Oedipal complex as the location of values, ideals and moral principles. More specifically, as the locus of critical self-observation,[60] appeal may be made to the superego to facilitate formation of the group and its work of self-scrutiny and transformation. But such appeal must be made very carefully, since members may present with an overly-developed, overly-critical super-ego, manifested by either a self-righteous, constricted sense of self or else pervasive feelings of inadequacy and shame. If early childhood experiences proved toxic or pathological, with parents and later other adults disapproving and punishing most expressions of aggression, self-assertion and sexuality, repression of large areas of thought and behavior may have followed, sealed off by the internalized strictures of a hyper-vigilant super-ego.[61] And when such injunctions of right and wrong, of approved and prohibited behavior are assimilated to the religious sensibilities also lodged within the super-ego, to the point that they become the essence and substance of

[59] Jack O. Balswick, "Male Inexpressiveness: Psychological and Social Aspects," in Solomon and Levy, eds., 139.
[60] Brenner, 112.
[61] Haas, 43.

religion (i.e., law, not promise), then the situation is exacerbated, with the self either rife with scrupulosity and hypocrisy or else in desperation, acting out frenzied rebellion.

Further, since the super-ego can be seen, as Ahlskog writes, as "a product of demand placed on every individual to respect the power of the group…establishing norms and dealing out rewards and punishments,"[62] it can be expected that super-ego functioning on the part of participants will certainly impact the group's process. Some may exhibit an overzealous embrace of group norms and expectations, to the detriment of self needs and development; others may be defiant, physically sitting in the group circle but effectively evolving without it. I will want to lift up resistance to the group task when it occurs to be studied by the group, seeking to unravel its meaning and implications for male self-understanding. Since I do want to influence values through our group process, I will appeal to the super-ego. But I want to speak to its mature, healthy aspects, not ignoring overly-critical and constricted expressions of super-ego function but neither summoning them either. And I want to enlist the work of the ego, its executive and self-organizing functions, not only in support of the super-ego's legitimate functions, but also, more critically, to examine one's super-ego, understand its individual formation, its contours, severity and influence on self and identity, and begin, as deemed necessary, to nuance and modify it.

Another clinical principle of importance to this ministry project is the concept of selfobject as derived from Kohut's theory of self-psychology. In abandoning Freud's drive and conflict theory, Kohut posited an innate growth force motivating the individual toward personal development and wholeness.[63] His position finds an echo among many who

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[62] Ahlskog, 26.

[63] Laura Melano Flanagan, "The Theory of Self Psychology," in Inside Out and Outside In: Psychodynamic Clinical Theory and Practice in Contemporary Multicultural Contexts eds.

contend that dysfunctional patterns of thought and behavior overshadow a solid base of healthy strivings, and that the clinical task consists in helping persons reconnect to their underlying competency and inherent energy for mastery and belonging.[64]

Kohut emphasized the subjective sense of the self as a cohesive whole, an individual's experience of well-being, vitality and vigor, in trying to understand it from "inside out." He eventually scuttled Freud's structural theory with its objectively-functioning parts in favor of a flexible relational web of aspects or polarities of the self: the "grandiose self," driven by ambition and needing mirroring of its uniqueness and assets; the "idealized self," pulled by ideals and seeking to merge with the strength and wonder in another; and the "twinship self," seeking to recognize itself in similar others.[65] Central to meeting the developmental needs of this tripartite self are selfobjects, so called because they are not objects related to in and of themselves but those that give the self what it needs as sources of mirroring, models to be emulated and similar selves to feel at one with.[66] I intend to serve as a selfobject to the men in the group, by reflecting and esteeming their persons, talents and contributions to the group; by projecting qualities of my person and presence that betoken strength of character, integration, calm and energy; and by allowing myself to be known as one with them, a man with his struggles and triumphs and self-interrogations much as they. I will also seek to facilitate the group participants, by modeling and group technique, including direct invitation, to become selfobjects for one another. The experience of "being seen" and admired, of "seeing" and identifying with the highly regarded qualities of the other, and of

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Joan Berzoff, Laura Melano Flanagan and Patricia Hertz, (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1996), 184.

[64] See as an example David B. Waters and Edith C. Lawrence, Competence, Change and Courage (New York: W. W. Norton, 1993), xiv.

[65] Flanagan, 182-189.

[66] Ibid., 181.

seeing one another together in kinship and mutuality will be instrumental in countering the isolation and fears of self-disclosure that separate many men from each other and from themselves. Yet this will only be effective to the degree that such selfobject interactions deploy empathy and empathic attunement, which for Kohut is not the popular notion of warmth or sympathy, but a "vicarious introspection," a way of understanding from within the experience of another.[67] This is a tall order. It will put a premium on active listening, suspension of judgment, and earnest effort to enter into the experience of another, both on my part and that of group participants as we go forward. And it is certain that empathic failures will arise, which will have to be "worked through" by processing the unmet needs and the often strong and difficult feelings to which they give rise. Yet here, too, the experience of being fallible and human all around, and the opportunity to let go, to give up control, to experience being vulnerable can prove invaluable in portraying authentic humanity and the hidden strength of a new understanding of masculinity.

We now turn to developmental theorists, with their idea that human development proceeds by stages, since it is to be expected that the group participants will not all be at the same level in their construction of psyche and self, in their masculine understanding and in their capacity to relate and de-isolate. Erickson's life cycle theory with its eight stages comes to mind, with the expectation that the anticipated age span of the participants (25 to 60) would find them negotiating the requirements of his stage six (intimacy versus isolation: consolidating and "letting go" of self-identity for shared identity in close relationships) or

[67] Ibid., 179.

reaching for the satisfactions of stage seven (generativity versus stagnation: altruism and care for the next generation).[68]

Most developmental or stage theories associate human development and maturity with growth in autonomy and independence (some have suggested that this is because they are developed by men![69]). For a ministry project which seeks to move men beyond isolation and independence toward interdependence and relationality, this is a decided theoretical shortcoming. Robert Kegan, in *The Evolving Self*, presents a more promising alternative in his comprehensive theory of human development that integrates relationality as well as individuality, inclusion as well as autonomy. Kegan understands development as an evolutionary, meaning-making activity, involving our creating of the other (a process of differentiation) as well as our relating to it (a process of integration). In a succession of adaptations, the self differentiates itself from the world in which it is embedded, resulting in an ever more complex object of relation. Kegan posits five such stages, each a balance between differentiation and integration, each a transition inaugurated by a process of "decentration," or emergence from embeddedness, each but a temporary solution to the lifelong tension between autonomy and inclusion.[70] Yet each also represents a relative triumph of "relationship to" rather than "embeddedness in."

It will be useful to give a brief summary of Kegan's stages, since collectively they diagnose well the dilemma of the male who "is" what he cannot "relate to" as a distinct self,

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[68] Donald Capps, Life Cycle Theory and Pastoral Care (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1993), 19-30.
[69] Gail Sheehy, Understanding Men's Passages (New York: Random, 1998), 147, laments that theories of adult development, mostly constructed by men, focus on the full individuation of the self, based on separation from others, rather than building mutual relationships; only Erickson's final stage of generativity re-focuses on relating or mentoring.
[70] Robert Kegan, The Evolving Self: Problem and Process in Human Development (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1-21.

compounding a sense of isolation.[71] I anticipate that group participants will most likely be in stages three and four, embedded in relationships or a self-system of relationships, though possibly one may be fixated in stage two (embedded in one's needs) or have advanced to the genuine maturity of stage five. Kegan's stages are descriptive, but in laying out the ineluctable crisis of an embeddedness that no longer "works" for the individual, they are also prescriptive, or prophetic. They provide understanding of where differing selves *are* and cannot but be, while also sketching out where they are headed with their next decentration

[71]Kegan, 85-110. Infancy is a transition from complete incorporation in the parent into the Impulsive balance (stage one), in which two-year olds, disembedded from their reflexes, now have them instead of being them. This new self is embedded in its impulses or wishes which now coordinate the reflexes; the meaning of the self at this stage is its impulses or perceptions which now have, as object, the reflexes. In the Imperial balance (stage two), with the capacity to have one's impulses, rather than be them, the self is now its enduring wishes or needs. A self-concept can emerge. Transitioning out of this stage of embeddedness in one's needs brings needs into view, into being, into *having* needs. Mutuality and the ability to talk about feelings come to the fore. In the Interpersonal balance (stage three) there is conversation but inability to consult itself about that shared reality, to "bring it before me;" the self *is* that shared reality. Though interpersonal, this balance is not intimate; the self is embedded in this intimacy, as its source, not its aim. So this is fusion and not true intimacy. There is discomfort with anger, or no anger where there might be, for the self cannot know itself apart from this interpersonal relationship. In differentiating from embeddedness in interpersonalism, meaning-evolution makes a self that can remain coherent in relationships, that achieves an identity. From "I am my relationships" to "I have relationships," there is self-ownership, self-direction, someone who does this having. The Institutional balance (stage four) brings into being this kind of psychic regulation, which far from "losing" others in emerging from Interpersonalism now includes them in the new context of their place in maintaining a self-system. No longer owned by relationships, one can have them; they no longer constitute the self. Yet the self is identified with the self-system, with regulation rather than mutuality now ultimate. Not "do you still like me?" but "does my control still stand?" becomes the question. This primacy of control is still not intimacy. The Interindividual (stage five) achieves maturity, with a self that has control rather than being the control, a "self" that is equally independent and belongs, that can be brought to others rather than be derived from others, that can freely self-sacrifice and know intimacy. This maturity is essentially the deep, personal openness which comes from having an independent identity, while recognizing the limitations of autonomy and individualism and valuing the intimacy of mutual interdependence. See also Joann Wolski Conn, "Spirituality and Personal Maturity," in Clinical Handbook of Pastoral Counseling: Volume I eds, Robert J. Wicks, Richard D. Parsons and Donald Capps (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 43-46.

and transition. The male individual reaches a point in which his self and object system is untenable, where he must break out (emerge or "hatch out") to new understanding of self and others that can counter his relative separation and seclusion; as Kegan writes, "every re-equilibration is a qualitative victory over isolation."[72] Kegan provides an excellent lens through which to observe and ponder participant development, not the least because he takes into account the two greatest yearnings of human experience at the heart of the male malaise, the desire both to be included and to be independent.[73] He gives them both equal dignity, in the process redefining psychological growth and maturity as not only increased differentiation and autonomy but also as attachment and integration.

The group as the vehicle for this ministry project is an important clinical principle in its own right. It provides not only the framework for the project but the setting and process for its work as well. The group is ideally suited as a mechanism for a gathering of men intent on being together and presenting themselves and their lives. Groups duplicate life as it is lived "outside" and become a microcosm of reality; group members will create in the group the same interpersonal universe they inhabit in the day-to-day (even in a men-only group, interactional patterns with women will also be re-created in the group) and will enact, sooner or later, their interpersonal behavior, as maladaptive or adaptive as it may be, before the

[72] Kegan, 106.

[73] Daniel Levinson's theory of adult development, in Daniel Levinson. *et al.* The Seasons of a Man's Life (New York: Knopf, 1978) also attempts to encompass both independence and inclusion. His fourth polarity, "the masculine/feminine polarity," is ill-named, as it treats traits, agency and communion, that are not necessarily gender specific. Levinson's theory distinguishes the "Dream" of young adults (18 to 45) intent on becoming more self-directed with the "Vision" of middle adults (40 to 65) intent on becoming more integrated or whole persons. See Donald Capps, "Pastoral Counseling for Middle Adults: A Levinsonian Perspective" in Wicks, *et al.*, 215-223.

others' eyes[74] (Ormont likes to say that "people create their own impasses,"[75] in the group as much as they do in daily life; in fact, the group evokes such mannerisms).

The group takes on a life of its own. It goes through its own stages of formation, setting of norms and conditions of inclusion, conflict and violation of its contracted norms, reforming and re-equilibrium and terminating ("forming, norming, storming, reforming and de-forming"). It can develop its own cohesiveness and positive cathexis, with benefits for its own functioning and for the maturational growth of its participants. It provides opportunity for relationship, for being fully present to others, for relating in more empathic, assertive or intimate ways. It can elicit a full range of feelings among group participants that can be understood as to where they came from and what they mean. In what Ormont calls the "immediacy principle," of "being in the moment," the group is repeatedly led to identify and study its own behavior, with opportunity for greater self-awareness and rendering more of the unconscious into consciousness.[76]

Ormont identifies among the benefits of group treatment the following: eliciting of self-destructive behavior; enabling members to see how others respond to them; affording members diverse views of their behavior, including spontaneous reactions in the moment; opportunity for on-the-spot self-definition, including discovery of one's feeling states in interaction with others; and affording "life situations" in which to rehearse new behavior that can serve in the "outside" world.[77] Yalom echoes these benefits, stressing the dividends of

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[74] Irvin D. Yalom, The Theory and Practice of Group Psychotherapy 4th ed., (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 28.
[75] Louis R. Ormont, The Group Therapy Experience: From Theory to Practice (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1992), 4.
[76] Ibid., 43.
[77] Ibid., 29.

here-and-now activation and process illumination in creating growth opportunities and endowing an experiential group with "compelling potency."[78]

Stein has reflected on the specific values of groups as men's groups. He regards joining a men's group in itself as an important statement by a man that he seeks change, a statement of nontraditional masculine values, or at a minimum a willingness to re-examine traditional or inherited conceptions of masculinity. Men's groups provide an opportunity for men to relate to other men in an interpersonal setting without women, accomplishing a variety of interpersonal functions (caretaking, nurturing, affect expression) typically more associated with the feminine role; and also demonstrating to men how they behave when they are with other men, with the appearance of typically masculine role characteristics (competition, striving for success, seeking to dominate, assertiveness, aggressiveness and intellectualization). A men's group represents a nontraditional male activity for its members, being "talk" rather than "task" or work-oriented, in that personal feelings, thoughts and hopes are shared. Through the relationships in the men's group, members can gain insight into significant past male relationships in their lives; and explore topics and themes difficult for men to talk about (dependency, sexism, partner relationships, homosexuality), gaining greater understanding and alleviating stress. Finally, men's groups can serve to alter the nature of adult male-male relationships by promoting caring and friendship between men; and instill new patterns of relating to women, as members explicitly discuss relationships with women and change their ideas about themselves as men.[79]

Though made up of its several individuals, I believe that it is important to think of the group-as-a-whole, and work with it in that dimension. Rather than working one-on-one with

[78] Yalom, 142-143.
[79] Terry S. Stein, "Men's Groups," in Solomon and Levy, eds., 281-283.

each individual, group psychotherapy theory emphasizes working with the group as a whole, as a single entity, enlisting its members collectively to do the work of the group. This work or purpose of the group is clearly and succinctly communicated in the group contract. Following modern psychoanalytic group process, I understand that contract or purpose of the group to be to engage in progressive emotional communication with one another in the present ("in the moment, in the "here and now"), sharing the emotionally significant story of one's life and experience. This is highly challenging and there is ordinarily resistance to doing so, with group members "out of the room" with what they say or even the feelings they share, rather than engaging their peers and sharing their feelings "in the moment." Yet, as Yalom underscores, self-disclosure is absolutely essential in the group therapeutic process,[80] as well, I believe in a support or koinonia group, if there is to be indeed true support or fellowship, as the case may be. Such self-disclosure in the moment engages one with another, providing immediacy and energy to the group flow, and opening up the possibility of new awareness of one's self and relational behavior and of awareness and incorporation of new ways of being and relating. As such it can prove an immediately de-isolating experience, one that is not always or necessarily comfortable, but one that stirs and engages the ego. I will endeavor to lead the men's group in such a way as to facilitate this emotional communication among all its participants, in meeting their needs, telling their story, disclosing their self, in their hearing and responding, so that they might begin to see and know themselves as men in a new light and in that light, relate in new ways. In so doing, I invite them to undertake the pilgrimage journey of awareness and growth of the self, the self in relationship, dying to the old and rising to the new.

[80] Yalom, 120.

CHAPTER III:

METHODOLOGY

The ministry initiative described in this project was developed to address a core clinical and spiritual need of a cadre of "men in malaise" from among area congregants and counseling clients, that of their isolation and disconnect. The loneliness, hurt and confusion of many men are very real, and far-reaching in their disabling and deadening consequences for their well-being and personal and spiritual growth. In seeking to address this core need, this ministry project seeks to gather men to sit together, to talk and be heard, and to give and receive support to one another both in their lives and as men who live in times in which understandings about manhood continue to undergo change and transformation. The project aims to give men an opportunity to experience relationship with one another, and through that experience, deepening relationship with self and with others; to explore their identity as males and ideas about masculinity; and to grow in their self-awareness, self-understanding and self-acceptance.

As a ministry intervention, an application of the principles of pastoral care to meet these specific needs of men, the project is designed to test out the working hypothesis previously stated: "because men are socialized in our culture to become providers, independent and self-sufficient, they become increasingly isolated in their adult lives, which

in turn leads to an increasing degree of spiritual barrenness; by its structure and intent, the men's group is a de-isolating mechanism, in which by a contagion factor men's discovery that other men share similar experiences and feelings precipitates progressively greater degrees of trust, self-disclosure, mutuality and affirmation that significantly lessen isolation and its obstacles to personal and spiritual development." Calling men to sit and talk with one another, to tell their stories and express their feelings, to be honest to themselves and to the men in the circle, serves to counter the conditioned reflex of isolation and emotional disconnection, that can block personal growth, authentic community and deepening spirituality. This is the premise which the project design will attempt to demonstrate.

It is not axiomatic that men will respond to that call. For a man to step forward and work in a group, as Culbertson in *The Spirituality of Men* cautions, is already "counter-cultural in societies that presumes the rugged individualism (read: lonely isolation) of adult males." Yet I believe that the wound and pain that many men feel in their isolation and disconnect is such that they have come to know implicitly what Bly means when he writes that "having no soul union with other men can be the most damaging wound of all."[81] There are men longing to step out of the competitive and isolating one-upmanship of male interaction to become co-beings and collaborators in a journey toward wholeness and well-being. The pilgrimage of self-discovery may be solitary, but it needn't be taken alone; "taking the journey and telling the story," Keen underscores, "go hand in glove…we need a listening community in order to make our solitary pilgrimage."[82]

The chief methodology for this ministry as stated in the hypothesis is the group experience, specifically, the "men's group." The small group is an excellent modality for our

[81] Bly, 33.
[82] Keen, 234.

purposes. Groups re-create habitual emotional patterns of relating and communicating learned from childhood; they duplicate the interactional patterns of daily life which participants can begin to discern and examine, affording insight and the possibility of adaptation and change. Groups have the potential to break down isolation, fueled by the assumption that our feelings and experiences are unique to us, unshared and consequently not understood; hearing others' experiences can validate and normalize our own. Groups commit participants to interactions over time, enabling new experiences of communicating and relating in community. Groups allow participants to learn to express more of their inner lives and truths, affording a safe environment in which to be more fully ourselves, where new behaviors can be tested out and where honest feedback from others can be received. Groups also help in developing intimacy with others, connecting us with our own hurts, needs and desires and enabling us to feel and connect with others. Finally, groups, with their potential to build a sense of shared community and evoke awe and wonder, can enable participants to connect with spiritual aspirations which many have been unaware of, or have sought without finding. For all these reasons, small group process is our methodology of choice, a powerful antidote to isolation and hopelessness. The intent is to provide a safe and hospitable space, to re-create what Keen calls "the hearth,"[83] where men can gather to talk of what is important, pursuing their journey and doing their work together as a questing community.

The ministry clientele was identified---men 25 to 60 years of age, either clients in individual therapy at the Lutheran Counseling Center of Metropolitan New York, or congregants from Association congregations of the Center—and a period of recruitment was initiated. For purposes of communication and recruitment, the ministry project was offered

[83] Ibid., 229.

through the Center as *"Talking Through Tough Times—A Recession-Era Men's Group,"* to relate it to the recent economic downturn which has adversely affected so many men in the area. A flyer was prepared and distributed to all Association congregations, the Counseling Center's offices and all current clients of the Center (see Appendix A).

I determined the time and place for the group sessions, after consulting with several men who had indicated to me that they would be joining the group. Weekly sessions of an hour and a half were planned for Tuesday evenings, 7-8:30 p.m., for a duration of six weeks (Center groups customarily run 5 sessions, to attract commitment and avoid attrition over a lengthy period). Six weeks would put this project in Yalom's category of "brief group therapy:" He advises defining "brief" or "short "in functional rather than in temporal terms; "a brief group is the shortest group that can achieve some specified goal."[84] A short-term group with its imposed time limits, while it puts the onus on keeping goals clear and the group focused, can increase efficiency and heighten awareness of the time-limited, existential dimensions of life (i.e., this group is not intended to complete the process, rather set it in motion, with ultimate responsibility resting with the participant). As to locale, we would meet in a comfortable room at the main Counseling Center office, furnished with deep leather chairs and soft lighting. Optimal group size would be 5 to 8 men at the most; a minimum number to invite diversity and foster interaction, but a maximum ceiling to allow for in-depth sharing[85] (Clinebell advises that "the intensity of interaction tends to vary inversely with size"[86]).

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[84]Yalom, 275.
[85] Keen, 234.
[86] Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Basic Types of Pastoral Counseling (Nashville: Abingdon, 1966), 212.

Prior to the start of the cycle of six group meetings, as participants give notice of their desire to join the group, I will conduct a personal interview with each man. The purpose of this individual session is to meet the "candidate," getting some idea of his personal history, current stressors, course of treatment if in therapy, ego strength, and motivations for joining a men's group. This encounter also serves as a screening interview for suitability to the group, with an eye toward group interaction and cohesiveness and avoiding psychotic pathology. Composing a group with some degree of diversity of background, race and age would also be an intention here. Some initiation into the group's purpose, its contract to share emotional communication, would be shared at this point.

The six group sessions themselves would be modified open-floor sessions with a weekly theme, with the aim of having everyone take a share of the "talking time" in relating their story, their viewpoints on the topic at hand, and their feelings—in sum, engaging one another in "progressive emotional communication" (the watchword of the modern psychoanalytic group movement of Spotnitz and Ormont). As convener and facilitator of the group, I recognize that initially I will be the group's unifying force, a "transitional object" in Winnicott's sense, since all members are strangers to each other and know only me, and that my first task will be to "create" the group as an entity, a system.[87] I will use group techniques of bridging and joining to bring in a silent or ignored participant, and otherwise activate the group flow so that the group is doing the work of sharing and responding to the emotionally significant story of each one's life. I want to exercise warmth and empathic attunement towards each participant, yet pay close attention to group-as-a-whole dynamics, to its process and not only the content of its interactions In my leadership style, I will seek to follow

[87] Yalom, 107.

Friedman's leadership by differentiation model, "defining" myself, my goals and values, and not the group members, with my own self-disclosure as appropriate; "staying in touch" with group members; and maintaining a non-anxious presence as much as possible,[88] in order to circumvent dependency on the part of participants while effecting relationship change. In so doing, I seek to provide a strong and committed servant leadership, one that can provide and model the selfobject role to the members.

Turning to the agenda, each of the six weekly sessions would have the following general outline:

a. Welcome and "check-in" (member updates, group matters, feedback on group)

b. Presentation of evening's theme (video clip, reading, questions or group exercise)

c. Personal stories or vignettes

d. Group discussion of theme

e. Summation, feedback and bonding/blessing

Several comments and clarifications on this basic agenda are in order: As introductory material to the session's overall theme and prompts to launch the group interaction and sharing of one another's stories and perspectives, I have decided to use a mix of video and film clips, short readings from the literature on masculinity, presentation of direct questions to the group with illustrative personal vignettes as appropriate, and group exercises to involve each participant singly or in pairs. The video sequences (VHS and DVD) from film and TV are intended as succinct portrayals of male themes and varied conceptions of masculinity as a springboard to discussion and could connect vividly with the way men live and process in a virtual and mediatized world. The readings and questions are also

[88] Edwin H. Friedman, Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue (New York: Guilford Press, 1985), 229.

designed to focus on the session themes, taking them deeper and lifting up new perspectives for group response and comment. The group exercises are fewer in number, selected from among those current in men's movement groups,[89] needing little or no advance preparation or outside materials and intended to spark further discussion and personal sharing.

Clinical feedback and attunement to participant needs and wishes is very important in a ministry context. Opportunity for feedback is built into the flexible agenda, in an attempt to allow pressing member concerns to be brought to the group at any point throughout the session; this is a recognition that the process of member interaction and emotional communication is more important than the given content, and that any subject or feedback the group chooses to consider can "carry the freight." Additionally, depending on feedback from the group members about progress of the group, or in periods when the group appears restless or resistant, I plan to "shift gears" and follow their lead for discussion, introduce a new perspective or substitute activities. A fear that I have rendered conscious to myself is whether the men in the group will talk or descend into silence. This is not impossible, it being a common resistance; and in a men's group, as Dittes observes, "there isn't much to say when the conversation begins to review lifelong unquestioned commitments"[90] about manhood, work and so much more. The silence could always be "studied" and a new subject for discussion---though there is no guarantee that that would get participants talking and interacting either! In a group of short duration such as this, prolonged silence, lethargy or boredom should be met with creative resources and activities—to re-ignite the talking! Whatever the recourse, Ahlskog's principle of "benign benevolence" holds, that members

[89] A helpful resource used in planning for this group is George M. Taylor, Talking with our Brothers: Creating and Sustaining a Dynamic Men's Group (Fairfax, California: Men's Community Publishing Project, 1995).
[90] Dittes, 46.

have a right to emotional safety and self-determination, that they suffer no consequences for having told their story[91]—or not!

Mention should also be made of the absence of overtly religious elements, with neither prayer, scripture readings or religious devotions or meditations planned. I came to this decision so as not to activate an additional level of transference to me as a clergyperson and ritual leader, and also to respect the integrity of the group as principally a "talk" group. A brief parting blessing, non-liturgical, is the only exception confirming the rule. I invoke Margolin's recognition of the underlying spirituality of this enterprise when she writes, "every session is a form of prayer."[92]

What follows is the planned outline of each of the six sessions; texts of readings are in Appendix B:

First Session: Gathering of Men…and Brothers

a. Welcome

b. Brief personal introductions

c. Questions for discussion:

Why have you come? What is the purpose you see for this group? What do you want to get out of it? Do you have any experience being in a group? In a men's group?

d. My self-presentation

My affiliation with the Center and my other ministries. My great interest in this group, and its relationship to my doctoral work. The paucity of experience with, and Center's attention to, a men's group. My hopes for a rewarding experience for all.

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[91] Ahlskog, 15.
[92] Alida Margolin, "Sexual Temptation and the Pastoral Counselor," in eds. Ahlskog and Sands, 238.

e. Setting the group contract

Among friends. Open discussion format. Weekly themes about men and what we face and feel. Sharing one's story and what one feels—"emotional communication." As we risk sharing, we realize others struggle with similar challenges, that we are not alone, that relationships can grow. A few "ground rules"—no personal attacks, each takes a share of the "talking time," honesty and friendship.

f. Film/video clip #1: "Mad Men"

Discussion: What do you see? Is that who you are? What is this saying about being a man? Being masculine? Does that hold up? Why or why not?

g. Reading: *Iron Man*, Robert Bly

h. Film/video clip #2: "Shawshank Redemption"

Discussion: How about this one? What kind of a man is Tim Robbin's character to you? And Morgan Freeman's? What does this clip say about being a man, about being masculine? About men as friends?

i. Core narratives based on the previous discussions

Each man is invited to share something about himself, an event, a time in his life, a relationship, that helps us to begin to know him.

j. Concluding thoughts on tonight's experience

Second Session: Our Work

a. Welcome, initial feedback and introduction of session theme

b. Readings #1 and #2: *Men at Work*, James Dittes

c. Discussion on work as our identity, as "taking over"

d. Film/video clip: "Death of a Salesman"

What happens to him? Who did Bif want to be? How was manhood and success as a man understood or perceived? How is your manhood related to your work?

e. Presenting our work and how we feel about it

Each man is invited to share what he does and how it relates to whom he is and wants to be.

f. Reading #3: *Men at Work*, James Dittes

g. Concluding thoughts from group regarding work and interaction this evening.

Session Three: Family and Relationships

a. Welcome and feedback on group experience so far

b. Presentation of session theme

c. Film/video clip #1: "Scenes from a Marriage," Ingmar Bergman

A portrait of strained communication and a growing chasm between this couple. How do you get in touch with your feelings and put them into words? Do you? Can you?

c. Film/video clip #2: "The Incredibles"

The joys of fatherhood depicted. What relationships give you joy? And why?

d. Discussion and personal sharing regarding close relationships

e. Reading: *Raising a Son*, Don and Jean Elium

f. Continued open discussion and concluding thoughts

Fourth Session: Growing Up

a. Welcome and presentation of session theme

b. Film/video clip: "The Pursuit of Happyness"

"Don't let anyone tell you, you can't do something, even me." Did you hear that affirmation as a child? What was your relationship with your father like? With your mother? What did you get from them and how are you like them? How does your behavior here in the group reflect that? Do you have to be strong and controlled here or can you be sensitive and caring as well?

c. Reading: *Raising a Son*, Don and Jean Elium

d. Group exercise: "Imagining Your Family of Origin"

Each man takes another and suggests what it might have been like for that man growing up: his relationship with father, the role he played in the family, the traits observed now that could be attributed to that relationship.

e. Open discussion on exercise and theme

f. Concluding remarks and any feedback

Fifth Session: Our Spiritual Selves

a. Welcome and "Check-in" in terms of group

b. Film/video clip: "Through the Glass Darkly," Ingmar Bergman

c. Questions for discussion

If you were to draw a picture of God, what would God look like? How do you see or understand God? How did that start for you? How has it changed for you? What gives

you a sense of wonder and awe, a sense of connection with something greater than yourself? What is it that gives you meaning? What would you as a man like your church to know and do?

d. Discussion and sharing of spiritual connections and aspirations

e. Reading: *The Song of the Bird*, Anthony de Mello

f. Final thoughts and feedback

Sixth Session: Wrapping Up…and Going Forward

a. Welcome and overview of final session

b. Film/video clip #1: "Mad Men" (repeat)

c. Film/video clip #2: "Ferris Bueller's Day Off"

We've seen different takes on masculinity, on what a man looks like and acts like in our film clips. Your reactions? Where are you? Do you see yourself in any of these? Any other images from TV or film that depict masculinity for you?

d. Questions for discussion

What have these six weeks been like for you? What have you learned about yourself? What has the experience of group been like for you? Did you bond with this group? What insights do you have about being a man?

e. Reading: "Counterepilogue," Wolfgang Lederer

f. Recommendations for moving forward

What is your next step? What will you do with what you've experienced? What would you want to tell your church about this experience and about meeting men's needs? Should this group continue?

g. Blessing ritual

Each man is invited to share a parting blessing with the group.

Following the six sessions, a concluding personal interview will be scheduled with each participant. The purpose of the interview will be to receive feedback concerning the group overall and the participant's personal experience of group, to explore personal themes and relationships in the group interaction, and to consider next steps and future growth.

METHODS OF ASSESSMENT

Since this ministry project proposes to address male isolation and disconnect and foster relationships among its group participants, it will be evaluated as to its outcomes on the basis of the degree and quality of the interaction observed:

The degree of interaction involves the extent to which group members attend to one another and engage one another in conversation, that is, the relative amount of contact and talking going on between them. Do participants continue to relate primarily to me as group facilitator or do they develop more and more direct interaction between themselves without the need to route such contact through the leader? Are all members taking their share of the talking time and interacting with their group colleagues? Is non-verbal communication openly given and received? Is the group session punctuated by lengthy periods of awkward silence, or do the 90 minutes pass by rapidly with the members immersed in the conversation? Is the interaction animated to the degree that several members might be vying to take the floor at the same time, to "get a word in edgewise"? If this project "takes off," group members are anticipated to become more vocal, not less.

The degree of interaction also includes the topical breadth of communication between members. Do they bring up an increasing variety of topics for group consideration? Is the range of topics substantially expanding or contracting? Do group members feel free to speak about their family of origin, about their present relationships, both outside but also inside of the room, about their hurts and dilemmas as males? Can they propose topics for conversation? Group members will move toward talking about anything and everything.

The quality of interaction looks at the depth of contact between members and its potential to result in authentic connection between them. It is observable in a number of important indicators:

Is the conversation perfunctory, remaining surface-level or superficial, or does it go "deep," involving head and heart, and tending toward integration of them?

What is the extent of introspection and self-disclosure one to another? Is there an ability to risk disclosure, to trust oneself and others in doing so, and to be at ease with what eventually transpires when one does?

Are members connecting to one another? Is a bond building? Do they evince relational support and empathy for one another? Can members be candid about the loneliness they've experienced and by their comments, gestures and energy indicate that their level of isolation has diminished?

Is there greater emotional availability to one's feelings and those of others, and greater emotional expression? Are members familiar with their emotional landscape? Are members giving voice and [appropriate] physical expression to their feelings without being prompted? Are difficult feelings (anger, fear, sadness) able to be expressed along with those considered less difficult (happiness, joy)? Group members are anticipated to experience

greater depth in their interaction, as evidenced by the presence of genuine and meaningful conversation, and increased self-disclosure, connectedness with one another and emotional expressiveness.

One other area of assessment criteria concerns potential benefits to the participants' spirituality and religious life. Is there evidence of the participants becoming more conscious of life and being in all their manifold expressions, of their own life and creatureliness? Is there expression of awareness of the gifts of life, even amidst the troubles of life, and of appreciation and gratitude for them? Is there ever a sense of wonder and awe, of sheer joy? Are participants relating their experience of relationship in life and in the group to their relationship to something greater than themselves? Can they bring up thoughts about God and how they "see" and understand God? Do they share plans for follow-up projects and men's ministries in their congregations and religious life and show motivation and passion for them? Group members are anticipated to show growth in these spiritual indicators and in their interest and commitment to pursue them.

A final area of criteria for outcome assessment is overall receptivity to the group and to its continuation. Did members attend all sessions or was there attrition? Was feedback about the group favorable or unfavorable? To what degree did participants express the desire to see the group continue to meet after the planned six sessions? Group members would be expected to indicate a liking for a de-isolating, re-connecting experience and wish for its continuation.

The methods of assessment enumerated above, based on specific outcomes or consequences of the men's group as it meets, will allow us to evaluate our project hypothesis,

that the group, as a de-isolating mechanism, counters men's proto-typical isolation, disconnect and spiritual barrenness, and recommends itself to clinical ministry among men.

CHAPTER IV:

RESULTS

The men's group that was the focus of this ministry project and conducted over a period of six weeks showed some excellent results a well as some surprising developments that will be presented in this chapter. The group was ultimately composed of seven men, ranging in age from 28 to 59 years of age. Three of the men were African-Americans (two of Haitian-American descent) and four were Caucasians, all of European-American background. Three were current counseling clients at the Lutheran Counseling Center and four were congregants from Association congregations (two of whom had previously been Counseling Center clients). The majority of the men were affiliated with Lutheran congregations; two were of non-Lutheran Christian affiliation.

The group sessions were generally conducted according to the project design with its planned themes and agendas, as presented in the previous chapter on methodology. There were, however, several additions and modifications in response to client feedback and the presence of unanticipated elements as the group evolved—all of which will be detailed in this chapter. I propose to give first a summary of the main events of each session, with attention to the unexpected developments, then assess the outcomes of the group as a whole over its six-week tenure, and finally assess the group experience and its impact on each of the seven participants.

The first session began with a word of welcome and very brief self-introductions, followed by initial questions and discussion about why the men had joined the group and what they hoped to get out of it. This proved a somewhat subdued and respectful conversation, with general replies about seeking support or responding to curiosity, but it did convey both an eagerness and anticipation in being part this new undertaking as well as hesitancy as to how to proceed with this "company of strangers." After I introduced myself and shared the group contract, the two film clips were played and a more animated discussion about the images of masculinity, of what a man is supposed to look like and be, followed.

The last half of the session was given over to the core narratives, giving each man the opportunity to talk about himself. What was unexpected here was the degree of personal sharing for a first encounter, and the highly emotional, even passionate tenor that carried it forward. Alex[93] offered to start, and with stable ego and firm boundaries intact, he was brief and somewhat restrained in sharing that he had been laid off three times in the last two years and was still looking for work. Peter followed, with the first installment of what would prove to be an ongoing recitation of his disintegrating marriage of some three-plus decades, told with such anguish, such vehemence that it left the room spellbound. Shut out by his wife's children and grandchildren, his cleaning business in shambles as she demands half of the assets, Peter concludes emphatically, "I was erased!" Stewart counters with a defiant consolation, "You're not erased! You're here!", then proceeds to recount his "punitive" first and second divorces. Jordan follows with the story of his verbally-abusive wife and his struggle to decide whether or not to leave her; then Owen with his shrew of a wife who suggests not too discreetly that he's either gay or having an affair; then Edward who vaunts

[93] All names of group members have been altered for this document.

his business acumen and real estate holdings before breaking down in tears as he recalls how his wife told him "Get out!" The group is not beyond reaching out to each man with shared consternation and empathy, but can hardly catch its breath before Marlon, the seventh and last man, rolls out the last aftershock in this seismic narrative of personal woes: how, so overworked, he snapped and spent five days under observation in a psychiatric ward; "I'm crazy," he remembered, "see what I'm doing to my wife."

I did not anticipate so much self-disclosure so soon, and worried that this headlong rush into confiding in one another, into intimacy, might backfire. It demonstrated to me at the group's outset men's hungering to be heard and understood, and the depth of isolating pain and confusion within them. I stressed the risk each one took and the trust implicit in our sharing and reiterated our pledge of confidentiality and support for one another. I reasoned to myself that if such candor did not repel or frighten off, it would serve as a magnet to draw these strangers to one another in a cohesive whole and to galvanize the personal work they had set out to do. In retrospect, this level of self-disclosure quickened and intensified the process of interacting, connecting and bonding.

I also did not anticipate the degree of malaise around marriage, although I should have. I knew that one of the men had been divorced twice, two were separated and in the process of divorcing, three were in seriously strained marriages and only one reported a reasonably happy marriage. I was surprised how current and how raw these conjugal difficulties were, and was concerned that the group not devolve into the equivalent of an attack dog rabid with recrimination and misogynist venom, that the men would not divert their energies into "blaming the women" and squander the opportunity to look more deeply and honestly into themselves. At the same time, I recognized that these failed or failing

relationships were very much on their hearts and minds, and both a result and source of the disconnect and isolation that aggrieve men.

The conduct of the second session did not deviate from the planned theme and agenda. The video clip from “Death of a Salesman”--the “Dime a Dozen” sequence--was very powerful and brought a prolonged discussion about work and the deceit of any final identity derived from it. The talk was more intense yet, more non-stop and more interactive. The discussion, threaded through each man’s sharing of what he does and how it relates to who he is and who he wants to be, moved from finding and keeping jobs to the financial pressures of making a living and even more, to meeting spousal expectations, and their impact especially on relationships at home. Several spoke either glumly or painfully of their feelings of inadequacy in the face of those overwhelming pressures and expectations.

The third session saw a change of date and a snafu of a logistical nature, both unforeseen. The day of the session had to be moved from Tuesday to Wednesday evening, to accommodate several who were poll workers on the Tuesday Election Day; this was done with group consent, but given competing schedules, still resulted in lessened attendance on the rescheduled day. The other development was the inexplicable absence of the necessary cables for the VCR/DVD player to project the film clips. These had to be described orally instead (most everyone was familiar with “The Incredibles,” not so much with Bergman’s “Scenes from a Marriage”), and as the resulting discussion struck me as compromised and lacking the punch of earlier responses to the film clips, I added a group exercise focused on the session’s theme of family and relationships. This consisted of each man taking a photo or two from his wallet, looking at them and becoming aware of the feelings that he has for that person, and then attempting to put those feelings into words, to talk about that relationship.

Everyone took their turn, and the resulting interaction wended its way across a vast relational landscape, taking up the abuse of a child in a troubled family, autism and its etiology, the fear, and desire, of parenthood/fatherhood, the grandfather's worries for his grandson, and much more. The men bemoaned the loss of influence of a father, a grandfather, of the male; recalled their families of origin; contemplated the deep friendship of a spouse, and peered into the vulnerability and strength, their own vulnerability and strength, of the man within.

The fourth session saw another pair of adjustments to the original design. Incredibly, the replacement cable did not fit that particular VCR/DVD model (!) I briefly named the forsaken film clip (most had also seen this movie, "The Pursuit of Happyness"), but moved on to the group exercise in which each man chose another, and on the basis of what he had observed about him, suggested what his growing up, his role in the family of origin, his relationship with father had been like. The men commented on their surprise at how much they could "read" each other after only four weeks. The parallelism of relationships in the group with relationships in life, and the potential of group process for interpersonal learning, were also introduced at this point.

In responding to his turn in the group exercise, Peter gave yet another heated update on his futile efforts to reconcile with his wife. He introduced another unexpected twist in the interaction, presenting a mystical side that again, kept all in rapt attention but without knowing quite how to respond. He shared how the house clock had stopped precisely at the hour of his grandfather's death, 3:15 a.m., and that his mother had died in room 315 in a nursing home. Sharing strange phenomena was certainly not out of bounds—nothing was—but I would be concerned if the men tried to outdo one another with stories of the extraordinary and the supernatural, going "outside" the room rather than commit to the

relational work “inside.” Fortunately, the group edged Peter back to our discussion with some mild humor (“So you get up every night at 3:14 to make sure all’s alright!”). Later, Peter offered to bring in his “healing laser,” if anyone was in muscular or back pain. Other “mystical” elements were to surface.

The discussion continued around the relationship with father and I introduced the notion of the Oedipal complex, whereupon first Peter (adopted) and then Edward and James (absent fathers) wondered where they fit in. Edward, meanwhile, had located the film clip on his cell phone (!) and several others followed with theirs; Jordan cited the key line in the clip from memory, “don’t let anyone tell you, you can’t do something, even me,” and discussion followed on what we got, criticism or affirmation, from our fathers, or didn’t. The conversation returned to the pressures on being a man, how without money, success, power or expertise, one is considered less a man. Observing that the interaction had stirred up feelings of shame, I added at that point a group exercise in which the men, eyes shut and breathing deeply in, relived a time when they had felt shame and could now give voice to those feelings. When all had shared, I provided a closing summary about how relationships, true intimacy with other males, could help us see and heal ourselves.

Session five, with spirituality as its suggested theme, began again by checking in and receiving feedback from the participants about how the group was going. Some of the men then suggested that Marlon, who had had to miss the prior session, be included in the group exercise about our roles growing up completed last week. This was done, and then I said that we want to enlarge that frame tonight, in moving toward the focus on spirituality. The questions about imagining God, one’s image of God, brought a rich and lengthy interaction—including Owen’s account of receiving a vision of Jesus while flat on his back

after cancer surgery. Notions of espoused and received theologies, of images of God in other religious traditions, of defining God and spirituality—all were in the mix. Connection to someone or something greater than ourselves was stressed. Marlon insisted that results need to be looked at to determine if something is spiritual, that it is not what is said, but what is done, what he termed "walking the way." With that note of transformation, ideas about what the churches need to know about men's needs and ideas for men's ministry in their congregations were aired. The story about transformation by de Mello served to close the session.

The sixth and last session saw a tormented Peter lead off once again with news that his wife who had made overtures of reconciliation had "slammed" him again. "We can't get back together 'cuz we don't get along," he repeated with explosive rage. The men commiserated and helped to calm him, and the session commenced. The two film clips brought us full circle, to discussion about different conceptions of masculinity and male identity. The text by Lederer, of man as solely impregnator, brought heated responses. The continuation of his text, with man as provider and protector, was given more assent; Jordan commented that "I feel like a man when I can take care of someone." The group was asked to review what the group had been like for them, and what they had learned, about self, others, and masculinity. That discussion fed into another one: what would they want to tell their churches about what men need. The session, and the group, ended with thanks and encouragement all around and a final blessing ritual, in which each man pronounced a blessing on his fellow men…and brothers. The men then embraced, some lingered afterwards to talk further, and eventually all went their way.

From this overview of the main currents of each session, I now turn to an assessment of the group's outcomes, using the assessment criteria presented in Chapter 3:

The group demonstrated a good degree of interaction. *That* they talked could not be denied. This was a talkative group—a sign, no doubt, of their desire and effort to connect. In fact, they were far more talkative than I had expected. From a strong start in the second half of the first session, the group went on to become more vocal, filling the sessions with talk and freer in offering both their verbal and non-verbal communication. Though they never weaned themselves away from my facilitation completely—as one would expect in a brief group of only six sessions—nevertheless they made great strides in engaging one another directly, without recourse to triangulating me. Additionally, every man spoke at least some in every session. Some, to be sure, were more active in conversation (Peter, Marlon, Jordan, Edward) than others (Alex, Owen, Stewart), but all did speak. Initially, I made sure of that by inviting them to speak, or by bridging or joining, but I had to do this much less over time, as nearly all took initiative to speak, even vying for the floor. Several commented that the ninety minutes went by too fast, and wondered whether we might meet longer (we didn't).

Secondly, *what* the group talked about showed an expanding variety of topics. While there were announced themes for each of the sessions, nevertheless, the men went far beyond (and at times far a field from) them. They raised many areas of concern for men, including personal identity, marriage, parenting and family, unemployment and the shame of losing one's job, financial pressures, and the elusive sense of meaning and purpose in one's life. Already by the second session, they exhibited less reticence and greater freedom in proposing topics for group discussion. The men talked easily and continuously of relationships on the "outside," in their lives, but also made some movement forward—though more would have

been welcomed—in discussing the relationships being developed in the room, that is, in engaging one another to talk about how they see and feel about one another.

As to the quality or depth of the interaction, my judgment is that the group took their work seriously and dug deeply to matters of the heart, mind and soul. The group moved rapidly from superficial or surface repartee to genuine conversation that was rich in meaning and purpose and gave evidence of an increasing degree of shared introspection. Space does not permit more than a few examples in each of these interactional categories that follow. In deepening conversation, the group heard and grappled with reflections on the worth of a person, change and maturity in one's life, male strength and sensitivity, giving and receiving affirmation, responsibility for one's faith and spirituality, male adjustment to the changed self-definition of women, the meaning and purpose of being male.

Such "deep" subjects did not preclude some humor and laughter or enjoyment of one another: "I'm a consultant!" quipped unemployed Alex; "my wife must be your wife's sister," one troubled husband concluded to another;" Jordan couldn't resist deadpanning, "Oh, you mean I don't have the perfect family?;" and Stewart summed up the dilemma of many when he rang out, "I am the boss in this house and I have my wife's permission to say so."

I was most impressed with the extent of personal self-disclosure, to the point that its early onset had me concerned about a possible pull-back. This did not materialize. Group members risked sharing very private experiences, thoughts and feelings, and invited one another into their very closest relationships. They trusted one another with this material, and grew to consider it what it was, sacred material of a human life of worth and value. Memorable moments of self-disclosure come to mind: when Jordan shares losing the job as

youth pastor that he loved, and the shame and devastation that set in; when Stewart recalls the precious little time spent with his father-pastor, and the pain of missed moments with his own son; when Edward talks about growing up without a dad, how "mom had to be father and mother," how, in consequence, "I never really learned how to be a man…that's what makes me so sensitive. And now me, raising two boys…I'm just doing it from what I feel like I wanted, not really from what I got." Knowing a few of the men and their stories, I know that there were truths about themselves that went undisclosed, truths that must be too hard for the self to bear, much less bring them to the gaze of new and untested relationships. But overall, the group created a safe space for disclosure of self, and was soon busily filling it.

The sowing in sharing of self soon brought reaping in the form of clear evidences of connection made, of bonding deepening. The men grew together, feeling themselves a kinship, a brotherhood, a kind of family. Marlon told his peers, "All of you are worth more than a worker. You can tell when you're around good people. It doesn't take long." Owen said much the same in his own words, "I value who you are, not what you are or do." In but six weeks, the bond is new and tender, but it is established. Alex shared that realism with the group at its last session: "Yes, we've bonded, perhaps not enough to call you up and hang out. But if I saw you on the street, I'd call out to you, and give you a bear hug and see how you're doing."

If the connection is made, we would look for empathy and relational support for one another. We found it. The men leaned forward, straining in their seats to hear, to understand, to enter into the skin and experience of the other. There were nods and knowing glances when Alex summed up how dispensable over-qualified workers like himself are, saying

"They want you young and cheap." There was compassion and caring for Jordan in being vacated from his youth pastorate, and encouragement, in speaking of the senior pastor who hustled him out, to "go ahead, make him look bad."

In that developing bond of connection, we would also find the candor to acknowledge unabashedly our loneliness and the healing salve that this new relationship represents. So Owen shares how "I became an island" of isolation and despair. And Marlon devoid of self-consciousness tells his colleagues, "You almost feel alone…work has been my existence, you feel isolated. I can't wait to come back to listen to you guys." Being candid also means beginning to challenge and call someone to account, beyond being constrained to do so in a group exercise. So Peter to Jordan, "You're not as happy as you could be." Or Alex to Peter, "You're the strong, silent type. You keep your emotions under wraps." Thus, there has been candor to be supported, and candor to be challenged.

One other indicator of the quality of interaction is all-important emotional expressiveness. Members increasingly shared a wide range of feelings spontaneously, without being prompted. These included feelings difficult to articulate or to receive---anger, fear, sadness, confusion, hurt. Sharing their feelings and affective life promoted their knowing and connecting with one another as fellow men whose experiences were not dissimilar, thus easing the sense of isolation and estrangement. Deep and even turbulent feelings were out of the gate from day one's sharing of core narratives. Peter's anger and Edward's tears especially had a galvanizing effect on the men, freeing and certifying for them that expression of feelings in the group would be acceptable, normative and encouraged. When a concluding summary was given that evening, about seeing ourselves as men differently, as vulnerable people with the capacity for deep feelings, heads nodded in

agreement. In successive sessions, feelings continued to tumble out: Jordan's tear-filled devastation in losing his ministry position and Owen's trek to Bear Mountain to scream and cry in solitude over his lost employment; impassioned anger from Alex over the abuse of his niece and Owen's over the autism of his son, and the moving tenderness each feels for these children; the numbness of shame and withdrawal when a wife says that you don't measure up, that "you're a loser." The group also revisited the emotions that had long been clamped down and gained insight into the mechanism of repression that had been operative in their lives; "we always had to be nice," Owen recalled, to which Peter glowered, "We were all brainwashed by our parents!" Much of the emotional expressiveness in the group was "free-floating," that is, emotions were *had*, expressed and put into words, without usually being connected to one of the men, to the interaction in the moment. Sometimes that did happen ("You really inspire me," was heard, though never "You really irritate me"). But generally, that kind of emotional engagement of one with the other, while it did take root, remained an area of development.

In summary, in terms of the quality and depth of their interaction, the men of the group came through these six weeks with greater introspection, more self-disclosure and evidences of real and deepening emotional connection with one another. This would indicate that the group methodology was reaching toward its aims of de-isolating and re-connecting and was having a positive impact on its members.

Another criterion of assessment was evidence of renewed spirituality and/or religious life. Was there a heightened awareness of creaturely life, of gratitude for the gifts of life, of wonder and joy? Were the men able to talk of the Sacred, the Holy, of their relationship with something greater than themselves? This men's group was not explicitly billed as a

spirituality group, although its sponsorship by the Lutheran Counseling Center, a faith-based agency, would infer that this important, indeed, all-encompassing dimension of life would not be sidelined in a ministry and service initiative aspiring to wholeness and well-being for its participants. And indeed, I believe that the men grasped the subtext running throughout the group's interaction, the underlying conviction that their spiritual welfare and psychological health are bound up together, that the life of the psyche and the life of the spirit are but two sides of the same coin, mutually interpenetrating and enlightening, two ways of speaking about what is, and what can be.

In that vein, the men shared their spiritual aspirations and religious practices and their effect on their lives and feelings, as well as conversely, the impact of their life circumstances and how they were living them out emotionally on their spirit. There was the sense of being embraced and sustained, as in Peter's comment that "We are held, we are not coincidence;" the sense that the unseen holds promise for what is seen. Different God-images were shared, and different approaches to the Being seen as transcendent and yet immanent marked out—some church-focused ("Yes, I'm a chronic Lutheran" chuckled Stewart), some not ("It's the only thing I knew," Marlon said of his traditional church upbringing, "but I'm just not there now"), suggesting disparate perspectives and major rifts in the making, if there had been time for their articulation and sufficient risk-taking to confront them. There was the desire, oft-expressed, to know a closer God, a divine Being who can "look like me and walk with me," like the father one never knew or the brother one aches now to find. And there were expressions of wonder and gratitude, as Owen's rhapsodic delight in and care for God's creation, and of joy, sheer and unadulterated joy in being and being-with (e.g., Marlon's words, "I have such joy being with you guys," taken up by several others). I believe that the

men were able to take in this group encounter, no doubt quite different than their Sunday service or Bible class religious experience, as a spiritual exercise for the whole man, opening up new vistas even as it shed transformative light on the more venerable, traditional aspects of their spiritual lives.

The final means of assessment was to look at receptivity to the group and to the possibility of its continuation. The first indicator was attendance. While no one dropped out of the group, attendance was mixed. Because of transferring the third session to a Wednesday evening, three men were absent (two had to work that night and Peter was laid up with severe back pain). The following session, one man missed, again because of work commitments; a week later, four were absent (one away at a funeral, one at a parent-teacher conference with his estranged wife, Peter with his lawyer in divorce court, and one who left no word), and the final session saw Marlon absent (working late, he thought the group would be continuing the following week). Absentees were enthusiastic in their comments about the group, and usually wanted to know what they had missed, but pleaded the burden of conflicting schedules. That there was no financial commitment to being in the group left a larger place, as in all voluntary associations, to this being not only optional, but a matter of personal commitment and motivation. “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is…” well, flesh.

A second indicator is feedback about the group, culled from check-in periods and random comments throughout the sessions. Here the appraisal was highly positive, and even, as indicated, enthusiastic. Marlon announced in the second session, “This week I actually looked forward to coming back here today, all week long I was thinking, I can’t wait to come back to listen to these guys.” Others concurred, extolling the group for its camaraderie, mutual support and accountability. Individual sessions and exercises were given the hands up

as “a really interesting discussion.” And in the final session’s review of the group, the men praised their experience as a first for them, of bonding with other men and finding affirmation and encouragement in mutual sharing of their lives. Several indicated that in their estimation the group had indeed gone “deep” in its exploring and connecting, while a few mildly dissented saying the group had done what it could in its six weeks.

Such comments led to a unanimous desire to see the group continue past its initial ministry project duration—a third and final area of receptivity to the group. Peter urged, “We could go deeper still…I don’t want the group to stop,” and Owen added, ”We’ve just scratched the surface.” Others announced that they would like a weekly meeting and would be willing to pay. It was decided to reconvene in the new year to discuss continuing the men’s group. Clearly, there was receptivity to the idea of men actively overcoming their isolation and sense of disconnection from one another by nourishing their lives together in some sort of ongoing meeting.

The assessment of outcomes reviewed above would indicate that the men’s group as group-of-the-whole is indeed an effective clinical ministry instrument to address male isolation and emotional disconnect through its generation of disclosure of self and relationship of self with others. What was the case for the group-at-large could also be seen in the impact of this group experience on its individual members. We turn now to some comments on individual experiences and outcomes observed in each of the group participants.

Alex

Alex is a 45-year old married mechanical engineer who shared with the group that he had been laid off three times in the last two years. In the pre-interview, he indicated his interest in an all-male group to help him evaluate what he wants since changing careers at his age is "frightening and full of the unknown," and the church prayer group just "turns into a women's help group." Alex was the first to self-disclose the first evening, and then and in subsequent sharing, he gave poignant details of a self-image somewhat awash with people's comments of "you'll find *something*," and awareness that employers "want 'em young and cheap." He felt the group's empathy and approached the others with very great empathy himself. He was the group's humorist, timing one-liners with a sarcastic twist, sometimes veering into the defensive. He was very clear about his own vulnerability, and could see it as a strength, yet he also seemed to want more of a male fierceness, especially as a certain inertia has set in with his role reversal of keeping house while his wife goes off to work. I saw Alex functioning as one of the more adult members of the group, tending toward Kegan's stage five maturity and Erickson's stage seven generativity. His selfobject needs center especially in finding a twin, a peer who can relate to his situation and aspirations: "you feel like you're misunderstood," he told me in the pre-interview. Alex has had several minor heart attacks which he chose not to share with the group; out of a "certain fear of looking at myself" was his comment when asked about this in the post-interview. He valued the group for its sharing of common experiences, of "seeing things through others' eyes," and for pointing him in the direction of greater spiritual exploration. He came away inspired to begin a men's group in his congregation, but also hopes that this original group can continue.

Edward

A legally-separated father of two sons, Edward is a 28-year old insurance adjustor with an entrepreneurial spirit and business orientation that was constantly on view in the group. He exhibited the traits of Levinson's young adult phase, seeking to be a self-directed person (agency rather than communion in Levinson's masculine-feminine polarity) and preoccupied with an inherently narcissistic "dream" of success and status. With this orientation, Edward gravitated quite readily to Peter, who shared his entrepreneurial drive but also his marital difficulties. Peter served him as a cautionary tale, not in the least in eschewing material success, but in assuring oneself of the "right" woman in whom to entrust it. Edward repeatedly spoke of this "wake-up call" in terms of dislodging the "wrong" wife, of making a clean break to move on, no doubt to assuage the deep hurt of his rejection by her. But his break has appeared anything but clean, and Edward looked forward to group as a way to "let out some stuff that I normally wouldn't with a bunch of guys" and to realize that he's not alone in his travail. Edward exhibited a kind of bravado and tolerable ego-centricity that endeared him to the others; he was unfazed at being the youngest, "because probably I have more experience than half of them." He ate up the affirmation offered him, and sought connection in sharing a lot about himself. I saw him as particularly needy, not as other-directed nor empathic, embedded, I believe, in his wishes and needs (Kegan's stage two) and with difficulty (or the years of growing to come) moving to be encased in and finally find a self in relationship. Edward poignantly searches for the father he never knew. With an Oedipal conflict well-nigh never begun much less resolved, he knows himself to be "a momma's boy" and "a sensitive guy," yet craves both selfobject mirroring of his manhood

and identification and merging with some model of ideal manhood. To a considerable degree he was receiving both from the group. Edward liked the unstructured nature of the group, and the fast-paced film clips; he also favored its overtly non-religious but spiritual cast. When there was cursing, he thought to himself, "oh, oh," only to reason that "that's how you know these people are real." Edward told me in the post-interview that he wrote and submitted a proposal for a men's group to his evangelical assembly; he's waiting to hear back on it.

Marlon

Slightly older than Edward, Marlon is a pastor's son and assistant principal at a charter school, from a family with deep roots in African-American Lutheranism. He was seen in marriage counseling with his wife, which he did not disclose to the group, after allegedly threatening to harm himself and being taken for observation at a local hospital, which he did disclose. His ego strength battered by this episode, Marlon looked eagerly to join other men to take stock of his self-identity and life. His selfobject needs were primarily for a twinship connection, someone, anyone who could know what it is to teach and administer in a school in these times. If no one could understand, the agony, but also the glory of it all remains his and his alone, but that only compounds the solitary road he has taken. Marlon got a sympathetic ear, but not necessarily the understanding he sought (a few wondered why he had to miss the last session for work commitments). Marlon's Oedipal identification with his pastor-father was quasi-total ("he was the Law, mom was the Gospel"), but now he finds himself reconsidering his inherited spirituality and seeking to broaden his horizons. In this he was at odds with Stewart, of whom he saw in retrospect that "we'd butt heads…we have different views…he wears his Lutheranism on his sleeve." I saw Marlon moving to Fowler's

stage four Individuative-Reflective faith, taking responsibility for his own commitments and beliefs, weighing self-actualization with service to others. As for others of the group, “the guy with the laser” (Peter) provided the “wow factor,” and Marlon found himself with “pure and unadulterated empathy” with what he was going through. He has resolved not to let work dictate his life, as it had previously, and came away seeing himself better as “a feeling person.” His initial misgivings about the age differences in the group were resolved as he heard different perspectives and the “wisdom of the elders.” He saw interaction overcoming some of his sense of isolation; it has helped him be a better listener which in turn has been helping his marriage. Marlon advised that he would like to host the continuation of the men’s group at his home congregation.

Owen

Owen is a 54-year old hospital administrator, married and the father of three sons. He has been in individual therapy for some time, and recently began marriage counseling with his wife at the Center. He hinted passive-aggressively and with thinly-disguised humor at his deep frustration with a domineering wife who belittles his decisions, and his own dissatisfaction at his increasing withdrawal and isolation. A lonely man with only his youngest, a non-verbal pre-teen with autism, at home, he wanted to be in the company of men who can talk and share fresh perspectives. He shared his upbringing with a strict father and a dominant mother, suggesting an incomplete Oedipal resolution and a shaky identification with the father; Owen gave off veiled references to an ambivalent sexuality, topped off with repeated favorite lines from Doris Day (none of the men went there). His selfobject needs to identify and merge with ideal male types were satisfied in part with Peter,

Alex and Marlon; his selfobject needs to be mirrored and admired moreso by Stewart and myself. Owen showed passion and strength of character in talking of his work with autism associations and the impact of his cancer on his life, and received much affirmation from his peers. He thoroughly enjoyed the group, never missing a session and often lingering afterwards to talk some more (his transference to me as leader-pastor-counselor was pronounced).

Peter

Peter was, as noted previously, a key galvanizer of the group process of personal disclosure and empathic response, but, as became evident in the post-interview, largely unaware at the time of the impact he was having on others. Fifty-nine and the operator of a cleaning service for 32 years, Peter's wife left him a year ago, and he was anxious to be in a group to get a handle on his distress, releasing his emotions and finding "something substantial and meaningful in my life." Aware of his anger issues, he also wanted to relate better to others. Peter was thoroughly embedded in Kegan's stage three: his identity was bound up with the relationship; if it floundered, so would he. It was not sure that the empathy and affirmation directed his way by the group ultimately altered that reality. The group, he mused in the post-interview, was effective but probably moreso for the others, since "I was so lost with this Janet [his wife] thing." He was shocked that others saw him playing a major role, as shared in the last session. There was some *Schadenfreude* among his group colleagues ("there but for the grace of God go I"), but there was also admiration of his strength carved out in vulnerability to go on. As much as Peter served as an ideal selfobject in that strength, he himself sought a twinship selfobject, summed up in his plaintive inquiry,

"What of me, I'm adopted?" Stewart's response to his "I'm erased!" in the first session ("No you're not! You're here! She's erased!") had a huge impact on him. He came to see a more positive side of himself through the affirmation that came his way. He had felt the first night that "this will flop, no one will talk…this ain't going to go…because of the black guys," but came to see how foolish his thoughts were, especially as "the black guys opened up more than me." Peter, too, saw this connection and relationship-building as just a beginning, "it was great but we needed more." In the meantime, he has been inspired to look into pursuing a two-year course as a minister.

Jordan

Jordan, 30 years old, the estranged husband of a wife and father of a little daughter, sought fellowship and consolation to combat the terrible isolation he felt as his marriage went downhill and the added shame of losing his youth pastorate position due to his marital difficulties. Jordan was very open and eager to self-disclose, very affirming in his responses to his peers, and very willing to please (he invariably picked up my thought and ran with it). But he also gained experience in staking out his own position, in disagreeing, in being himself, without violation or destruction of the connection and relationship. I saw him moving out from an embeddedness in relationship, Kegan's stage three interpersonalism, to move toward a self that could have relationships. The selfobject functions supplied in group—the affirmative mirroring of being good at what he does (a recurring theme for Jordan), the admiration of the masculine strength and loyalty to be emulated, and the twin disciple of the Lord to understand and walk with him---helped inch him toward that emergence. In revisiting his family of origin in his self-disclosure, Jordan was helped to be

able to feel his true feelings, while yet being held by the hand of Promise. He was the dutiful son of the missing father, who had projected so much of his need and desire on to a heavenly Father, in whose obedience he found purpose and respite in his personal hell. In his relationships in the group, Jordan was finding that ultimate relationship rendered close and caring. With considerable passion, Jordan was preparing through these connections the self that could return to his marriage and to his ministry.

Stewart

At 60, the eldest in the group, Stewart, an engineer and twice divorced, is also the son of a pastor. His Oedipal resolution of identification with the father appears complete and unyielding; to this day, as evident in his group sharing, he excuses him for the precious little time that he spent with him. Stewart disclosed much about his journey, in his rambling, reflective manner—his upbringing, his concern for son and grandson, his painful first divorce (as there was much he would not risk sharing at this stage—"I held back," he allowed in the post-group interview---his problem drinking, his sense of uselessness at his employment, his girlfriend). The sharing that he did do brought him the group's attention and affirmation, though not as much as he needs. His selfobject needs to be mirrored, approved and soothed were addressed in part, but he cannot always hear or feel such acceptance as authentic. In true Lutheran fashion, Stewart's struggle is essentially within, dominated by a super-ego in overdrive. From the stern father Stewart has derived the relatively stern God. For all Stewart's talk of tradition and right doctrine—which made him Marlon's secret nemesis—it is law and demand, not gospel promise that leads, and one could say, haunts him. "The loving Father, gee, I don't know that the image ever really came through for me," he

concedes in session five. And when he vents his contempt on the godless, the atheist, he is struck by Owen's response of compassion for them, and suddenly feels close to him. Approaching Erickson's generativity, with his concern for the generation to come, Stewart oscillated between Kegan's stages two and five, embedded in the repressed wish and need for time with dad and yet able to be the self that could freely and willingly surrender itself in service. He rendered service of empathic attunement in the group, especially identifying with the "genuine bitterness" of Peter and the unemployment doldrums of fellow engineer Alex. In the post-interview, Stewart recounted a dream that suggests the framework of law and judgment in which he is embedded, as well as the unconditional love he can feel for the accused—in this dream, his own son—that he has difficulty applying to himself: His son was being sentenced to die by hanging, when suddenly "he bolted, he disappeared, I knew not why. And I broke down in tears." A troubling dream, but one that suggests that this son will have out of an imprisoning, deadening legalism, a release that Stewart, too, in his lonely, self-accusing interior, unconsciously seeks in stepping into this group to relate and to love and to be loved..

We can now summarize in observing that in the sessions as well as in the post-group interviews, each of the men spoke of relationships that had begun for them with the others in the group: men who had caught their attention, who inspired them or troubled them, who made them laugh or cry, whom they had learned from or given to, who encouraged them and sometimes challenged them, men whom they liked, or in a few cases, disliked. Each was a connection of some sort that had in effect called them, if only for a time, out of their habitual disconnection. The extent of this connecting was neither uniform for all of the men nor

necessarily permanent in its impact for any of them. Nevertheless, throughout the life of the group, connection was made and relationships were begun for each of them. Trust in one another progressively developed, and with it, a greater degree of self-disclosure on the part of each, which led to a shared experience, a mutuality of greater recognition of one another, of affirmation and encouragement. A bond was developing. And this experience of bonding, of opening up oneself and relating to another, pushed back the confines of their usual isolation, allowing them a new stance, a new perspective from which to learn to know themselves and grow in their self-awareness. The results observed for the individual men correlated with those of the group which they formed. With these results at hand, assessed by the criteria which we set forth, we are now in a position to verify our working hypothesis, that a men's group does indeed lessen isolation and promote personal and spiritual development.

CHAPTER FIVE:

DISCUSSION

In light of the foregoing assessment of outcomes, indicating that the men's group realized significant accomplishment in the extent and depth of its interaction, with considerable evidence of personal self-disclosure, bonding and emotional expressiveness as well as spiritual awareness and embrace of the group's existence and purpose—and this both within the group-as-a-whole and on the level of its individual participants-- endorsement of the men's group as a means to alleviate male isolation and disconnection is now possible.

Our working hypothesis as initially formulated held that "because men are socialized in our culture to become providers, independent and self-sufficient, they become increasingly isolated in their adult lives, which in turn leads to an increasing degree of spiritual barrenness; by its structure and intent, the men's group is a de-isolating mechanism, in which by a contagion factor men's discovery that other men share similar experiences and feelings precipitates progressively greater degrees of trust, self-disclosure, mutuality and affirmation that significantly lessen isolation and its obstacles to personal and spiritual development." Several aspects of the hypothesis, illumined by the project outcomes, now merit attention.

Our starting point was the recognition of male disconnect and isolation; this was the need that the ministry project sought to address. While a number of factors were seen as

contributing to chronic male isolation, the key element highlighted by the hypothesis is the socialization that the male receives to become the provider, the gender that "brings home the bacon." Males are socialized to do, to make something, to work, produce, compete, and succeed, for this translates as survival and security for the family. This focus on work and the provision it garners comes at the price of relegating the affect and emotional presence to far less importance; "boys don't cry" or express fear, sadness or even joy because they have work to do, they are raised to take initiative and be independent, self-controlled and self-sufficient. The men spoke often about the incessant expectations of providing for their loved ones and their own inner compulsion to satisfy these responsibilities; they grew in awareness of how they were raised to fulfill these expectations. In that sense, male isolation as a learned, socialized behavior is a testimony to the incredible power of the Oedipal resolution; the male child identifies with the father, emulating his work ethic but also what accompanies it, his emotional absence. Chodorow's analysis is compelling: the emotional distance of the working father, which parallels his physical absence, is passed on to the son.[94] The personal narratives of several of the men attested to the fact that this absence of the working father has degenerated in our times into the wholesale disappearance of the father, with no male emotional modeling even possible, given the prevalence of single-female parent families.

The restrictive emotionality in which the male is socialized exacerbates his isolation, and that isolation in turn hampers any semblance of optimal emotional development, in an endless vicious circle of increasing psychic desperation and spiritual anomie. The qualities considered "masculine," that men are socialized to favor and exhibit in the public sphere—rationality, control, competitiveness—disempower him in the area of relationality and

[94] Balswick, 139.

spirituality. The model of an all-men's group provided a secure place, a haven akin to Winnicott's "holding environment" in which other qualities considered "feminine" yet within the range of masculine human nature could make their appearance, be safely expressed and nurtured (e.g., emotional expression, caring and warmth, culminating in the demonstrative affection of last session's hugs). Edward captured the relief and exhilaration of emotions long repressed being released, legitimated and encouraged, when he confided how good it felt to "let out some stuff that I normally wouldn't with a bunch of guys." It was Edward who first shed tears at the first session, bringing to mind Keen's observation that "since boys are taught not to cry, men must learn to weep…the path of a manly heart runs through a valley of tears."[95]

Levinson considered that men approaching middle adulthood would seek to resolve what he termed the masculine-feminine polarity, becoming more accepting of their "feminine" side. They would begin to question gender stereotypes, admitting, at least to themselves, their irrelevance to understanding of who they are, and growing more accepting of their own vulnerability, need for security and capacity for deep emotion.[96] Such reconsideration of supposedly "feminine" qualities, though not always explicitly named as such, was in evidence in the group. It allowed the men to break through the "double bind" that keeps isolated men from reaching out for help, in reasoning that if a man were strong and dispassionate he *wouldn't* ask for help. This in itself was quite an achievement. Reaching the threshold to be more fully what one is, whatever genderal label might be applied, overthrew

[95] Keen, 135.
[96] Capps, "Pastoral Counseling for Middle Adults," 223.

much clinical wisdom which had insisted that by adulthood, the male role (i.e, traditionally-defined male role) was inviolate.[97]

The key engine driving these changes, and central to the group as a de-isolating mechanism is what the hypothesis calls the "contagion factor" operative within it--that of men discovering in the telling of one another's stories that they are not alone in their experiences and feelings, that others share similar experiences and feelings. The men found common ground, first in the shared woes of financial pressures, employment issues and marital problems, then in uncovering and re-thinking the societal conceptions of male identity which lay beneath these woes and in which they had been socialized. Emboldened to disclose their own story, their own self, the men entered into a progressively greater connection with other men who will hear and tell, a deepening relationship marked by trust, mutuality and affirmation, as well as ongoing self-disclosure, that effectively attenuates the condition of isolation and estrangement that previously prevailed. This contagion factor was certainly at work in the men's group, where Peter first galvanized the men with his very real and frank avowal of a problem that several others could relate to, emotionally as well as cognitively, that being marital difficulties and the threat of marital dissolution. He was followed by others, emboldened to "come clean" and experience the relief of disclosing their "deep, dark secret," their life problem or concern; at the same time earmarking out for yet others the opportunity to see their problem in someone else, and knowing that in some way

[97] Kenneth Solomon, "The Masculine Gender Role" in Men in Transition: Theory and Therapy, Kenneth Solomon and Norman B. Levy, eds. (New York: Plenum, 1982), 58, argues that "By adulthood, the role is integrated so thoroughly, with constant reinforcement from society (through peers, spouse, superiors, the media, advertising, and entertainment, among other ways), that it is virtually impossible for the man to make any changes in the dimensions of the masculine role unless he is willing to experience conflict, confusion, anxiety and social sanctions."

they were no longer alone with it. In this way, through this primary connection, relationship was being built between men and a confraternity of care for one another was being developed. The promise of hope and healing was implanted in the heart and psyche, and it could shed its light abroad to penetrate every crevice of darkness and distress in a human life. No longer hollow men, "tough on the outside but empty within,"[98] these men could be filled with the affirming bond of relationship with those like them, of like gender, as a prelude to renewed and transformed relationships with women and with all.

Thus our working hypothesis can be confirmed. Male isolation is lessened through the modality of a men's group, opening the way for increased personal and spiritual development. And cognizant of these ultimate consequences—of unprecedented growth and the surge of the spirit--the men's group entailed what can rightly be referred to as a "pilgrimage," a questing journey of the self, solitary, yes, in a sense yet lonely no more since taken together with other questing selves in a special kind of seeing and knowing relationship, a special kind of bond. It embodies the paradox which Keen peers into when he writes that "we cannot forget our self until we have remembered it…that only when we come to a sense of self-awareness and self-acceptance can we be self-forgetting and spontaneous."[99] This is a pilgrimage which turns its face toward the maturity of Kegan's stage five, the interindividual, where one truly has a self, a self to share, to give; toward Fowler's conjunctive and on to universalizing faith, where the self, self-possessed yet self-surrendering, shows forth the very image of the Holy and leans into the grand and all-encompassing future of God for all being. This is the call to be a man, the call to be human, the spirit that animated and blessed this men's group, as it has many others.

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[98] Keen, 139.
[99] Ibid., 151.

THEOLOGICAL AND CLINICAL PRINCIPLES REVIEWED

Some comments on the theological and clinical principles presented earlier follow, in the light of the process and outcomes of the ministry project:

This ministry project certainly gave credence to the theological principle that we are created for relationship, as this was unmistakably borne out by the deep yearning of the men for contact, association and conversation. Indeed, "it is not good for the man to be alone," yet despite the original intent of this scripture to refer to the martial bond, it is evident from this project that the man's loneliness and isolation must also be alleviated by other men or a group of men; for is not wise to expect the sole relationship with the spouse to provide all that the man needs psychically and spiritually for growth and wholeness..

The theological principle of the primacy of promise, of grace, over law and demand does not preclude exercising accountability and insisting on each assuming his responsibility within the group (attendance, participation, investment). Such accountability need not compromise the desired hospitality, warmth and acceptance. A useful parallel can be made between the group contract and the biblical covenant.

Developmental stage theories, it is best to remember, paint with broad strokes in attempting to describe periods of human development (including faith development as in Fowler's faith stages); they can never englobe all the many variables of the human individual, and provide but a picture in time, as the individual is constantly developing. Much like the DSM diagnostic tool, they are useful for consulting, but they cannot capture the individual whom we must not lose from sight.

The theological principle of the "Body," the great scriptural metaphor for community, can certainly be viewed as a given (descriptive), but in retrospect, it is also a matter of

growing the body, of its development (prescriptive). Growth is neither automatic nor assured, prompting us to ask ourselves, in the community, in the group, what promotes growth and health and what doesn't. In that sense, the body remains very dynamic (and a good "fit" to illuminate the group process). Applying the "Body" to help define the men's group is somewhat paradoxical, however, because the metaphor describes the church, but the men's group as symbolic of men's ministries and men's place in the church, is on the margins of the church, awaiting entry and full inclusion. Sometimes the place of growth is on the margins.

Servant leadership is not a substitute for group leadership skills, but should include them, as the development of men's ministry groups is contemplated.

The importance of the Oedipal complex and its resolution, as noted previously, cannot be overestimated. Yet insight into the Oedipal dynamic alone does not necessarily bring change or transformation; the insight must be brought into the group and be "communicated" and assimilated through the relationships between the group members.

Concerning selfobject functioning, the group as modality unleashes the power of multiple selfobjects for each individual through the relationships in the group, intensifying mirroring, idealizing and merging, and twining. The benefit of empathic attunement to the person's selfobject needs is multiplied—as seen, for example, in the accompaniment and consensual validation given Peter (primarily mirroring) and Edward (primarily the multiple idealized selfobjects of the men)--but so, too, can the deficit provoked by empathic failures.

Kegan's theory of human development, with its sequence of embeddedness and ever new balances of amplified self and object worlds, provided an excellent resource to think about how each group member's construction of the self was active in their

participation, and how to contact and respond to that particular self. That the theory encompasses both the individual's longing for inclusion and independence, for autonomy and communion, and can anticipate their progressive and eventual integration, remains its strong, groundbreaking asset among developmental theories. The theory could be expanded to address the infinitely rich context, or "self-environment," of group and group process. I saw this men's group, for example, operating as a group primarily out of Kegan's stage three interpersonalism, where the self, and here, I mean the "group self" as well as the individual selves contributing to this group entity that is larger than itself and more than the sum of its parts, is "embedded" in relationship. The danger, or developmental immobility, at that stage is that the group, and the members through it, gain relationship but not the self; they do not *have* a relationship, but *are* the relationship (and this, seen in the preponderance of second polarity selfobject functioning, the merging dynamic, as well as in the unruffled cordiality of the group experience that steered clear of anger and conflict). As the group evolved further, beyond our six sessions, it might have emerged from its embeddedness in "relationship" to be a group-as-a-whole that *has* a relationship---a coherent, cohesive communal entity able to examine its interactions with other group selves (including church and Counseling Center) --- rather than *is* one. Greater awareness of the development of the group self in contradistinction to the individual "selves in group," and their mutual impact upon each other, shapes up as the next frontier in melding stage developmental and group theories.

As a final reflection, the power of the group to generate the kind of multi-relationality that re-presents life has been noted. If re-creation of the hearth, to invoke Keen's image, was an intent in organizing the group, means might have been found to "turn up the heat" in that hearth, moving more swiftly to a fuller exchange of feelings, especially "difficult"

interpersonal feelings of anger and conflict. That some of the men have been in therapy was no guarantee of fuller emotional expression;[100] the group was "forming" and skittishly "norming," and would not risk its new-found ebullience with "storming." All of this puts a premium on sound and skilled group facilitation.

MINISTRY RELEVANCE

Conduct of this men's group has confirmed for me the importance of this ministry modality in addressing the clinical and spiritual needs of a largely under-served and neglected population in our religious institutions, that of the male membership and the male community in general. What I anticipated as its relevance for ministry to this gender demographic in my earlier statements can now only be stressed even more, in light of the experience vetted in this demonstration project. Men are indeed desirous of a ministry opportunity to deal with their existential pain, to grow in their awareness of self and aspire to psychic and spiritual growth, and to understand themselves as men in the company of men. And men are open to an atypical and novel approach to meeting their needs for self-scrutiny and spiritual renewal such as a men's group offers, where incessant doing, endless activity pursued in relative silence and solitude yields to a gathering where men can sit and talk and just be. And in doing so, as this project's confirmation of our hypothesis of the group's efficacy has shown, the group is a modality that does counter and diminish male isolation, enabling men through relationship with one another to pursue fresh insights and initiatives for personal and spiritual development.

[100] Keen, 110, observes that "if therapy has re-introduced some men to their feelings, it seems to have encapsulated them in privacy."

The enthusiasm of the men in this group to see ministries geared to men in their own congregations—and their readiness to propose and work toward their realization—underscores both the critical need for, and the openness on the part of men, to such ministries. Congregations need to attend to their male members, not only to address and stem the troubling phenomenon of "male flight," but to be congruent with their own purpose and identity as religious organizations bearing spiritual support and human succor to all, male and female alike. And the men's group is a highly reproducible modality for ministry. It is feasible for the local congregation or for several congregations together, or again, for local agencies of religious judicatories, such as community or counseling centers. The need for group leadership can be met initially by clergy or capable lay people, with the kind of training in group process and skilled facilitation needed over time provided locally or in the larger community.

Grappling with men and church, Culbertson remarks that "for many men in the church today, no place seems predictably safe. Sometimes it feels like the only place left for us is in the margins."[101] This men's group, like most that have appeared within the men's movement over the years, could be said to have come into being and operated at the margins of the church, beyond the four walls of any congregation, in an agency perhaps more open to and risking of men's needs. Yet it is time to bring those margins fully into the church or religious institution, into its priorities for ministry, into its awareness and response to the special needs and aspirations of its male constituency. The men's group can represent a sign and witness of commitment to those needs and aspirations in a new way. It can be the locus, as bell hooks writes, where

[101] Culbertson, xi.

"…we are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world."[102]

The men's group, by its ability to supplant isolation and disconnection by relationship and new and unprecedented growth, can be that "radical creative space" which congregations and religious institutions of every faith tradition offer to men in their midst.

QUO VADIS?

Developing and implementing this ministry project has had a tremendous impact on me personally and professionally, with very significant implications for my immediate and future ministry. The men's group at the heart of this project will reconvene shortly, as agreed upon, to make plans to continue the group through the auspices of the Lutheran Counseling Center. Additionally, I will be consulting with several of the group members about men's ministry initiatives, including formation of other men's groups, in their local congregations. And I now plan to begin a parish men's group in my own congregation, focusing on young adult men (20 to 40 years of age) whose needs to overcome isolation and examine self and identity seem particularly pressing at this time.

Out of this experience, both in the reading and writing and consulting with professional colleagues, and in the actual ministry of working with the group and interfacing with the men, I have come to the decision to pursue men's ministry and men's issues as a special focus of my work as a counselor and pastoral psychotherapist at the Counseling Center. This will no doubt entail additional training, and certainly continuing education in group leadership and facilitation. I am thankful for what the men of this first men's group

[102] bell hooks, Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics. (Boston: South End Press, 1990), 153.

have taught me. And I look forward, as a person and professional of male gender, to future growth in this ministry--- in the company of men and brothers, becoming more ourselves--- men, human beings, creatures, with those of our twin gender, in the very image of God, moving imperceptibly forward in spirit and in light.

My eyes already touch the sunny hill,
going far ahead of the road I have begun.
So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp;
it has its inner light, even from a distance---

and changes us, even if we do not reach it,
into something else, which, hardly sensing it, we
already are;
a gesture waves us on, answering our own wave…
but what we feel is the wind in our faces.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Appendix A

New Group for Men Now Forming!

TALKING THROUGH TOUGH TIMES

A Recession-Era Men's Group

an opportunity for men to talk about where they are in this economy in turmoil and in their lives

six sessions

beginning Tuesday, October 20, 2009

7:00-8:30 p.m.

About the Group

Many men have been hit hard by our troubled economy, finding themselves out of work or under-employed, losing their homes or even their families. These tough times underscore the special pressures and challenges of being a man in today's world. Many are sensing that the Marlboro Man or the Lone Ranger just won't cut it anymore, that the traditional American model of what it means to be a man could use an overhaul. With the help of some classic film clips, group participants will gather to talk about their lives, experience connection with other men and find support and solidarity.

Facilitator

Rev. David Elseroad is now in his eighth year with the Center as a pastoral counselor and licensed marriage and family therapist. He is completing his doctorate in pastoral counseling at the Post-graduate Center for Mental Health and Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion in Manhattan.

Presented by the Lutheran Counseling Center at

132 Jefferson Avenue

(corner of Willis Avenue, two blocks south of Jericho Turnpike)

Mineola, New York

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO REGISTER

Please call the Center office (516-741-0994)

or Pastor Elseroad (917-757-4749)

This group is made possible in part by a generous gift from

The Good Shepherd Fund, Good Shepherd Lutheran Church, Plainview, New York

Appendix B

TEXT OF READINGS AT EACH SESSION

Session One

"It is clear to men that the images of adult manhood given by the popular culture are worn out; a man can no longer depend on them. By the time a man is thirty-five he knows that the images of the right man, the tough man, the true man which he received in high school do not work in life. Such a man is open to new visions of what a man is or could be."

---Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book About Men*, page ix.

Session Two

"We all know the excruciating pain of discovering that the work has drained us so much that we do not have energy or goodwill or even interest left over for the things we once said were more important than the work. The means have swallowed up the ends. We still *say* that these other goals of life are more important than our work. But, in fact, our behavior says loud and clear that we have come to give the work itself the highest priority, and this priority of work over life takes on a life of its own and keeps growing, snowballing, smothering the life some remnant longing in us still yearns for. This discovery, when we face up to it, is one kind of sour grief. A man discovers all too readily and all too painfully that the work is taking over. The work is not working for him. He is working for the work. It does not get him where he is going after work, but leaves him stranded at work. Work turns out to be not so much the way to a richer life as what gets in the way of a richer life.

Even more painful and less well recognized than grief for after-work goals, the extrinsic payoffs, may be grief for the at-work, on-the-job goals, the intrinsic payoffs. Here, too, work that promises to lead to a richer life takes over and gets in the way of that richer life, sabotaging it. This is less easy to admit because it is more painful, more humiliating, a more sour form of grief. One can feel foolish, victimized for being caught in this trap. And no man wants to feel foolish or victimized. It means he has lost control over his destiny; he has lost manhood. But, admitted or not, the pain is deep and gnawing."

---James Dittes, *Men at Work*, pages 30-31.

"Work lures us and fixes us with this same seductive tease. The daily job, the lifetime career, seems to promise to welcome you, to you a place, a chance to make a difference and to be effective, to be in the center of the action, to be a vital and important person connected with others. So too with working as a life-style, as a way of living, as a way of loving and parenting and playing and worshiping; working at being father, husband, citizen, seems to provide the way to a guaranteed welcome among family and friends, to make a difference and be effective in these relationships, to be in the center of the action, to be a vital and important person connected with others. Doing becomes the way to be. Doing a job, doing it well, doing good, performing, managing and maneuvering, analyzing and solving, working—that's the good life, the way to contentment. This is the wisdom we have accepted, largely unexamined, and pass on to each other, passing it on more fervently when we have doubts. This is the life we have committed ourselves to, so it must be right."

---James Dittes, *Men At Work*, pages 41-42

"A man expects his work to be the main arena in which he will exercise some power, have some control. When he finds he is, instead, being controlled, something important to his manhood feels violated, depleted. The experience must help a man understand how a woman feels when raped. Only the man's experience is much milder—or is it? Something absolutely fundamental to his own sense of manhood-that indefinable sense of having initiative and control over his own destiny and the destiny of others—is preempted, commanded by others without his choice, and of course he feels depleted, limp, drained, used up, abused, owned, used."

---James Dittes, *Men At Work*, pages 38-39

Session Three

"I was given a picture of the man I was supposed to be---cooperative, in touch with my feelings, and sensitive to the feelings of others. So I rejected the "John Wayne" model, but I noticed an odd trend—I had women friends, but no dates. Most women I knew were going out with men who were like the 'Duke'—harder, more self-assured, and sometimes more stubbornly aggressive than I was. What I was calling a "sensitive man" was really a passive-aggressive man, who didn't say what he felt, didn't take a stand, and said yes when he really meant no. My marriage and the birth of my son backed me even further into a corner. I started looking for a better way. I did not want my son to grow up with out a strong father figure. Before I had looked to women to define my maleness. Now I began to search out other men. It was then that I discovered the powerful, masculine force that is with me, and within all males. Left unattended, it can be destructive; nurtured to maturity, it gives life. The turning point for me was when my therapist, Dr. Gary Jordan, said, "Don, this is what

it's like to be a man." I was shocked. Here was a man who believed that men have unique challenges—to be strong and sensitive, and to act on what they feel is right."

---Don Elium and Jeanne Elium, *Raising A Son*, page 7

Session Four

"Eventually, a boy must internalize his father's world, too. In our culture this process can begin at sixteen or seventeen and last until age twenty-eight or older. The son germinates the seeds of self-worth and self-understanding that time with his father planted within him. But one man is not enough to satisfy the drive of a boy's soul, so, with his father's help, he must cross over into the world at large. There he meets older men who help him further discover the many possibilities of his destiny as a man."

---Don Elium and Jeanne Elium, *Raising A Son*, pages 24-25

Session Five

"A dialogue between a recent convert and an unbelieving friend:

> "So you have been converted to Christ?"
>
> "Yes."
>
> "Then you must know a great deal about him. Tell me: What country was he born in?"
>
> "I don't know."
>
> What was his age when he died?"
>
> "I don't know."
>
> "How many sermons did he preach?"

"I don't know."

"You certainly know very little for a man who claims to be converted to Christ!"

"You are right. I am ashamed at how little I know about him. But this much I do know: Three years ago I was a drunkard. I was in debt. My family was falling to pieces. My wife and children would dread my return home each evening. But now I have given up drink; we are out of debt; ours is now a happy home. All this Christ has done for me. This much I know of him!"

To really know. That is, to be transformed by what one knows.

---Anthony de Mello, *The Song of the Bird*, page 112

Session Six

"The only sex-irreducible male function is that of impregnation; whatever else we consider male is sex-derivative or perhaps merely sex-arbitrary. All male roles, except the male sex role, can be performed by women as well, or by some women, at any rate; and to that extent a man is nothing special, or even largely superfluous, since his sex role, while essential, takes up such a minute part of his life…whereas a man at all times, though much more today tha n in the past, must prove to himself and others the worthwhileness, usefulness, and indispensability of his existence. A man there, more than a woman, has always been and is today in *quest of a meaning.*

---Wolfgang Lederer, *Counterepilogue, Men in Transition: Theory and Therapy*, page 477

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