

Illuman's participation in a recent retreat held by Gender Equity & Reconciliation International

By Terry Symens-Bucher, Illuman President



In last month's Drumbeat, I spoke of a retreat focused on transformational healing and reconciliation between women and men that I would be attending on behalf of Illuman. Near the end of that retreat, hosted by Gender Equity & Reconciliation International (GERI) from February 9–12, eighteen men faced seventeen women, all leaders of men's and women's groups and nonprofits working with gender issues. The men's group included leadership from Illuman and ManKind Project; imams, pastors and other religious leaders; spiritual directors; financial managers; and leaders of international nonprofits. Facing these women, who had deeply shared their painful experiences of being a woman in patriarchal systems, the men had written and now spoke aloud the following:

For the times we have not seen you, I AM SORRY.

For the times we suppressed your voice, I AM SORRY.

For the violence perpetrated against you and our complicity with it, I AM SORRY.

For the times we have turned away when you suffered injustice, I AM SORRY.

For the times we haven't honored your bodies, your minds, or your spirits, I AM SORRY.

For the times we didn't value or undervalued your talents and the unique gifts you bring to the world, I AM SORRY.

This sorrow was founded upon Truth Mandalas held separately by each group—men speaking to men about the anger, emptiness, shame, fear, and grief they carry as men. The women carried on their own process in a separate space. Then we came together in Truth Forums which were set up as fishbowl councils—the inner circle of women first surrounded by the outer circle of men. The women spoke of their experience as women in society, church,

business, school, family, etc. From what they heard in that sharing, the men met together and agreed upon personal, shared commitments. Those commitments were spoken aloud to the women as each group faced the other:

1. I (we) commit to ask women about their experience—to ask again, and again, knowing some things are very hard to talk about at first.
2. I (we) commit to listen deeply, with an open heart, without interrupting, and to believe what I am (we are) hearing.
3. I (we) commit to speak with and to confront other men who are engaged in disrespectful or abusive behavior toward women or girls.
4. I (we) commit to teaching young boys that a single hurtful act or word can injure a woman for her entire lifetime.
5. I (we) commit to continue my (our) personal learning for gender equity and reconciliation.

I also left the retreat with commitments to continue the conversation and collaboration with leaders of ManKind Project: to explore ways we can collaborate in helping men become better men, to address the toxic masculinity that is endemic to growing up as a man in our current culture, and to deconstruct the patriarchal system that creates that toxic masculinity, wounds so many men in their experience with other men, and wounds so many of our wives, mothers, sisters, daughters, and friends.

Learn more about Illuman at illuman.org.