

# Creating a Level Playing Field: How Men Embrace Brotherhood

By John K. Davis and Dick Michaels

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A common core element of successful men's groups is a spirit of brotherhood (or "brothering") shared among the participants. This sense of being deeply connected with one another can transform the lives of men involved with the group.

But in Western culture, and American culture in particular, men are usually taught to measure their worth by their performance effectiveness. Thus, we often see other men as competitors, perhaps on a playing field that seems inherently tilted against us.

More and more men are growing dissatisfied with this culturally imposed framework. The men's movement in all its forms can be seen as an effort to encourage men to move from cold objectivity and isolation to an awareness of warmer, subjective reality where close friendships flourish.

The hunger for a more connected community of men is emerging in a few Unitarian Universalist congregations and events. Still, when we find a UU setting where men are involved with each other, formally or informally, they are most often engaged in problem-solving in some way. For instance, men come together to paint the building, raise funds with a pancake breakfast, etc. We suspect many of the men in these settings want to move beyond ego, to develop a different way of being with one another, but a group formed primarily to complete a task represents a result-oriented process. Reward in this context comes from good performance, and the traditional male role is sustained.

A non-competitive way for men to be together to share deeply with one another is the theme of

## *A Community of Men:*

*A Guide to Men's Programming in Unitarian Universalist Congregations.*

This resource, published by the UU Men's Network (UUMeN), is available free to UUMeN members, or for a suggested \$5 donation for non-members. Areas covered in the 50-page booklet include:

- Creative ways to structure men's groups;
- How to use consensus process to minimize competition among participants;
- Honoring confidentiality and a right to reticence; and
- Modeling authentic leadership, by taking risks and listening without critique.

Men can do social justice work, raise financial contributions, even paint buildings in this expanded context, and the hook is *brothering*, more than completion of the job (although that's usually still important, too). When the goal is to establish a level playing field, where egos are kept in check and brothering relationships are nurtured, men can find a new way of being in the world: speaking truth, honoring vulnerability, revealing inner thoughts.

Programs for men in UU churches that encourage this way of being can change men. And changing men can change the world!

A partial listing of other UUMeN resources is included on page 2.

## A Partial Listing of UUMeN Resources

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### *New Men-Deeper Hungers*

Tom Owen-Towle's reissued book (now with a built-in study guide) has clear essays and questions showing the way, for individuals and groups, toward mature masculinity marked by flexibility, firmness, pain and depth.

### *FatherLoss: How sons of all ages come to terms with the deaths of their dads*

Neil Chethik's affirming resource for men dealing with the loss of their father, or other significant death in their life.

### *A Community of Men: A Guide to Men's Programming in Unitarian Universalist Congregations*

A helpful booklet about creating men's programming, produced especially for UU settings.

### *Toward A Revolutionary Manifesto*

Tom Owen-Towle's inspiring and pioneering statement that helped launch UUMeN almost ten years ago.

### *An Annotated Bibliography of Men's Movement Literature*

Collected and reviewed by Daniel Ó Connell.

### *Men's Spirituality*

A new curriculum by Daniel Ó Connell, currently being field-tested.

### *MaleCall*

Back issues of our quarterly periodical.

### *Award-winning sermons, reflection papers, and how-to articles on subjects relating to men.*

John K. Davis lives in San Diego, CA, where he's helped build the Men's Fellowship at First UU Church, and is UUMeN treasurer.

Dick Michaels is a leader in the men's community at the Unitarian Church of Evanston, IL, and serves on the UUMeN Steering Council.

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The **Unitarian Universalist Men's Network** supports a mature, liberal religious masculinity with resources and leadership, and can be contacted via

e-mail: [UUMeN@usa.net](mailto:UUMeN@usa.net)

Web: <http://uumen.uua.org> OR <http://clik.to/uumen>