

Another chance to experience male rite of passage rituals

Males Ireland, the group which aims to help men find themselves, is hosting several seminars on male spiritual development. **Adrienne Murphy** reports

Males (Men as leaders and elders) Ireland - the group set up last year as a "school for male spiritual development" - is hosting seminars in several Irish locations this week entitled Men Matter: A Quest For The True Self.

The seminars feature a talk by Fr Richard Rohr, US author and lecturer in men's issues and the original founder of Males in Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Rohr is a Franciscan priest who has "initiated" thousands of men around the world through his travelling "rites of passage" programme. By offering what "men may have missed during their critical development period as men", Rohr claims that his initiation process helps men to cope with suffering, thus re-birthing them into a new consciousness of themselves.

"Spiritual director" and meditation teacher John Doherty is one of a group of 10 Irish men from a wide spectrum of backgrounds who were inspired to set up Males Ireland after undergoing Rohr's initiation process in the Czech Republic last year.

Doherty notes the widely observed crisis in Irish men, which manifests itself most profoundly in alarmingly high rates of suicide and road accidents, especially among younger men. He says: "There's an increasing number of groups and programmes to support men experiencing particular difficulties, and these are to be welcomed. But there is a basic problem that no one's yet addressing: the role of spirituality in the life of the male, and its core question of 'Who am I?'"

"Particularly in today's society, so many men try to avoid at all costs the painful parts of themselves. It's almost like not accepting their humanity. I see so many men getting caught up in workaholism and other addictions. There's a lostness there, and many men have no sense of purpose in their lives. What they do in their work just doesn't fulfil them, or they can't relate at a deep and constant loving level with their partners."

Doherty adds: "Women have a different relationship to pain, because through the maturation process and that time of the month, they're really brought into their bodies and the pain of that. Young men don't have this and need something else to help them, otherwise they're chasing pleasure all the time and trying to escape from the reality of being human, part of which is to experience pain."

"In our society, many men are failing to learn that it's part of the human condition to have a certain amount of brokenness, and to be able to incorporate that into their psyche in some way, so they're not constantly going out trying to rule the world."

The theory seems sound, but in reality many Irish men would run a marathon before joining a spiritual development group. Doherty believes that men are often put off self-help groups because they're usually dominated by women, whose way of relating may cause discomfort in men.

"That's why men-only groups are so important," he says. "There's something about that male energy which fills the sense of emptiness in young men - particularly those who haven't had strong male role models - allowing them to really heal something very deep in themselves. I've seen so many men really open up emotionally in groups of other men, which they'd find very difficult to do if women were present."

As described by Males, male spiritual development sounds similar to psychotherapy, but Doherty insists that two paths are quite distinct. "We're not a substitute for therapy," he says. "Traditional therapy generally helps to build a healthy ego so that a person can engage in society and relationships. It may not necessarily fulfil them, but at the end of the day it gives them a certain ground on which to stand to be able to deal with life."

The next step for those who feel that call is to begin to develop a soul-directed place, where you're going deeper again, finding a deeper sense of meaning, a deeper sense of connection, a deeper sense of who you are in life. What would be considered healthy from an ego point of view just isn't enough anymore, and it's a different journey, even though they go hand in hand.

"What comes up in the rites of passage work is that we've got to get past our egos, to be able to acknowledge something bigger than ourselves, to surrender to something greater - whether you call it God, the life-force, whatever - rather than allowing our egos to become super-egos. It's a big thing for a man to hand over in that way, to develop that sense of humility."

"In today's society there aren't a lot of support mechanisms for men who want to engage deeply in a spiritual sort of way," says Doherty. "That's why we've set up Males Ireland - to help provide a structure and role models, so that men don't have to do this kind of work on their own."

- Fr Richard Rohr will host a talk, Men Matter: A Quest For The True Self at 7pm today at UCC, Cork; and tomorrow at 7pm at NUI, Galway; September 1st, 7pm at Iona Retreat Centre, Southway, Derry; and 9am on September 3rd at Milltown Institute, Ranelagh, Dublin 6. The events are open to women and men. For details, contact Males Ireland at 01 494 3266 or 086 843 5191, and malesireland@hotmail.com

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