

An Invitation to Virtual Council

By Andy Gray, on behalf of the Virtual Council Team

Three of Illuman's [spiritual touchstones](#) are:

- **Centering** – We are men grounded in the power of the here and now.
- **Gathering** – We are men who listen deeply to each other's stories.
- **Connecting** – We are men who choose another to walk with, shoulder-to-shoulder.

One way to do all three of these is through the ancient practice of Council: gathering intentionally in a circle with others, sharing our stories, and being deeply present to one another. Council is a fundamental practice within Illuman's work; all around the world, men are gathering together regularly in local Council Circles.

One of the questions that we are asked frequently is, "How can I find other open-hearted men to connect with?" Perhaps you're in an area that doesn't have an active [Illuman chapter](#), or it's difficult for you to attend a local gathering, or you just don't know other Illuman men nearby. Or maybe you recently attended a [Men's Rites of Passage](#) and want to maintain a deep connection with other men with whom you shared that experience.

A group of intrepid men has been working to address these issues by conducting Council Circles online—what we've been calling Virtual Men's Council Circles. We use an Internet video conferencing system (Zoom) to connect with one another from anywhere in the world. These virtual Councils are conducted in much the same manner as in-person Councils would be: with an opportunity for some grounded contemplative time, some reflective readings or poetry, and some time wrestling together with challenging prompts. We typically break the larger group into smaller Councils of four to eight men, so that everyone has plenty of time to respond and be present to one another.

The results so far have been deeply satisfying! We've had a consistent group of men attending Council sessions twice a month for the last five months, from every time zone in North America (both the US and Canada) as well as Germany and South Africa. The feedback from attendees has been consistently both affirming and grateful.

While it may seem a bit incongruous at first to look to technology to help us connect with others, I think that we've all been positively surprised to see how quickly the technology can fade into the background and facilitate deep connection. These virtual Councils aren't meant to be a replacement for gathering face-to-face, but rather a supplement: I consider it an amazing gift to have the opportunity to connect with men around the world that I would otherwise not meet, in addition to the other time with my local brothers.

Now that we have some grounding with the process and some initial momentum, we're excited to continue expanding the circle and share these virtual Councils more widely. Wherever in the world you may find yourself, **please join us, starting on Saturday, June 9!**

The virtual Councils currently take place at the following days and times each month:

Day of Month	Time Zone	Local Time	Link
2nd, 4th Saturdays	Eastern (EDT/EST)	08:00 – 09:30	https://tinyurl.com/illumian-1
2nd, 4th Saturdays	Pacific (PDT/PST)	09:00 – 10:30	https://tinyurl.com/illumian-1
2nd, 4th Saturdays	Pacific (PDT/PST)	10:30 – 12:00	https://tinyurl.com/illumian-2
4th Tuesday	Pacific (PDT/PST)	18:30 – 20:00	https://tinyurl.com/illumian-2

Note that Eastern Daylight Time is GMT-5, and Pacific Daylight Time is GMT-8; [World Time Buddy](#) is helpful for translating to your local time zone if needed.

We recognize that Saturday mornings don't necessarily work well for everyone, so we're working to establish additional days and times—we'll hopefully have additional weekday evening options soon. (If you want to join a virtual Council Circle but those times don't work for you, please let us know what you prefer by emailing Brad Pickel: administrator@illumian.org.)

[All men are welcome!](#) All that is needed is access to a computer/tablet/phone with a camera and microphone, and a stable Internet connection. You can join each circle at the appropriate time, through the link in the table

above (on PC, Mac, Linux, iOS, and Android devices). There is no cost to participate.

If you plan to attend, please try to join the Zoom meeting room five minutes before the start time. If you haven't used Zoom before, please try to join 15 minutes early, so that we can work through any technical issues that might arise for you. And if you'd like a bit more information about using Zoom, the following quick videos might be helpful:

- <https://tinyurl.com/illum-an-zoom-help1>
- <https://tinyurl.com/illum-an-zoom-help2>

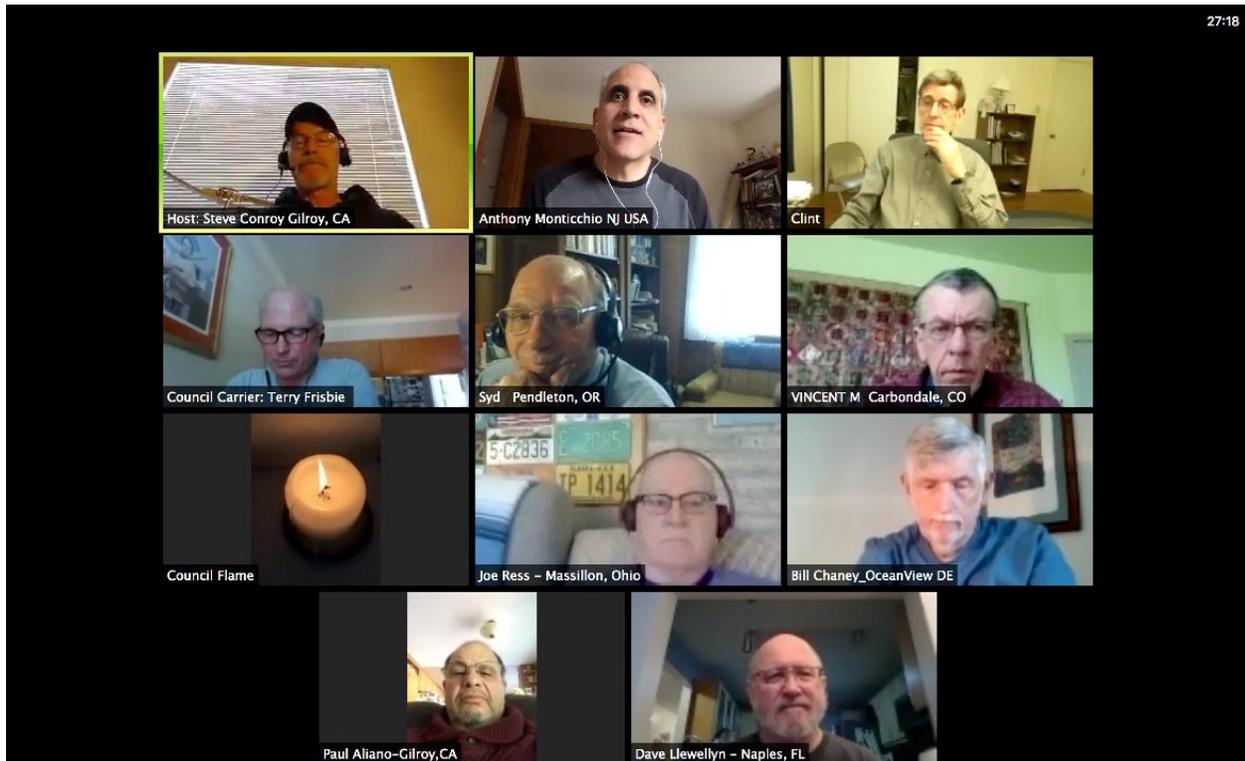
Below are recent screenshots of four of our virtual Council groups. We look forward to being together with you in an upcoming virtual Council Circle! And thanks to the many men who have participated in these circles so far and helped to make them better going forward.

If you have any questions or feedback about the virtual Council Circles, please contact Brad Pickel at administrator@illum-an.org.

1. Illuman Virtual Council from Saturday morning at 8am Eastern Time



2. Illuman Virtual Council from Saturday morning at 9am Pacific Time



3. Illuman Virtual Council in Southern California



4. Illuman Virtual Council in Canada

