



Where Courage Meets Joy

MMG Connector Talks With Muncie McLeod



Q: What's special to you about MMG retreats?

Men have told me the gathering's a special time—a time out of normal time, some even say a sacred time—and those are my sentiments, too. Opening Circle is where we first create that sense and, as I began helping to shape what we do in that circle, those feelings grew even stronger in me. Now that I'm Opening Circle's lead facilitator, I work to keep its ritual both familiar and fresh. The secret to that freshness is how our circle is uniquely shaped by every man who attends.

Q: How does Opening Circle set the stage for the weekend retreat?

We each arrive at MMG from our workaday lives as separate individuals. Opening Circle responds by starting with a symbolic procession through which we “dust ourselves off” and get ready to share. Once we're all seated, I

invite each man to speak—whether about what he's leaving behind or what he's hoping to step into over the weekend.

Either way, when a man opens up about where he's at, the old walls between “me” and “them” dissolve. Not just him; everyone in the circle feels a certain empathy and connection. Helped along by the drumming rhythms, heartfelt sharing, or simply sitting quietly together, what starts off as a group of separate guys gradually morphs into a single, supportive community. That's an experience I value and never tire of.

Q: Will this fall's Opening Circle follow the traditional routine, or is there something fresh in store?

A bit of both! This fall marks our 75th gathering and, to honor that milestone, I've been thinking about one of our long-term leaders, Greg Clark. Greg occasionally looked to numerology for inspira-

From Around The Web: Men's Mental Health



Whether you're looking for insight for yourself or trying to support a friend, these resources tailored specifically to men may provide the right tool for the job. An article, online assessment, or video can offer real clarity—or provide the spark needed to start an honest, supportive conversation.

While MMG doesn't endorse the following sites addressing men's mental health, we can recommend you have a look and see what you think:

[1. Man Therapy](#)

Best for: *A down-to-earth, approachable check-in.* Using a dose of humor and straight talk, Man Therapy cuts through the stigma surrounding depression, anxiety, stress, divorce, and suicidal thoughts. Features quick self-assessments, short videos, and practical action steps.

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tion, so I'll be following his lead with the number 75.

I'll unpack the details at Opening Circle, but the short version is that 75 points to three themes:

1. Wisdom, intuition, and quiet reflection
2. Adventure, adaptability, and courage
3. Joy, optimism, and artistic expression

Q: Well, you just inspired me! What does that mean for this gathering?

In a nutshell, MMG 75 will offer an adventurous journey guided by inner wisdom and marked by profound joy. Once I got that, what fascinated me is how it also describes exactly where our MMG community sits today. Being

guided by inner wisdom reflects how we've grounded our gatherings in their authentic core, while the *adventurous and joyful journey* speaks to how we've been adding online check-ins, hosting Zoom workshops, and reaching out to welcome new men. I'm excited to see how, what's already become true for MMG as a whole, will next shape our fall retreat.

Q: Any final words for men making their way to the retreat?

I can't wait to feel how the courage of each man's sharing opens all of us into a joyful, connected community. To me, that's really MMG's art form, and it all starts at Opening Circle. I look forward to seeing you there on October 16!



≡ MAN  TO  MAN ≡

A Gathering of Men

By Rick Sweeney

I wrote the following article to share a vital part of my personal history, and how MMG made a difference in it. Originally published by [The Good Men Project](#), it still resonates as my truth. Yet, 12 years later, the story has developed further. On the occasion of republishing it here, I've added a post-script sharing crucial events that have happened since.

*May 20, 2014 by Rick Sweeney
Rick Sweeney shares how men's gatherings became an important part of his life.*

When I turned 50, things in my life seemed fairly normal. I had been married almost 30 years and had three growing boys. My wife

was my best friend and always there for me. My boys were getting older and building their own lives. To keep me occupied I had my work, kid's soccer games, handyman projects, and helping my parents. This didn't leave much time



[2. Heads Up Guys](#)

Best for: *Practical tools and personal stories.* A comprehensive resource focused specifically on male depression and suicide prevention. It offers personal accounts from other men, self-assessment tools, guidance on finding a therapist, and practical strategies for recovery.

[3. The Good Men Project](#)

Best for: *Perspectives on modern masculinity.* A broad collection of articles exploring what it means to be a good man today. The site frequently tackles mental health and emotional well-being, featuring pieces like "*For the Modern Man, Emotional Peace Is the New Luxury.*"

[4. NIMH: Men and Mental Health](#)

Best for: *Clear, clinical information and crisis support.* Provided by the National Institute of Mental Health, this page outlines common warning signs, evidence-based treatment options, and advice on how men express mental health challenges differently. It also includes immediate crisis support contacts.

[5. American Institute for Boys and Men](#)

Best for: *Research, policy, and big-picture cultural issues.* A non-partisan think tank focused on the systemic challenges facing boys and men in modern society. They offer a newsletter and insightful video content exploring education, mental health, and social connection.

- Check out their work on their [Website](#) or watch their discussions on [YouTube](#).

Should you find any of these helpful (or not), please let us know.



for my own needs. Then things got complicated. My dad was fighting colon cancer and the prognosis was getting pretty grim.

Even though I was surrounded by family and always on the go, I found myself wanting for male friendships. I lacked someone I could talk with, share with, and simply call a friend. There was something missing. With the help of Google I set out on my search; I wanted to find a group or organization to join that would help me find a way to make friends and meet other men.

I managed to stumble upon a web site for a group called the Massachusetts Men's Gathering (MMG). The site described their weekend retreats, and had lots of pictures of men sharing various sorts of fun. They made it sound intriguing because there was no preset agenda or topics; there was a basic framework and the men who attend would set the content of the weekend. The rest just happened. I was intrigued, but skeptical. I fired off an email asking for more info, and received a very pleasant and reassuring reply. It sounded like a good fit for me, but was this what I really needed?

After summoning a lot of courage, and talking it over with my wife, I sent in my registration and check for the next weekend gathering. Still nervous, I was ready to bail if only I was given a sign. A few weeks before the gathering my dad got the worst news possible, there was nothing more that could be done for his cancer. He was going on hospice care. That was my sign!

I sat down with my dad, and I told him that I would cancel my plans for the gathering, and stay home to help him out. He became very emotional, and told me that he

felt it was more important to take care of myself. He somehow knew that the experience was something I needed. He insisted that I go. I stopped looking for signs that I should stay home. The Friday of the weekend rolled around, and I packed up my stuff and headed out. With my fears and insecurity keeping close watch, I felt like I was walking into a den of wolves, a group of men who knew what it was like to be masculine and tough. That wasn't me at all. I was going to be alone among strangers, and I was WAY out of my comfort zone.



As I walked into the dining hall at the campground, I was immediately greeted by a man I had never met who wanted to hug me. Hugging? I was ready to bolt out the door and head home! Instead, I gathered up what little courage I brought along and I stuck out my hand for a firm handshake. Soon I had settled in, and melded into the group. I met another first timer. It was nice that I wasn't the only new guy. At the opening circle we were asked to say who we were, where we came from, and why we were there. I told my story and talked about my dad and his impending death. I was there to honor my dad

and all that he meant to me. As the weekend progressed, I participated in workshops, enjoyed the talent show, and had some great meals. The unexpected part was the many conversations I had with other men who stepped up and wanted to share their stories of death and dying to help comfort me. For those men, I am eternally grateful.

By the closing circle I finally understood the value of a good hug, and why that one guy was so eager to hug me at the door. Over the weekend I got to know him better, and I found that he is a good man with a heart of gold. There were men there from all walks of life. Some were gay, some were straight, others were somewhere in the middle. There were engineers, artists, singers, laborers, and thinkers. During the weekend, none of that mattered. We were all men and we were all there for the same reasons. I gave many of them a goodbye hug.

I went home in great spirits, told my dad all about it, and a few weeks later he passed away.

I have attended the twice-yearly gathering weekends fourteen times now, and each time has been more powerful than the last. There are workshops offered at this and most gatherings, all run by the men attending the weekend. The topics of the workshops can vary from the very serious to the lighthearted. There have been workshops on caring for elder parents, divorce, spirituality, improvisational comedy, stretching, yoga, massage, body image, sexuality, and hypnosis. This is a very short list of the workshops that I have seen presented. Any man attending can offer a workshop; it's a great way to open a dialogue on a topic you are interested in or one in which you have some expertise. No two gatherings are ever the same!

I have come to consider a number of the regular men as brothers and look forward to seeing them twice a year. Since that first gathering, they have helped me cope with my dad's death, my youngest son's spiral into drugs and alcohol abuse, my own near-death experience, and the foster care and subsequent adoption of my youngest son's baby (my grandchild and now daughter). If I am not at the weekend gathering, they are only a phone call or email away. Through their encouragement, I have also found a local men's group to join. I finally know what it is like to have strong and caring men in my life as friends and brothers.

The Massachusetts Men's Gathering has become like a second home to me. As I started growing more into the experience, I opened up and volunteered to help out. I soon became the web guy for the group and was later asked to join the Organizing Committee, which plans the weekend gatherings. Now the work that goes into preparing for the weekend is as therapeutic as the weekend itself.

Men's gatherings help you get in touch with your masculine side. They help you to explore what it is to be a man in the 21st century.

They enrich those who simply hunger for friendships and brothers. If this intrigues you, then I strongly encourage you to attend a men's gathering in your area. They are easier to find than you might think. Every state in New England has a Men's Gathering, and they are spread all across the US. Find your local gathering and give it a try. You will find yourself among friends.

Check out the [Massachusetts Men's Gathering](#) website, and from there follow links till you find a local gathering. Don't rule out Massachusetts if you are far away; there are guys who come regularly from as far away as Quebec and Philadelphia!

Since writing what you've just read, life hasn't stopped being complicated. My connection with

MMG has grown even stronger.

In 2018, my wife—*the center of my world*—was diagnosed with breast cancer. Despite treatments, her health worsened until, two years later, at the very height of the pandemic, she was verging on entering hospice. You can imagine how low I felt. That's when an extraordinary thing happened: The man who tried to hug me when I first arrived at MMG got into his car and, unannounced, drove over 100 miles to see my wife and me.

By then, my wife was unable to move and, due to COVID, I couldn't let him come inside. So, while I stood out on my apartment's balcony, looking down;

he stood three floors below in the driveway, looking up, and we just talked. It wasn't a long visit; it didn't have to be for me feel that this man had my back. I will never, ever forget the brotherhood that man showed me.

My wife died shortly afterward. By then, I'd been on MMG's Organizing Committee for a while. To offer me their condolences, the other OC members sent a peace lily. It was a small gesture, probably forgotten in the seven years since, yet that lily's the only

plant I've ever had that thrives to this day. Each time I water it, It reminds me of my connection to my wife—and to MMG.

This connection to MMG is a big part of my life: I've gone to MMG twice a year for 18 years. More than retreats, though, MMG's given me a tribe. Through all the stresses my life has brought me, I've never felt alone. One thing that I've learned is that all the talk about acceptance, authenticity, brotherhood, friendship, and belonging—all that isn't just talk. It is reality.

That reality is MMG.



- Rick Sweeney, July 2026





~ MMG 75 ~

A Call for Workshops



Got an idea, a passion, or a life experience you'd like to share? Your MMG Organizing Committee invites you to submit a workshop topic for our upcoming gathering—and we'd love to hear from you now rather than waiting until October!

Why the early call? We want to feature a preview of upcoming workshops in next month's newsletter to give men a taste of what's in store for **October 16th**.

“What if I have an idea, but I've never led a workshop?”

That's a very common hesitation, but here's the good news: *at MMG, a workshop is really just a deeper conversation guided with a bit of structure.* You don't need to be an “expert.” You just need a topic you care about and a willingness to share from your own lived experience.

To give you an idea, past and potential topics include:

- *Drumming (for absolute beginners or experienced men)*
- *Developing meaningful new friendships later in life*
- *Fathers and sons: navigating the unspoken*
- *Landscape Drawing*
- *Sex and intimacy after physical changes or dysfunction*

A Simple 5-Step Structure To Get You Started

If you're wondering how to structure your time, here's a reliable flow that works well:

- 1. Set the Stage:** Introduce your topic, why it matters to you, and what the group will explore together.
- 2. Spark the Experience:** Offer

a brief prompt to get men thinking—a short meditation, a writing exercise, or a provocative question for men to discuss in pairs.

3. Open the Floor: Invite participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and insights with the larger group.

4. Reflect & Summarize: Gather the common themes that emerged, and check in on how everyone is feeling before wrapping up.

5. Offer Next Steps (Optional): Suggest a book, a practice, or a takeaway for men who want to keep exploring the topic after the retreat.

Pro-Tip: You don't have to do it alone! Teaming up with a co-leader is a great way to share the mic, bounce ideas back and forth, and make the whole experience feel more relaxed and collaborative.

How to Submit

Send your workshop ideas or draft topics to info@massmensgathering.org. We can't wait to see what you bring to the circle!

P.S. Looking for something even simpler? Host an Affinity Group!

If structured workshops feel like too much heavy lifting, consider hosting an **Affinity Group**. These are casual, drop-in conversations that can happen around a dining hall table or at a picnic bench outdoors. Men can pop in and out as they like.

You can announce an Affinity Group topic during the Opening Circle, or write it down with a time and meeting place and hand it to **Wayne Williams**, our Workshop Coordinator.

Join Us For This Major Milestone Event!

October 16-18, 2026



**Massachusetts
Men's Gathering**

Find Details At: MassMensGathering.org