

## **Courage Ministry**

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**Brendan Scarce**

### **The Ministry of *MenAlive* for Courage members**

#### **Introduction**

A question that I am asked in my role as Courage Director is: What pastoral care, support, encouragement and assistance does the Church offer those with same sex attraction to live the gospel and to live according to the Church's teaching? In March I attended my third MenAlive live-in weekend. I believe that MenAlive can provide support and encouragement for those with same sex attraction.

#### **Being with men**

The venue for this year's weekend was on Mount Tamborine which is one hour's drive from Brisbane. I went with four other men, one of whom was invited by me and who struggles occasionally with same sex attraction. The drive and stop for a meal on the way was a natural beginning to developing male bonding. It is important for men to relate in a wholesome manner to the masculinity of other men. The camaraderie and conversations that were shared with one another during the drive were uplifting and acted as an icebreaker for the events and activities of the weekend.

Upon entering the venue and the hall just in time for the first session I was met by a crowd of over one hundred and twenty men. That is almost overpowering in itself. I had an immediate subliminal insight that we men had decided to strengthen our relationship with one another and with our God. I was expecting a grace filled weekend yet one of challenge and an examination of my life since my 2012 weekend. I hoped that it would be good for Courage men to experience this dynamism. I now consider the weekend a form of annual retreat and examination.

#### **Why do I recommend MenAlive?**

In my apostolic work with Courage I have seen too many men, single and married who are isolated from other men. This isolation is not conducive to the growth of holiness that Vatican II emphasised in its keynote conciliar document *Lumen Gentium*. A lack of fellowship with other men does not promote growth, virtue and a healthy examination of one's life and behaviour. The goal of the weekend counteracts this tendency by beautiful moments of fellowship, prayer, witness and heroic and courageous sharing of life and experiences. The sharing was a catalyst for others to share profound experiences of pain, hope and healing and in so doing examine their own lives and actions which may be a first for some men. I strongly believe in each person being allowed to tell their narrative in an uninterrupted way and when that occurs it is a healing work of the Spirit. It cements the relationships within the group and for some leads to deeper healing beyond the weekend.

#### **The work for the weekend**

The opening page of the weekend programme stated:

*The authentic man is one who intentionally rejects passivity, accepts responsibility, lives courageously and loves God with all his being.* The whole weekend was devoted to providing opportunities for us to explore this by ceremonies, rituals, the sacrament

of reconciliation, telling stories and fellowship. We allowed ourselves to come away for a whole weekend and to be obedient to others and to be directed. Quite a surrender of the ego, and our own striving for independent action.

### **Examination of Conscience**

The first session was not officially an examen but it was for me. The issue for me was the progress I may have made in 2012 and the times I failed or was wounded, defeated, broken. In the past year I had practised the presence of God slightly more. I also examined the dominant factors in my life to see if God is the priority or not in these activities. A useful question was: *Where do you spend your time? And how have you used your time in the past year?* An excellent question was: *What is dying and what is living? What needs to grow and what questions do I have for God?*

All these are sound practical examples of how to realistically examine one's life, habits and attitudes. After each session – and there were seven, we had small groups of five to six men which met six times on the weekend. Many frank, earnest, profound intimacies of the heart were shared: and it was a privileged time that gave permission for men to voluntarily strip away their own masks. I can converse with most, but I have had a deep reserve about sharing my particular religious habits and ways for it can look like boasting. However we know that Saint Paul mentioned this in his letter to the Corinthians (2 Cor 11:16-12:9 “*So that I too may boast a little...*”). I do overcome this worry about the feeling of boasting because the benefit of sharing the way we have been blessed is so edifying and encouraging to the hearers.

### **The trap of passivity**

In the second session the problem of passivity was tackled. I call it the sin of omission – which is becoming a pervasive Australian attitude. Passivity is often exhibited by men who seek to be nice, do nothing in order to be popular and exaggerate the need to be accepted. We all need affirmation, but the gross overemphasis on this self-esteem issue does not build a necessary resilience for the inevitable challenges and misunderstandings of life.

Are we *boy men* or *real men*?

Given that men are the main butt of jokes in the media and that the world basically fears a safe masculine man, it is not surprising that more and more men want to be recognized as a Sensitive New Age Man and not rock the boat. No! One of our tasks is to be prophets and witnesses to the fire of the Lord. See Luke 12:49 “I came to cast fire upon the earth; and would that it were already kindled”

The programme editor had written this for our rumination: “*Faith does not mean passivity. It means the courage to act and never to be deterred. The future will happen, but it is we – inspired, empowered, given strength by the promise – who must bring it about. It is not so much that we have faith in God but that God has faith in us.*”

### **Heroic Manhood/Living Courageously**

It is interesting to ask men who are their heroes or who have been their heroes. (I do not mean role models but heroes). It can be a revealing insight into the life of the man. My heroes have been Saint Dominic Savio, when I was an adolescent, at a later stage in my life, Neil Harvey, that great Australian left handed batsman from Fitzroy in Melbourne. Through most of my adult life Saint Paul and Blessed John Henry Newman and in the latter part of my life, Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In this session we were lead to reflect on traits that promote heroism, such as discipline, persistence, self

control, courage conscientiousness, zest, gratitude, optimism and curiosity. The notion of **grit** was emphasized; that ability to keep on going despite repeated failures and setbacks. In our small groups we were asked to investigate those times when we lacked the courage to either start a new thing or complete a difficult task. There were two insightful questions set for us: *What stories do I use to explain my life? And what do I need to change in those stories?*

### **Pornography**

The problem of pornography is growing exponentially in Australia. The statistics are horrifying in what they tell us about the pervasiveness of its spread, especially through computers and internet. The presenter stated categorically that pornography is toxic and is extremely harmful and its long term use would destroy everything in the person that is good, wholesome and Godly. *“If left unresolved, unrepented and untreated it will destroy all intimacy in our lives.”*

*“Pornography does not teach us to serve, honour, cherish and love. It does not foster romance and intimacy; instead it trains us to be consumers. He recommended a course of action for those involved. (An issue that I have written about in article 13 February 2003). For the group work these suggestions were made... admit you have a problem and that you want to change, assess the consequences of the problem, know your own personal triggers, increase your awareness and acknowledgement of the issues and causes and then, articulate what action you will take to remove this from your life.”*

### **Conclusion**

Many issues for men are the same whatever their sexual orientation. Prayer, fellowship, accountability, our narrative being heard, and being loved and accepted for who we are is life changing. It is good for men to be experienced in their masculinity, and to be seen as wholesome men of God at gatherings such as MenAlive. A new apostolic force is upon us. In my earlier years, I saw the YCW apostolate yield a great harvest. Am I being naïve or prophetic and sensing that the MenAlive ministry is a possible new form of the Jocist enquiry method adapted for the 21<sup>st</sup> century? “I have a hope and a dream.....!”

Brisbane Courage is a ministry of the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Brisbane  
Enquiries can be made to PO Box 151 Geebung Qld 4034  
Email [brisbanecourage@bigpond.com](mailto:brisbanecourage@bigpond.com) Website [www.bne.catholic.net.au/courage/](http://www.bne.catholic.net.au/courage/)