



*The Unitarian Church in Westport*

## **TRANSCRIPT of REMARKS:**

### **A Better Man – Past, Present, Future**

*Service led by Luke Garvey, Jim Cooper, David Keeton, Chuck Colletti, Rob Laug and Rev. John Morehouse*

*Sunday, August 18, 2019 10 AM*

---

#### **WHAT IS A BETTER MAN?**

**Luke Garvey**

In the beginning, there was UGNO. Guys doing what guys do well: get together once a month at a bar, spend an hour or two over adult beverages, talk, toast Ken Lanouette, and go home until next time.

I bring this up in no way to diminish UGNO, which I love, and attend regularly. Two years ago, my partner in crime Jim Cooper and I had been attending a monthly men's group at the sweet little Talmadge Hill Church in New Canaan. This is a group that has been in existence for 10 years. It is warm, welcoming, and can go pretty deep. Then the light dawned: why not have something similar at our Unitarian church? Jim and I huddled up, met with Reverend John, and our group was born. Our name is "A Better Man", our motto is "Looking inward, connecting outward".

We are a covenanted group; we meet monthly in the Meeting House on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday. Our purpose remains personal growth, connection, and service. We've had a lot of growth and connection, not so much service – yet. But we'll get there. Topics are formulated monthly by the team, and discussed in as deep a manner as the individuals choose. Membership has remained steady at around 20. We open up to new participants annually, in the model of Small Groups. And our men have continually expressed satisfaction with how the group is going.

So what is this group about? First of all, the name: it is **ASPIRATIONAL**. As John has said, "If it ain't aspirational, it's bragging." And I assure you, it's not bragging. We are humbly trying to become the best versions of ourselves. Our motto, looking inward, connecting outward, is the crux. Taking a hard look at what hurts us, drives us, gives us joy. And seeking brothers to share this with. Most of us find that there is an absolute famine of authentic male connections in our lives. Men tend to be transactional – we get together for a purpose – sports, bars, barn-raising, whatever – and then adjourning. And our society is isolating.

Men. Need. Other. Men. To talk to, to ask for help, to offer help, and slowly, carefully, maybe.... Learn how they really feel about something, and to say it out loud. To be vulnerable is a vital state, which we're usually terrible at. But the ability to give and

receive affection, support, even love, is directly related to how much we are willing to open up, to show each other our pain and our joys.

We've been at it 2 years in September. Speaking only for myself, it has been a joy. To evolve, and to see my brothers evolve. To see trust growing. To see men learning to go a little deeper, to speak in \*I\* statements, to gingerly approach that revealing of our well-hidden inner selves. And to receive the support and feel the connection of brotherhood.

How are we doing? My two measures are: a subjective impression of how the meetings go, and the feedback I get from our men. As to the first, I see wonderful growth, as I've said. And I'm warmed through to my soul – whatever that may be – by the continuous expressions of gratitude from our brother seekers. And we are continuing to aspire. Thank you.

### **A BETTER MAN PAST**

**Jim Cooper**

We have an illustrious past. Men's DNA includes testosterone, thus we are physically larger and stronger. In the decision to 'fight or flight', men often choose to fight. That has been the 'noble' thing to do. To our detriment, it's been passed down for generations.

Men valued success disproportionately, and thus require them to 'win'.

Men were historically insular. They were left on their own to figure it out. Although there were brotherhoods out there, these were an upper tier access. The *ordinary* man soldiered on...

Our 'forefathers', a term we minimize presently, *were* good providers: Strength to build, Families to care for, Societies to be a Leader and a Teacher. Yet they single-mindedly forged with a dominating hammer as their favorite tool.

"With great power comes great responsibility" (attributed to many sources, including Voltaire, the Bible, and Spiderman). With great power also comes greater abuse. History is FILLED with male despots, dictators, and authoritarians.

Male privilege was and is real. Along with this privilege are sobering statistics in FAR greater numbers: War and combat deaths, Suicides, Homicides, Industrial accidents, Prison populations, and Jail sentences. All are overwhelmingly imbalanced. (Nor should ANY of those be *in balance or exist at all*, but it is just a point of note.)

The role of a man was established. Be strong! But, as my wife Susan pointed out to me, what of the men who were meek, or less dominant, or who were in non-stereotypical male roles? Reaching out to talk was a sign of weakness. They were all alone in the past.

From the turn of the century forward Women have increased their roles in society, yet it was taken lightly. Witness the successful TV shows of the early sixties: *Father Knows Best*, and June Cleaver's wifely submissive role in *Leave it to Beaver*. They are implausible now!

In 1963 Leslie Gore sang this song with the blindfolded lyrics : "*Maybe I know that he's been a cheatin', maybe I know that he's been untrue. But, what can I do?*" It was #14 on Billboard charts.

However... The following year her single "You don't own me" a song of this 17-yr-old's independence reached #2 in 1964 (just behind the Beatles 'I want to hold your hand'.)

The late Tammy Wynette's 'Stand by Your Man' was voted #1 of 100 on (CMT) Country Music Televisions greatest songs.

Claimed Tammy: "In 1968 I spent 15 mins writing that song, and a lifetime defending it from a newly-formed feminist movement." She declared it was not a statement that women were in 2<sup>nd</sup> place, but instead asked them to overlook their partner's shortcomings because "After all he's *just a man*".

Both women and men have progressed a long way these days. The need for a strong man can be summed up in this indelible statement I once heard from a meeting with my then therapist, Michael Crouch: "A Strong man is also a Compassionate man." We still need to be Fathers, to be Leaders, and at the very least to be Role Models for ALL of our youth and families, as well as to our current troubled society.

Every one of us has an Uncle, a Grandfather, or a Father whom we loved and cherished, and who lived these questionable roles during their lifetimes. This is what they were taught. I know you love them still.

We Men are still on our path to teach: with fairness, equality, and love. We need your support. After all we are *just human*.

**A BETTER MAN PRESENT**

**David Keeton  
Chuck Colletti  
Rob Laug**

Good morning, my name is David Keeton and I've been a member of the men's group since it began in the fall of 2017.

For me, the monthly gatherings provide an opportunity to reconnect & recharge myself through a combination of personal reflection & respectful listening.

Although our common denominator is being men, each of us bring different perspectives depending on our life experiences & family upbringing. In my case, I was raised in rural California as the youngest of 5 kids. My father was a liberal minded country pastor and my mother was a teacher. Because of the small congregation, we had to rely on my mother's income to support the family. Hence my expectation of a parent's role was significantly influenced by the fact that my parents behaved more like partners raising a family. Unlike many other children, my father watched me during the day until I went to school. Outside of family, both my father and mother's professions played prominent roles in our community. They both volunteered as adult leaders in 4-H, Boy Scouts and our community governance organization. While I knew this contrasted to the then predominant family structure of Dad works and Mom stays home, it wasn't until I became an adult that I began to realize how much my 'normal' influenced me differently than many others - men & woman.

Paradoxically, when courting, although there was the social norm of wanting to be the breadwinner for my family, it simultaneously seemed natural to assume that my spouse would want to have her profession as well. In the end, I was lucky enough to marry a woman who wanted both a career & a family.

Although my job was the primary reason we moved to the east coast, my wife maintained her own career which has proven critical to sustaining us financially through recent lean years. After moving to Westport, we began searching for a spiritual home and a place to provide religious education for our children. I was pleasantly surprised to find that; Unitarian Universalism was more aligned with my religious upbringing than most other protestant denominations.

Growing up as a child, I was taught that Sunday was a day of reflection. In today's world of more activities on Sunday, and as our kids grew, weekend schedules became more conflicted to the point where I began to depend on intermittent yard work for my reflection time. However, that was not communal. So, I also tried to attend UGNO evening events but they were more social in nature than reflective. Luckily, I was still on the UGNO email chain when I saw an invitation to join a new Men's Group. I saw this as an opportunity to reconnect with my spiritual foundations and am glad I joined the group.

For me, the key is embedded in the process of our gatherings.

When we gather in a circle, I am reminded of my scout leadership ordeal weekends. After working in relative silence on camp maintenance needs, we would sit around a solemn campfire where we passed a 'speaking pipe' when moved to share meaningful memories that influenced our lives. For our monthly gatherings, the topic serves as the inspirational campfire and each person can speak as they feel moved to do so. When sharing, we try to keep our words focused on personal experiences. At times the sharing can unexpectedly trigger long forgotten memories, suppressed feelings, regrets and/or lessons learned. Inevitably, as I listen to the reflections of others, my own perception of

the day's topic evolves whether due to similarities in experiences or even when someone sees the topic from a completely different perspective.

For me, this free flow of thoughts is invigorating and spiritual. When my reflections reach a point of clarity, I share my personal thoughts. In doing so, I often tie key elements of my comments back to previously shared experiences and/or emerging themes. From my own personal experience, when sharing my thoughts aloud, I have also been struck by the degree of emotions that can be evoked. While intellectually, I know I have emotions, they become more tangible when I hear myself verbalize my thoughts before trusted friends. Obviously, the degree of trust required by all of us in the group contributes to the authenticity of the experience, the depth of sharing and the rewards of listening to others.

I leave each meeting reinvigorated, more hopeful and refocused on the important things in my life. Perhaps even more importantly, when I return home after our gatherings, I share my thoughts with my wife and family. Why only share my thoughts with the men's group? In that small way, the benefits I receive from participating in the men's group are shared outside the group as well.

I am grateful for the opportunity to learn, grow and become reinvigorated as I continue my journey to live an authentic life.

[**Chuck Colletti** spoke from notes: no written remarks available at this time]

## **Rob Laug**

Hello.

So what is it to be A Better Man for me? For those around me? My family, my co-workers, for all or you?

It is not a measure of how I am judged by anyone. I am not looking to adjust who I am purely to be judged in a better light. And yet I strive to be A Better Man to share myself, to improve the community that surrounds me, and the earth that feeds me, body and soul.

At our monthly meetings we start with a topic and few points, pro or con, to get the group going. It is at 8am on a Saturday so that is often a consideration. We share and connect in a meaningful way with each other knowing that with just men in the group we have a different audience, a different openness or freedom, than we are used to having. Sometimes you listen and take it in. Maybe the subject runs too deep for you to share but you still hear the others and gain some new perspective from that. And that is okay. Listening, meaningful soulful listening is very powerful. It is very often overlooked. In this overly busy world of go do and go get you need any and every opportunity to stop and listen and HEAR. Let it sink in and feel it down deep.

Other times it really strikes a chord with your past, present, or future projections of how you want to be as a man, as a person. Making this time to create opportunity for self-reflection and development is one of the driving forces for me. I don't need another Saturday of Errands, housework, yardwork, etc. I need some connections with other men that are, as it turns out, experiencing this life in very similar ways to my own. We are all on a different path and at different stages of life. We experience family and employment challenges and successes at different stages and with different lessons learned. By sharing them together we find common threads. They let you know you are together in this boat as we navigate the constantly changing waters.

A men's group is unique in just being men. The stereotypes that make us laugh, beat our chests, and feel ashamed, are all very real. We attempt to face it head on. Sure we stumble, we falter, we fail, in one way or another. We enjoy long lapses in speaking ..... But we learn, or try to learn from all of our experiences, shared or direct. We share knowing it is a safe place for us to talk, to vent, to feel without being judged too critically and allow opportunity for growth. A Better Man for me is one that recognizes he is on a journey and the path for growth is always right in front of you. You just have to recognize it, Listen to the world around you, and do the best you can each day.

#### **A BETTER MAN FUTURE**

**John Morehouse**

Stay tuned for Reverend Morehouse's remarks which are not yet available.