

Gay/Lesbian and Christian
Our Journey in Truth
June 9-12, 1994
Kirkridge

**Men's Gender Group
Friday Evening**

**WISDOM OF OUR SAGES
A Ritual Prepared To Honor John McNeill
and Our Gay Elders as Sages Among Us**

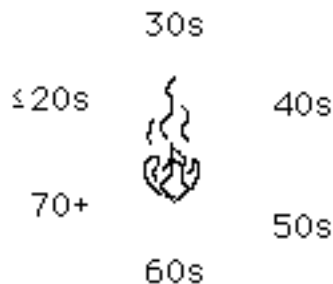
Silence

Introduction, Explanation and Rehearsal of the ritual acts to follow:

Leader 1: We are a gathering of men. Tonight we celebrate a ritual recognizing gay wisdom present here. As part of that, we will honor as wise men—or Sages—the men among us who are 60 years old or older.

Leader 2: We will need your help, for ritual like good liturgy is the work of the people doing it. With that in mind we'd like to walk through the different movements of the ritual. We will organize our circle by age groups, decade by decade, in order to recognize the unique wisdom that comes to us as gay men in each stage of our lives. As we note your age group, please gather in the location we indicate.

Leader 2 indicates placement of groups

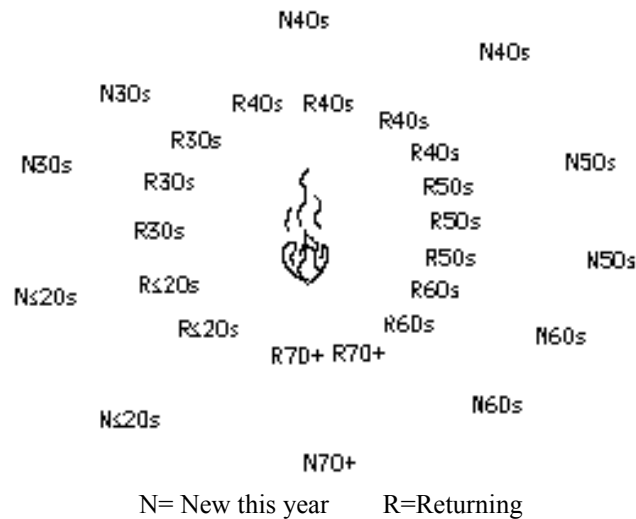


Gathering

Leader 1: Some of you have been here many times. Some of you are here for the first time.

Leader 2: I'd like to ask those men who have been to this June event or the January Gay Men's event to form a circle around the fire ring.

Those of you who haven't been here before, please space yourselves around the outside of the circle five or six feet back from the inner circle.



Leader 2: Men in the inner circle, who are returning to the mountain, look around the circle and remember the experiences that you have had with these people and this place.

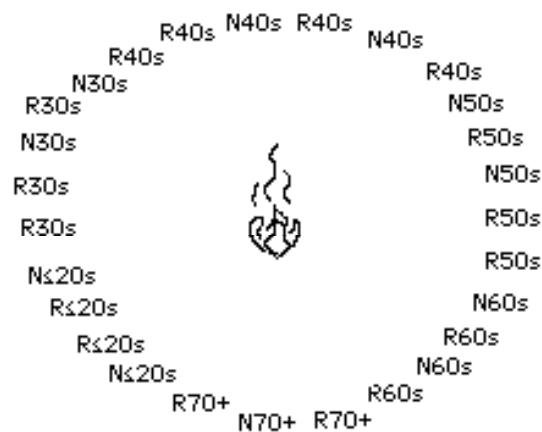
Leader 1: We give thanks to you, Lover of our souls. As we return to this holy mountain, we also return to You, to be refreshed and to draw nourishment for our journey. Be present with us as we remember your face in the faces of the men gathered here.

(Silence for a moment as people look around the circle)

Leader 2: Men in the inner circle, please turn and face outward toward the men who joined us for the first time. Then step outward to make room in the circle for them.

Leader 1: We welcome you, as fellow travelers to the community of this mountain, and invite you to step into this circle.

Leader 2: Please join hands to make one large circle, as we continue the prayer:



Leader 1: Shepherd of our journey, we also seek your face in new faces. We travel from youth to age, from birth to death, moving together toward the other side.

Music- "We're all Swimmin to the Other Side"

Circle the fire ring during the song

Honoring and Naming the Cloud of Witnesses

_____ We gather as gay men to honor and celebrate gay wisdom. Gay wisdom does not begin with us. Gay men have been the priests, shamans, spiritual leaders, healers, and artists down through the ages and in many cultures. The fire in the midst of our circle was burning as we gathered. The great cloud of witnesses—who prepared the way before us—now burn in our collective memory as faggots in the fire.

Leader 2: We invite you to take a stick, name aloud your gay mentors, men who whispered to you the secrets of being gay, who passed along the language, who initiated you in gay culture and taught you about gay sexuality. As you name them, cast their sticks into this fire, the fire of gay wisdom.

(time to name the mentors ended by the ringing of the wind chimes)

_____ Gay wisdom has been tempered in the fire of bashings, struggle, AIDS and HIV. As we journey from youth to age, we remember those who will never age. They have fallen in the struggle, and so remain forever young in our hearts. They continue to burn as fiery pillars in our experience.

Leader 2: We invite you to take a stick or two, name aloud the gay martyrs, those who have fallen. As you name them, cast their sticks into this fire of gay wisdom.

(time to name the martyrs ended by the ringing of the wind chimes)

Leader 1: We give thanks to you O Spirit of God, O Pentecostal Fire, for these men, our forebears, martyrs, lovers, and friends. Though they may be invisible to us now, their lives burn in ours, whispering wisdom to us through the elements of earth and fire, of wind and water.

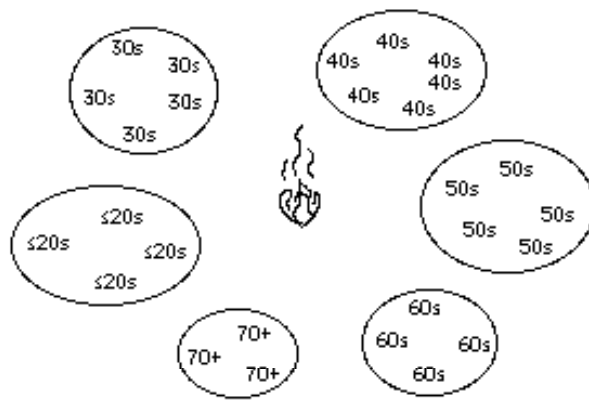
Music "Ancestor Song"

Honoring the Wisdom of Aging

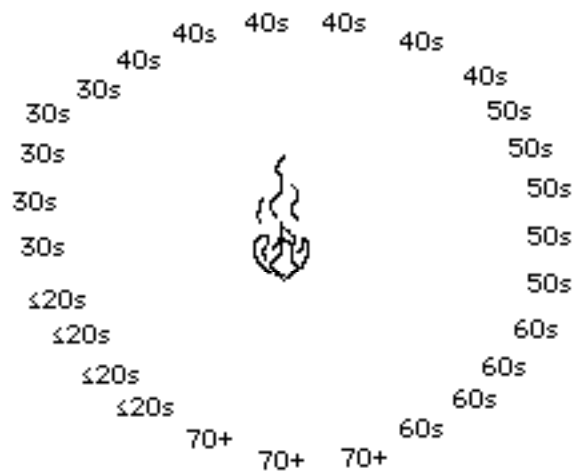
_____ Gay wisdom comes not only from the past. It presents itself to us in the men gathered here tonight. Each decade of life offers unique wisdom.

Leader 2: We now ask you to gather in groups marked roughly by decades: Men in your 20s or younger here. 30s here. 40s here. 50s here. 60s here. 70 and above, here.

Take 15 minutes to share your thoughts about the wisdom of your age group. And ask one man among you to be ready to briefly report to the larger circle a few kernels of wisdom that your age group has to offer to the larger group. What are you learning about being gay at this stage in your life? What wisdom do you have to share out of your experience of being gay at this age? At the end of 15 minutes, we will report to the entire circle.



Leader 2: Please reconvene to share your wisdom with the larger group.



Leader 2: Beginning with the 20s group and proceeding to the group age 70 and above, we will report. Following each report, we will all respond together: "Blessed are you, Holy Wisdom. You make yourself known through our brothers."

Each group reports followed by the response:

All: "Blessed are you, Holy Wisdom. You make yourself known through our brothers."

Honoring Our Sages

Leader 1: We are here tonight to honor our collective wisdom as gay men, regardless of age, and to honor the Sages among us.

What is a sage? According to the American Heritage Dictionary, it is a person, usually an elderly man, who is venerated for his experience, judgment, and wisdom. It is also a plant used for seasoning.

A sage actively participates in the events and activities of life and understands what is true, right or lasting. He shows good common sense, perceiving and distinguishing relationships and alternatives. He makes reasonable decisions, especially with regard to the practical affairs of life. Sounds like a lot of the older gay men I know. I would suggest that our gay sages also season and spice the life situations they are in.

My thesaurus lists synonyms such as deep, profound, shrewd, astute, well-balanced, far sighted, and level-headed. Almost all cultures throughout the ages have recognized and honored the wisdom of the sages among them.

Tonight we would first like to honor John McNeill as a sage among us. We do so as a symbolic act of honoring all the men gathered here, for we together make the journey of wisdom as we age from birth toward death.

(ask John to step to the center)

John, you have for many years functioned as a high priest among us here on the mountain. You have shared the wisdom of three books--and much, much more.

Presentation of stone from Iona

John shared with us this morning about his plan to become part of this mountain when he dies- for many of us - you already are a part of this mountain. Like Peter you are a rock- a rock that God is using to build the church among gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered persons.

As my partner will tell you, I love rocks. We have bowls of rocks all over our house. Now some of you may think this is strange or unusually, but I come by it honestly- my father is a geologist. So anyway when I thought about this ritual tonight, I knew that rocks would be one of the symbols and one of the gifts that we would present to you, John.

For just as the faggots that we threw into the fire are a reminder to us of our gay mentors and ancestors; The rocks that make up the fire ring remind us of our history as a spiritual people.

We have a rock from Jerusalem representing the homeland of Christ and our Christian faith.

We have a rock from the Isle of Iona- the spiritual home of Kirkridge. The place that many of us now consider our spiritual home.

The bulk of the stone in the fireplace ring is from the mountain we are standing on. As I built the fire ring I was struck with the vast amount of purple stone that is in this mountain. Historically where there is purple, there you will find gay and lesbian people. This holy purple mountain has prepared itself as a home for you.

As a reminder that we are all living stones that God is using to build the church and as a symbol of your importance to this community and to Kirkridge. We now present you with this rock from the Isle of Iona. May it remind you that your life and work is beautiful, timeless and purposeful.

Leader 2:

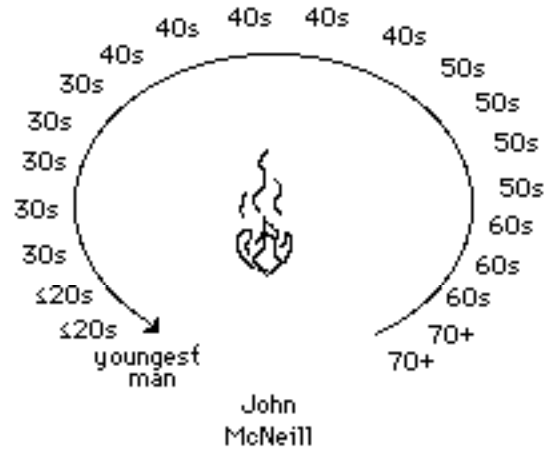
We invite those of you who wish, to witness to John's wisdom by sharing your appreciation and brief stories of how John has touched your life.

(time for sharing)

John, tonight we want to present you with a staff, recognizing that you are a Sage among us. The staff is phallic in form, recognizing the wisdom that grows from honoring the sexual energy in us as gay men. The staff also represents the fire stick, an ancient gay symbol, a remembrance of the gay men who were burned as faggots in the fires of oppression. The staff is also the symbol of a shepherd and guide, a symbol of mastery.

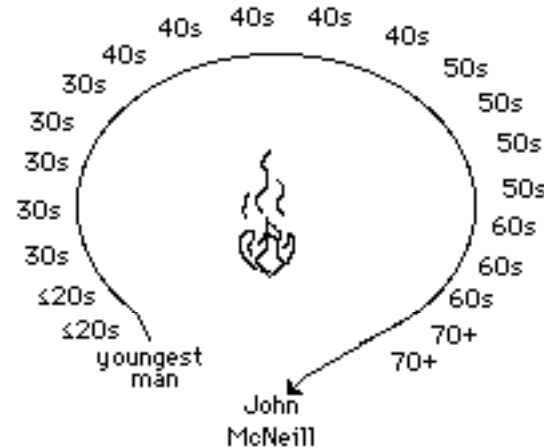
Leader 2:

As a sign that we invest this staff with our collective prayers and love, we will pass the staff around the circle from the oldest to the youngest. The youngest man will then carry the staff around the circle to present it to John McNeill.



Passing of the staff around the circle from oldest to youngest

(the youngest man processes with the staff inside the circle)



Presentation of the staff by the youngest to John McNeill

As the wisdom of youth marches down the line of age to present this staff to John, listen to the words of the Evangelist John, the elderly beloved disciple, exiled on Patmos. In his old age, he had a vision of Christ his lover as a wise old man—an old man with white hair. He recorded that vision in these words from the book of Revelation

"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.

[I John,] was in the spirit on the Lord's day, and I heard behind me a loud voice like a trumpet saying, "Write in a book what you see and send it to the seven churches. . ."

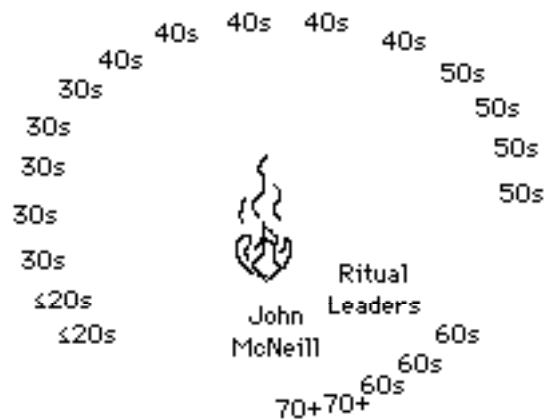
Then I turned to see whose voice it was that spoke to me, and on turning I saw seven golden lampstands, and in the midst of the lampstands I saw one like

the Son of Man, clothed with a long robe and with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire, his feet were like burnished bronze, refined as in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of many waters. In his right hand he held seven stars, and from his mouth came a sharp, two-edged sword, and his face was like the sun shining with full force.

When I saw him, I fell at his feet as though dead. But he placed his right hand on me, saying, "Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living one. I was dead, and see, I am alive forever and ever; and I have the keys of Death and of Hades. Now write what you have seen, what is, and what is to take place after this. . . ."

Leader 1: Just as John McNeill has shepherded us through his writings, his speaking engagements, his mentoring, counselling, and friendship, so also we have received wisdom from others gathered in this circle. Tonight, we call forth as Sages, as wise men for our community, the men among us who are age 60 or older.

Leader 2: We ask you who are 60 or older to come forward at this time.



Your presence here reminds us that through our celebrations and hardships, we survive and thrive—becoming a little older and a little wiser. We honor your achievements and your struggles, your joy and pain, The victories you have won and the losses you have endured to bring your wisdom to this mountain.

We all grow older
Our bodies grow softer
In your willingness to touch us and to hold us
we come to embrace the changes we experience
in our bodies as we age.

We all grow older
Some aspects of our life grow harder
In your openness to talk about growing older
you help us to age well.

Leader 1: As a symbol of the office of Sage within the gay male community—an office into which we now initiate you—we present you with these purple cords—as a vestment and mantel.

These purple cords bring together threads, individually weak and easily broken. These threads were turned together in a circular motion to form three larger

strands which in turn make the purple cord. Together they are strong, vibrant and useful.

Your journeys also have woven together multiple aspects of life—the physical, intellectual, spiritual, sexual, and emotional—into one strong, vibrant, and useful whole. These cords bind us to the past, to each other, and to the future.

Leader 2: As we name each individual to be honored, everyone will join my partner in the response: "We call you forth as a Sage for us."

_____ [Name], we bless and honor your journey

All: We call you forth as a Sage for us.

After all have been called forth and while John McNeill places the cords individually over each man's shoulders, the following blessing is read for the entire group collectively

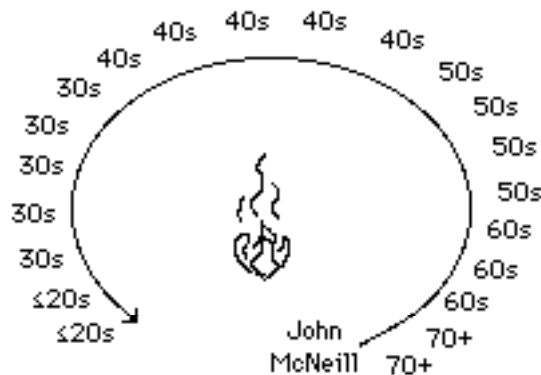
Leader 1: Blessed are you, our gay Sages and Elders, who have taken a chance on God. May each of you look joyfully over the years behind you. May each of you look forward expectantly to the work God gives you to do in your elder years. May each of you remain strong in your commitment to do justice. May your daily actions be both a strong light to dispel shadows and a comforting darkness to those in need of rest. May you never stand, sit, or lie alone in the struggle. In every posture of life may you find us, your brothers, by your side in body and spirit.

Candles are now distributed to all present

Passing the Wisdom to Following Generations

_____ Our wisdom is not our own. It can heal the past and give growth to future generations. As a sign of the passing of gay wisdom to generations here and to come, we now pass fire, from the older men to the younger men.

Leader 2: John McNeill will light a candle from the fire and pass the fire around the circle from the older to the younger, while we listen to a reading from Daniel.



_____ In the book of Daniel, the image of God handing authority to a messianic figure is represented as One of Great Age handing over authority to a young Son of Man who comes on the clouds of heaven.

*Thrones were set in place
and One of Great Age took his seat.
His robe was white as snow,
the hair of his head as pure as wool.
His throne was a blaze of flames,
its wheels were a burning fire.
A stream of fire poured out,
issuing from his presence.
A thousand thousand waited on him,
ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him.
A court was held
and the books were opened.*

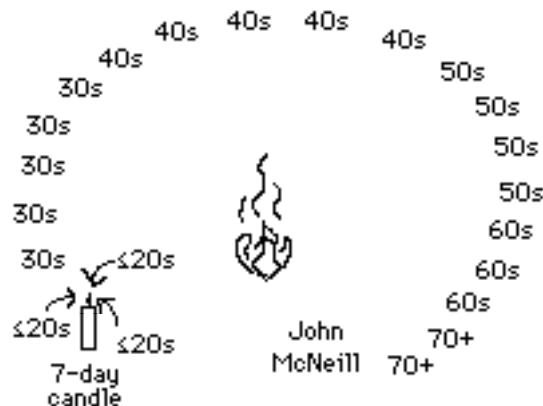
*I gazed into the visions of the night.
And I saw, coming on the clouds of heaven,
one like a Son of Man.
He came to the One of Great Age
and was led into his presence.
On him was conferred sovereignty, glory, and kingship,
and all peoples, nations and languages became his servants.
His sovereignty is an eternal sovereignty
which shall never pass away,
nor will his empire ever be destroyed.*

We now bless you who are the youngest among us. We invest you with our passion and our fire. We commit ourselves to share our wisdom with you.

Leader 2: But neither is gay wisdom yours to hold fast. We invite you—the youngest of us—to light this seven-day candle, which symbolizes the generations to come, whose future you and all of us hold in the spirit of this community.

Leader 1: We commit them to God, to the protection of Christ and the angels, pledging our solidarity with them as you light this candle.

Those in their 20s light the 7-day candle.



The following chant is begun and repeated for a time:

Listen, listen, listen to my heart song
Listen, listen, listen to my heart song
I will never forget you, I will never forsake you
I will never forget you, I will never forsake you

When an appropriate amount of time has passed with singing, the leader speaks:

Leader 1: Brothers, we pledge to listen to our heart songs, to forsake no one of our queer company on this mountain.

Leader 2: Together, in silence, we now extinguish our individual flames, transforming them from light to smoke, which rises toward heaven as a prayer of dedication for sages and youth and all who bear gay wisdom in between.

Everyone extinguishes his individual candle, leaving only the fire and the 7-day candle burning.

Silence

Leader 1: O youthful Son of Man, O Ancient of Days,
the way of our forebearers—and our way—
is to emerge from hiding places,
to stand up without fear,
to admit we're not sure of the next steps on the journey
but to walk on,
knowing we are not alone.

We carry your wisdom from the great cloud of witnesses.
We learn from the sages among us.
We add our wisdom to theirs.
And we pledge to walk with generations yet to come
on the ageless journey toward you our Great Lover.
Enflame us and make us fiery faggots,
that we may give light and warmth to those who follow.

Leader 2: The ritual ends. The dancing begins.