**CATHOLIC MEN’S FELLOWSHIP HISTORY**

The story of the Catholic Men’s Fellowship began when certain men separately experienced the power of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. They were drawn into the need for fellowship with each other to share the experience and to go deeper. In the spring of 1986, the Catholic Men’s Fellowship of Greater Cincinnati was established by Fr. Ken Sommer, Kevin Lynch, Tom Young and Declan O’Sullivan, to promote the growth of Christian fellowship to fellow Catholics. It is appropriate to acknowledge the debt owed to non-catholic Christians who participated in the original meetings. After much prayer and reflection, it was decided to direct the fellowship ministry to men only and to promote the ministry to fellow Catholics.

Much of the theological framework for the fellowship is based upon Fr. Ken Summer’s Call to Holiness, a series of talks and retreat topics, focused on the dynamic impact of Christianity. The discovery of the immense potential for growth implicit in a personal relationship with Jesus Chris caused great excitement in the founders and they were filled with zeal to share it with others. The graphical representation on page of the Handbook and the outline on pages 2 through 11 attempt to represent the key concepts of the Call to Holiness.

A central concept of the fellowship is that “all growth occurs in relationships” – the establishment of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the promotion of dynamic relationships with family and community. It was decided that the best place to develop the relationship concept was in the fellowshipmeeting format. By sharing the experience of God in an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality men began to develop relationships with each other beyond the superficiality of acquaintanceship.

It was agreed early on that each meeting would be autonomous – that there was no need for elaborate organization. The meetings were considered a good in themselves leading men into activities outside the fellowship that promote the Christian ideal in society. Since the meetings do not require a priest or an ordained minister to be present, although it would be desirable, any one or two men can find themselves empowered to start and lead a group.

Led by Kevin Lynch and Gus McPhie, a group of men from the fellowship sponsored a successful one-day evangelical Fire Rally in the fall of 1988. However, promotion of annual conferences dedicated specifically to male spirituality and the promotion of fellowship did not begin until the fall of 1995. Encouraged by the success of the Promise Keepers stadium rallies the Catholic Men’s Fellowship decided to sponsor a similar type event but one more specific to the Catholic tradition. The first such event occurred in the parish hall of St. Gertrude in Cincinnati in the presence of 500 men. The enthusiasm for the Lord was palpable and as a result many fellowship groups sprang up spontaneously.

It inspired the leadership to continue to sponsor the mass Answer the Call conferences on an annual basis. Over 50,000 men have attended conferences in Cincinnati since 1995.

Many have experienced a personal conversion by receiving Jesus Christ into their lives in the sacrament of Reconciliation and Communion. For many men, the conferences were not just milestones in their lives but real defining moments. As a result of these conferences there are now fellowship groups active in 180 parishes in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati and in the diocese of Kentucky. There are many other smaller groups based on other-than-parish affiliation that come together to pray and share their lives.

Encouraged by the success of the Catholic men’s conferences in Cincinnati many other cities and dioceses across the country have been inspired to hold similar events. Conferences are being held in 20 cities in which prominent laymen and clergy give witness to the kingship of the Lord in their lives. Many non-Catholics come to the conferences as attendees or as guest speakers.

A National Resource Center for Catholic Men has been established in Washington D.C. as a means of propagating the fellowship concept among Catholic men and as a clearinghouse to exchange ideas. The Center can provide valuable assistance to those wishing to sponsor a conference or a new fellowship group.

A Board of Trustees meets 4 times annually to consider and set policy with regard to the promotion of the Catholic Men’s Fellowship in the Greater Cincinnati area. It is entirely lay-directed but it is subject to the magisterium of the Church.