



How to Transform

The Man
His Family
His Community

Through
Catholic Men's Fellowship
A Process, A Relationship, An Awakening

CATHOLIC MENS FELLOWSHIP

HANDBOOK

INTRODUCTION

- Vision
- Mission
- Abundant Life (John 10:10)

CATHOLIC MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

INTRODUCTION

- **Vision** – We are committed men, principally Catholic, who recognize our need for God's help. We gather in Christ's presence in an atmosphere of trust, equality and anonymity to share personal feelings and experiences. We unconditionally accept one another and prayerfully support one another.
- **Mission** – We feel encouraged by the Holy Spirit to share with one another
- **Abundant Life** – "I have come so that you may have life, and have it abundantly" (John 10:10)

CATHOLIC MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

INTRODUCTION

The Handbook of the Catholic Men's Fellowship is designed to outline the history and specific nature of the mission of the Fellowship.

It traces the development of the basic Christian concepts of fellowship and relationship that grew out of Fr. Ken Sommer's talks entitled the Call to Holiness. It outlines the principals of fellowship groups, the guidelines and format of fellowship meetings and how to start and maintain a group.

It is the product of 16 years of experience in promoting male spirituality to Catholic men in large conferences, small workshops and thousands of fellowship meetings. There was no original master plan. The ministry evolved slowly under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It is still evolving and all are invited to suggest changes that would make the ministry more fully respond to the needs of men today.

The Lord is not done with us yet.

“ALL GROWTH OCCURS IN RELATIONSHIP”

Step 1 Relationship with God - Spiritual Life

A defining slogan of the Catholic Men’s Fellowship is that “all growth occurs in relationships”. To attain the rewards of the abundant life it is necessary to communicate in truth with someone else – to become vulnerable to another. The most important of these relationships is union with God. We come from God and our true destiny is to be with Him now and in Eternity.

God’s desire for intimacy with Him is revealed in the Holy Scriptures. It is also manifested in the experiences of daily life. It is shown to us in the beauty of the setting sun – the smile of a child – the gesture of unexpected friendship – the personal experience of God’s saving grace in life’s difficulties.

Step 2 Relationship with Family - Family Life

For most men the primary relationship in life is with spouse and family. It is to them that we owe primary concern and love. It is in family life that we experience feelings of great joy and happiness but it also exposes us to events of sadness and loss. The greater the depth of intimacy the greater is the potential for holiness. The spousal relationship is especially important. In the Catholic Men’s fellowship we acknowledge that the level of intimacy with God can often be measured by our feeling for spouse and family.

Step 3 Work/Community - Secular Life

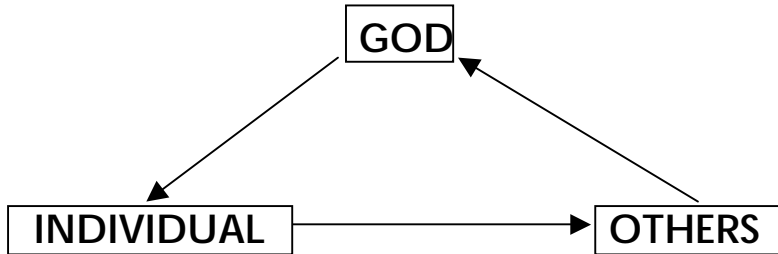
Finally, we grow and become more like Christ in the level of commitment we make to the vocation from which we make a living work and to our passion for community service. For most of us the risks that we take in trusting others are determining factors in any measure of success that we achieve. Success begins with the formation of relationships.

THE CALL TO HOLINESS

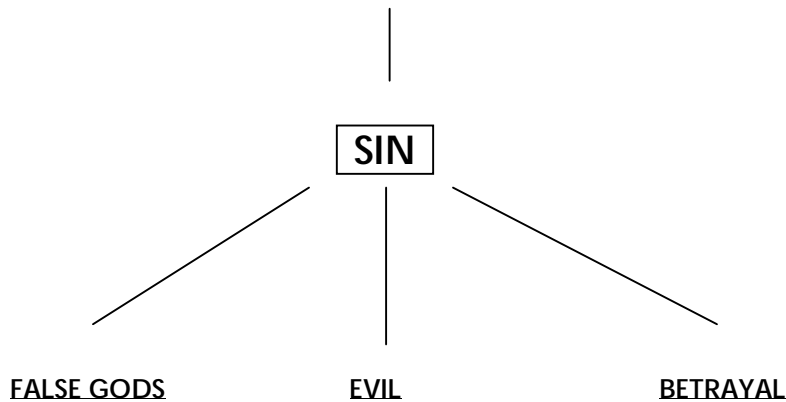
(Fr. Ken Sommer)



GROWTH IN RELATIONSHIPS

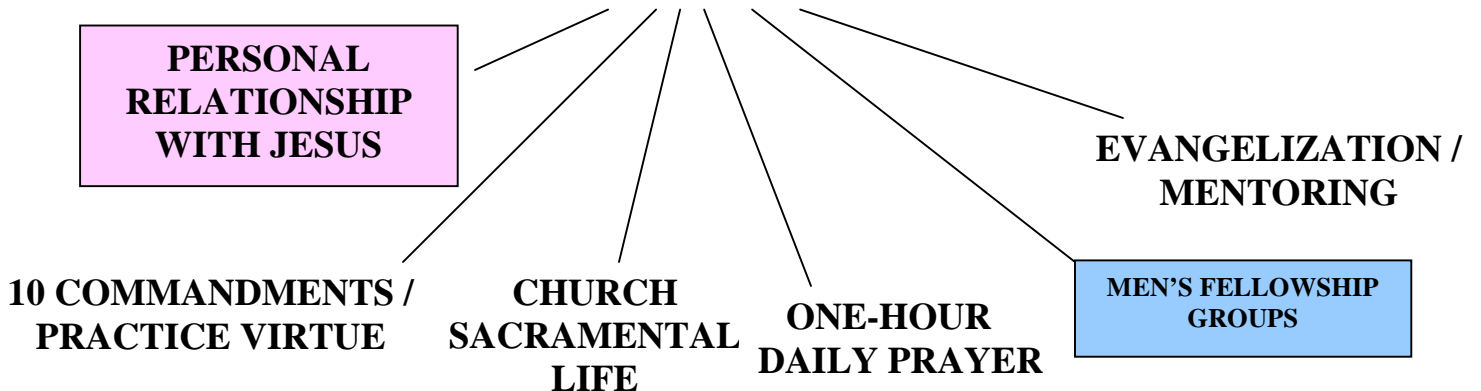


OBSTACLES TO RELATIONSHIPS



AIDS TO RELATIONSHIPS

JESUS CHRIST THE REDEEMER



WHY RELATIONSHIPS?

The key word in the name Catholic Men's Fellowship is the word Fellowship. Fellowship distinguishes the ministry from other evangelical outreaches of the Church and it defines it. To enter into fellowship is to enter into relationship with other men who gather in Christ's presence in an atmosphere of trust, equality and anonymity to share personal feeling and experiences.

Self-Knowledge/Discovery

It is in relationship with Jesus Christ, Family and Community that we come to know who we are and to realize the potential with which God created us. Our natural abilities, our dominant emotions, our likes and dislikes are all discovered in significant interface with others.

Transformation

By giving completely to another in a committed union we are radically altered. Ironically, we do not lose identity but instead find it. It is in giving that we receive. "He who loses his life shall find it – he who saves his life shall lose it (Luke 9:23). Without the transforming outcome of fully entering into relationships no true growth is possible. St. Paul describes the change that took place when he surrendered his life to Jesus in these words "I no longer live but Christ in me" (Romans 9:12). To experience a gradual or radical conversion to Jesus Christ is experience a profound transformation.

Commitment

The relationship process is one of growing intimacy. It is a movement away from the ego-based personality to one that is other-centered. The strength of the commitment can ultimately grow to the point that one is willing to lay down his life for the well being of the beloved. To whom we commit is both a choice and a mystery. Tell me your friends and I will tell you who you are" is an old adage that applies.

An Emotional Experience

To love is to experience the emotions of joy and happiness and to risk the possibility of rejection and failure. For men entering into new more intimate relationships may involve an awakening of feelings long repressed. It is an opening to the heart as well as to the mind. New stirrings of life and love replace the numbness of the cynic and skeptic who has disengaged from relationships.

RELATIONSHIP OPPOSITES

Absence of Relationships

Isolation

Loneliness

Separation

Division

Cold

Numbness

Hate

Decline

Anxiety

Hoarding

Fear

Stress

Self-Centered

Hell/Outcast from God

Presence of relationships

Inclusion

Intimacy

Fellowship

Union

Warm

Feeling

Love

Growth

Confidence

Sharing

Hope

Happiness

Other-Centered

Heaven/Union with God

IMPORTANT RELATIONSHIPS

Jesus Christ

To enter into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is to come to experience the saving grace won for us painfully on the Cross. To save us from the debilitating effects of Original Sin and to permit us to attain the fullness of our potential God humbled Himself by willingly submitting to death upon a Cross.

The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross was done in order to address an important reality – our inability to do what we wish to do relying upon our own willpower. Jesus freed us from the power of evil – the force that prevents us from realizing all that we were meant to be. A personal relationship with the Lord is better than winning the lottery. It is the pearl without price.

Family/Spouse

Of all human relationship the spousal is the most important. Through the gift of human sexuality we reflect God's love of life and creation. God created the "one flesh union of marriage right from the beginning to be the fundamental revelation of His own divine mystery in the created world (Pope John Paul II's Theology of the Body).

Work/Profession

The personal development in the course of a career is a life long task. How we relate to others in the process plays a large part in determining who we become. Men spend more time in workplace relationships with clients, providers and co-workers joined together to promote a shared objective. It is the place where men best evangelize through their actions and attitudes. "Preach constantly and if necessary use words" – St. Francis of Assisi.

Community

The Catholic also expresses his hope in Jesus Christ in his relationships in social service to the community – in politics, the arts and in social services to the poor and ill. There is no part of God's kingdom that does not involve God's work.

Men's Fellowship Group

The fellowship groups are the unique relationships of the Catholic Men's Fellowship. Here men establish and foster a deep personal relationship with other men who have a personal relationship with Jesus or who wish to establish one. In fellowship men express their dependence on the Lord to each other. By sharing their experiences and feelings men grow in knowledge of God and of God's creation.

OBSTACLES TO RELATIONSHIPS

SIN

If all growth occurs in relationships then **sin is the breaking of relationships.**

The original break occurred in the Garden of Eden when God and Man were separated by the sin of Adam. Adam declared that he could dispense with God's love and make it on his own. By alienating himself from the source of life, Adam introduced anxiety, loneliness, despair and death itself.

God created us in His own image and likeness so that we could share in the awesome work of creation. We also were given free will and the ability to accept or reject God's love. In choosing to break away from union with God we, like Adam, decide to reject His extended helping hand and to go our own way. The ego is the substitute for God.

Because of Original Sin we are at risk in terms of intimacy with God and His creation. In separating ourselves from God and His loving care we also put in jeopardy any intimacy with fellow creatures. Having no relationship with God the violation of human contact is easily rationalized. Sin, the breaking of relationships with God and Man is the presence of evil in the world and the source of all misery.

FALSE GODS

In refusing to acknowledge dependence upon the God of Revelation we have substituted other Gods in His place. If the loving God of the Scriptures does not exist for us we are forced to invent substitutes one – we come to rely upon False Gods. In the process we create our own rules, institute our own guidelines and make up our own definition of good and evil. The result is that evil becomes the good and the good evil.

The irrational pursuit of Power and the ability to exercise control over events is the greatest False God.

A False God is any person or and thing that is a proxy for the true God. It manifests itself principally in striving for power, money and wealth. Possessions and riches become our “security blanket”.

How do we recognize the presence of False Gods in our lives?

Because they do not contain the Truth, the pursuit of False Gods will ultimately lead to disaster. Before the final disaster – an eternity without the love of God – there are numerous physical and emotional signs that we are on the wrong track.

Breakdown begins when we reach the limits of our ability to control people and events. It manifests itself in symptoms of anxiety and stress which if not arrested can lead to depression and in the worst-case suicide. “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.” Romans 6:23.

If it does not result in self-inflicted violence, it results in the slow abandonment of commitment and responsibility – the equivalent of “six packing it into the grave”. We numb out and lead lives of “quiet desperation”.

BETRAYAL

Even if it is acknowledged that ‘all growth occurs in relationships’, many men are reluctant to enter into new ones or to move towards greater intimacy in existing ones because of **betrayal**.

Betrayals – The betrayal of divorce is the risk associated with the intimacy of the marriage contract.

- The physical or emotional abandonment of a child is a betrayal of the intimacy of parenthood.
- Being “let down” by people we trust in business and professional life is to experience betrayal.

Response Options – Revenge – to “get back” at the betrayer.

- To Deny Reality – I’ll never love again – Relationships are too difficult.
- Become a Cynic – The trust nobody. “Once bitten twice shy”.

Resolution - To Forgive

Stages of Forgiveness

- Can’t forgive the betrayer
- Want to forgive
- To forgive
- To love the betrayer as Jesus loves

Jesus Christ the Answer

To err is human to forgive divine. It takes a relationship with Jesus Christ, the only person you can completely trust, to forgive grievous hurt. It is only in relationship with Jesus that we can live life in abundance.

EVIL

Evil is a reality. It became a reality for us in the Garden of Eden when Adam, acting on our behalf, committed the **Original Sin** – the act of rejecting God’s blueprint for our well-being and happiness. In its place Adam tried to substitute his own version of the good but instead reaped a life of toil and despair. With that, time began and the Devil was let loose to prey upon man and his best intentions. The reality of evil is illustrated in the Book of Job. “And the Lord said to Satan “whence do you come?” Then Satan answered the Lord “from roaming the world and patrolling it” (Job 1-7). The attempt to make it exclusively on our own it led to societies based upon dominion, power, addiction, cruelty – man’s inhumanity to man.

The propensity to rebel against the laws of God is passed on from generation to generation. The sins of the father are visited upon the son. The frustration of trying to make it on our own leads to obsession, addiction, anger and rage. Our good intentions are thwarted by our propensity to do the opposite – we are trapped in the unending cycle of resolution and failure.

The Diabolical Lie

The inability to overcome evil by our own efforts gives the Devil the opportunity to spread the diabolical lie – that we are no good and will never achieve our hearts desires. The Devil reminds us of our sins and failures and he suggests that the battle cannot be won. He even suggests that there is no such thing as sin – that there is no objective Truth and that any one lifestyle is as good as another.

Jesus Christ the Redeemer

In the Old Testament a Redeemer was promised who would release us from the unending futile efforts to free ourselves from the power of the Devil. The promise was realized in the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who liberated us from the power of darkness by virtue of His sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. It was on Good Friday that man’s freedom from the power of evil was purchased. By believing in Jesus Christ and accepting His saving grace we can overcome the diabolical lie and begin a new rewarding life in the spirit. The potential of the abundant life that Christ promised becomes a reality for us (John 10:10)

AIDS TO RELATIONSHIPS

Personal relationship with Jesus Christ

The primary relationship in life is with Jesus Christ, the Son of God and the founder of the Church. Relationships only prosper by investing time in them. How much time should we spend with the Lord in prayer and contemplation? Obviously no hard and fast rule can apply to every individual. Many spiritual directors suggest that as much as one hour a day is necessary. Spending some time in prayer is a necessary condition for salvation.

Men's Fellowship Groups

Most men have few opportunities to truly share with others in an atmosphere of trust, confidentiality and anonymity. By creating a special ritual space, men are encouraged to reflect upon the events of their lives in the light of the Gospel and the living presence of Jesus Christ. By sharing themselves men can come to know themselves as they are. It is in this process that growth occurs.

Sacramental Life of the Church

The Church through its sacramental life provides an indispensable aid to relationship with God and with others. The Eucharist is an awesome reminder that God wants a personal relationship with each of us. He left this proof of His abiding love in the sacrifice of the Mass wherein the invitation of the most intimate flesh and blood relationship is extended.

Virtuous Life – Keeping the Commandments

A necessary condition to the enjoyment of the Abundant Life is to submit to the will of God by obeying His commandments. Whoever says, "I know Him," but does not keep His commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him" (1John 2:4). Relationships are not possible in the presence of sin, deceit and distrust. Sin is breaking off relationships with both God and man. The abundant life of peace, happiness, joy and prosperity is impossible while rejecting the blueprint given to us for our salvation.

Mentoring – Evangelizing

Belief in Jesus Christ is the key component in the life of the Christian. The Truth of Jesus Christ will always prevail because it and it alone addresses the reality of the human condition –that we cannot make it alone. We are compelled to spread the good news to others that salvation is at hand.

PRINCIPLES Of FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

“The Sharing is the Teaching – the Teaching is the Sharing”

Fellowship in groups is a bottom up rather than a top down experience. Fellowship does not depend upon structure or authority. It does not require the presence of a priest or minister in the role of teacher or spiritual director. The learning comes from the sharing of life experiences in the presence of Jesus and the light of the Gospels.

In sharing our story with others and in listening to the experiences of others, we come to know more fully who we are. The fellowship setting does not provide answers to problems – it facilitates giving them over to Jesus Christ for resolution. The fellowship process helps us to focus more intently on the events of life and to see God's plan in everything. We come to realize through sharing that nothing is coincidence.

“Your Weakness is your Strength”

In the fellowship setting we share our failures as well as our victories. We thank the Lord for our success and we ask Him to help us in overcoming difficulties. Many men have come to know Jesus out of an experience of failure – in acknowledging our inability to cope with circumstances on the basis of our own abilities. A significant conversion experience born out of desperation is an occurrence in the lives of many men. To acknowledge human limitation and dependence upon God for everything in life is the beginning of wisdom and the start of a new creation – to be born again into abundant life.

“Your Crisis is Your Gift”

God uses all things for the good. (Bible quote) The education of a young man is a process in which talents are identified and developed. A personality is formed, a healthy ego grows and a measure of self-reliance is nurtured. However, if this process takes place in the absence of any significant relationship with God a “mid-life crisis” is likely to occur. For many men this crisis can be converted into a life-changing moment by giving it over to the Lord. The fellowship groups are familiar with the experience and can help men struggling with the problem to find the solution in the gift of freedom that Christ purchased for us on the cross.

GUIDELINES For FELLOWSHIP MEETINGS

Confidentiality- Fellowship meetings foster the disclosure of some events that men would not otherwise share freely. Maintaining the privacy of such revelations is a vital principle of the meetings. Men may discuss some weakness or failure in the expectation that through the reciprocal sharing he will find help in coping with his difficulties. The seal of confessional secrecy that binds the priest in the Sacrament of Reconciliation should apply to the content of all meetings

A Safe Place – A fellowship meeting has elements of a prayer group, a bible study gathering, and a self-help meeting as well as moments of praise and worship. However, its most important characteristic is sharing. A suitable physical and spiritual environment is necessary to encourage the healing that comes from sharing.

The environment should be relaxed and all should feel equal. Whenever possible the men should meet seated in a circle. An empty chair symbolizing the presence of Jesus Christ should be placed in the center of the meeting space. The meeting conversation should be non-judgmental. There can be no discrimination with respect to economic circumstance, religion, ethnic origin or race. All men are welcome.

Meetings should occur at regular intervals. Meetings twice a month seem to work well. That interval gives sufficient time for new experiences to develop and to share without the need for re-acquaintance at the start of each meeting.

No “Gurus” - Leadership is required in order to conduct a successful meeting. A minimum of one person must have the responsibility to guide the meeting in the manner of the Fellowship. However, the leader is not responsible for instructing the group on proper Christian behavior, Catholic doctrine or dogma. That is the commission of the priests and duly ordained ministers. The leader does not impart his knowledge or wisdom to the assembled men – that is the role of the Holy Spirit. It is a guiding principle of the fellowship that the sharing is the teaching and the teaching is the sharing.

No Debating –There is no room for debating in a fellowship meeting. It invariably leads to dissention. Responding immediately to a disclosure by one of the group with a recommended course of action is discouraged. “Ought-to” statements should be avoided. The response to a plea for help is to express sympathy and compassion. The leader should elicit stories of a similar vein that might be helpful in the circumstances. In cases of obvious distress the leader should take time out to pray specifically for the healing of the individual concerned. After the meeting the leader may suggest that the individual seek professional counseling, if appropriate.

MEETING FORMAT

Greetings – 10/15 minutes

A time for general greetings and exchange of information and news before the meeting starts should be encouraged. Men can bring their own beverage or coffee or tea can be brewed on site.

Opening Song (Optional)

Spontaneous individual Prayer and Petitions – 10/15 minutes

Topic – 5/10 minutes The leader introduces the meeting topic selected from **Signposts** publication.

Signposts contains about 50 themes specifically oriented towards the needs of men meeting in fellowship. It is the “official” guide recommended by the Catholic Men’s Fellowship. Nevertheless, any fellowship group can introduce any suitable topic if it suits the purposes of the men meeting in fellowship format. Use of the **Signpost** themes reduces the burden on the group leadership to come up with an appropriate topic.

Scripture Reading – 5/10/ minutes

Read the scripture passage and catechism reading associated with the topic

Sharing of Personal Experiences – 50/60 minutes

The core of the meeting is the sharing that occurs as each participant expresses what the scripture readings are saying to him as he reflects on every day events. Sometimes he will witness to the significant turning points in his that are the equivalent of conversion moments. It is more likely that the observations and discussion will concern contemporary events and how the Lord is working in them.

Closing Prayer – Our Father

Total Length of Meeting 90 minutes approximately

Meeting should end at the Scheduled Time

HOW TO START A GROUP

- Contact the local Catholic Men's Fellowship if it exists. Otherwise lookup the Internet for websites of Fellowship organizations around the country, the National Resource Center (www.nrccm.org) or the Catholic Men's Fellowship of Greater Cincinnati (www.thecall.org)
- Become familiar with the learned truths contained in the Handbook. Other valuable informational resources are listed in Handbook.
- Two are better than one. Two men should take responsibility for leading the initial group. The leaders should first attend fellowship meetings if such groups are locally in existence. Existing groups will be anxious to help.
- Attending a Catholic Men's Conference or regional fellowship workshops is helpful in starting a group. A list of conferences around the country is available from the National Resource Center.
- Coordinate efforts with the pastor or parish staff if the group is part of a parish. Do not necessarily expect the pastor or the staff to lead or participate in a new group. It is important nevertheless to communicate and coordinate with them.
- Men coming out of Christ Renews His Parish and Life in the Spirit Seminars are potentially good candidates for parish fellowship groups.
- Invite men to attend the fellowship meeting. A personal invitation is by far the best. Notice about ongoing meetings can be communicated in the Parish Bulletin or by email to the participants or other likely men.
- It is important to discuss the vision and purpose of Catholic Fellowship at the initial meetings. The meeting principles and guidelines should be established as soon as possible, as well as the need for strict confidentiality.
- Size of the group is not important. Where two or three are gathered together in my name there I am in the midst of them (Mt 18:20). Functioning parish groups typically have between 4 to 15 members.

CATHOLIC MEN'S FELLOWSHIP

RESOURCES

- **SIGNPOSTS - How to be a Catholic in the World Today** A publication of The Word Among Us Press
It contains 50 different topics and associated scripture readings specifically designed for Catholic Men's Fellowship meetings.
- **SCRIPTURE** – Men are encouraged to bring a copy of the Bible to each fellowship meeting. A standard Catholic translation is recommended such as the **New American Bible**.
- **CATECHISM** of the Catholic Church
Second Edition published by Libreria Editrice Vaticana
- **NATIONAL RESOURCE CENTER for CATHOLIC MEN (NRCCM)** www.nrccm.org
- **THE CATHOLIC MEN'S FELLOWSHIP of GREATER CINCINNATI** www.thecall.org

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 Christ 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 fellowship-meeting 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.