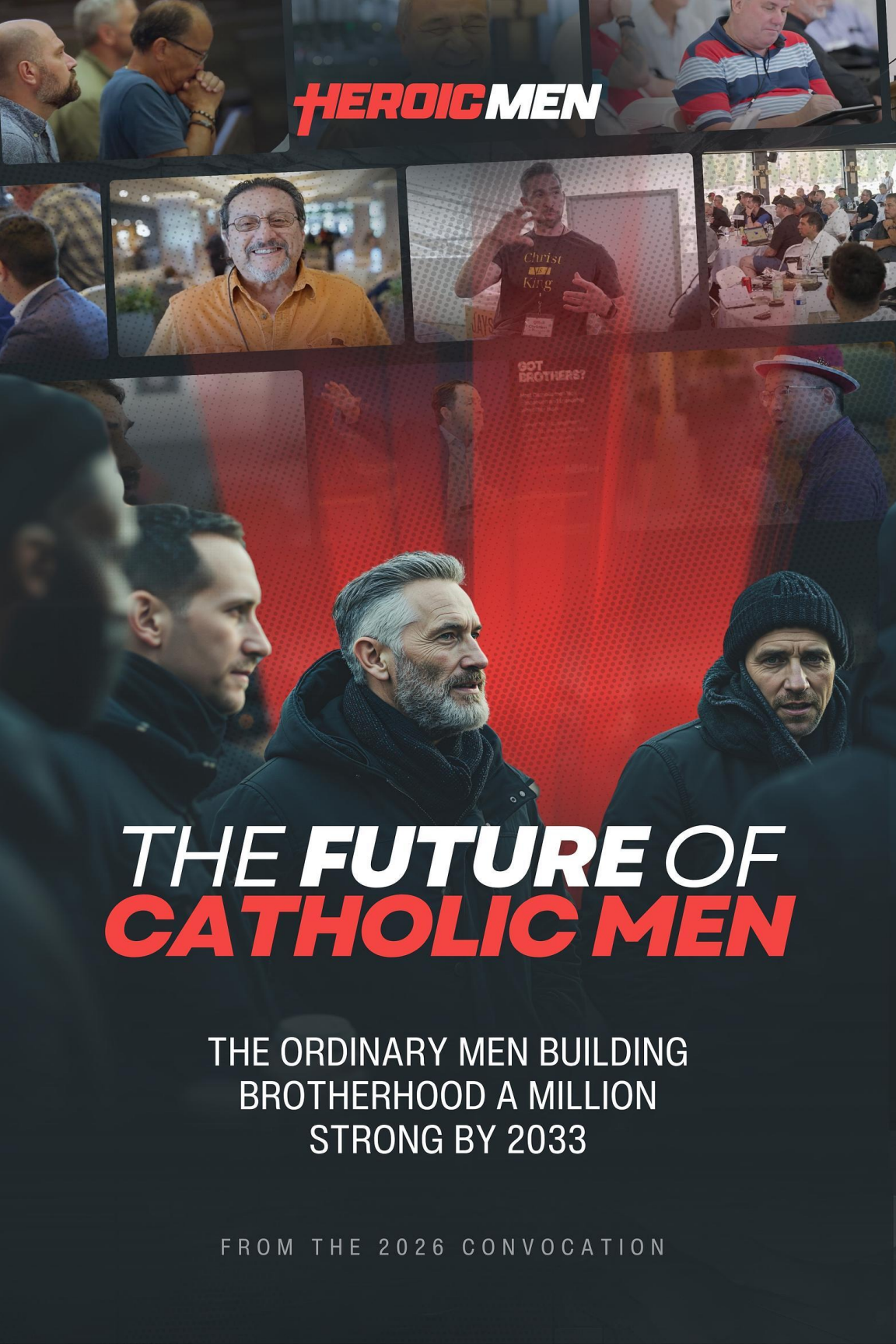




HEROIC MEN

THE FUTURE OF CATHOLIC MEN

THE ORDINARY MEN BUILDING
BROTHERHOOD A MILLION
STRONG BY 2033

FROM THE 2026 CONVOCAATION

HEROIC MEN

Future of Catholic Men: 2026 Convocation

*The Ordinary Men Building Brotherhood a Million Strong
by 2033*

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Foreword

If your men's group reaches 5% of the men in your parish, you may have built something remarkable.

What about the other 95%?

Sean Lynn put that question to the leaders at the 2026 Heroic Men convocation. He knew how easily a full room can hide the men who are missing. Fathers leave Mass without speaking to anyone. Young men face battles they are ashamed to name. Men fall away, and weeks become years before anyone calls.

The need is vast. **So is what men are already building.**

- In Boise, Travis Wingo set out to gather 250 men for a conference. About 950 came to the first one.
- In the Diocese of Austin, men's groups now meet in about 50 parishes. At one parish, a group that began roughly two years ago draws about 80 men each week, and some of them stay together after Mass.
- In Wisconsin, Tom O'Brien described a Men of Christ conference with 3,700 registrations and a network of parish groups meant to receive men when the day ends.

These are men making room for other men to meet Jesus Christ.

The work can begin much smaller. Scott Hadwin started a weekly Band of Brothers with a few men and a rosary. His son joined. As the group grew, their relationship changed. Scott thought he was building something for other men; he came to see how badly he needed it himself.

Santos Hernandez saw men's groups aging and disappearing in Western Pennsylvania. He began mentoring younger men, giving them responsibility

for events and preparing them to take over. Those young leaders went on to organize gatherings drawing 150 to 200 men at a time. In the Diocese of Metuchen, Adam Carlisle is working across eight deaneries to raise leaders in parishes before holding a diocesan men's conference.

Men are finding ways to begin, ways to grow and ways to hand the work on.

The stakes are personal. Lynn tells of an atheist whose friend invited him to a conference and offered to buy him lunch. Over the next two years, the man explored the faith and entered the Catholic Church at Easter 2025. He died that October. Matt Aujero tells of Brendan, a young man who found prayer, a brother in his struggle and eventually a path to the priesthood.

Every account in this book presses us to ask what could happen if more men did the same. What if the father who leaves Mass alone had a brother waiting for him? What if a young man searching for purpose were trusted to lead? What if every conference sent men home with names, friendships and a place to belong?

Heroic Men is calling one million men to live a simple pledge by 2033: **pray daily, connect weekly, invite monthly**. It can begin in any parish, alongside the ministries already serving there. It can begin with three names written on a card and one conversation this week.

The future of Catholic men is taking shape. You will see it in these pages: a handful of men becoming a group, a group strengthening a parish, younger leaders carrying the work forward, and an invitation opening a life to Christ.

The men who built these ministries began with the people and resources they had. So can we.

There are still men to reach.

Let's go find them.

I

Opening

1

What kind of man are you becoming? A call for Catholic leaders to become brothers first

Before the keynotes, strategies and breakout sessions began, Bill Moyer gave the men gathered for the Heroic Men convocation a simpler assignment.

Talk to each other.

Heroic Men had placed discussion prompts in the attendees' bags for use during meals and conversations throughout the weekend. Moyer wanted the men to learn what each other did, but he also wanted them to move beyond professional introductions.

"This is a men's group," Moyer said. "Men can talk more than, 'What do I do?'"

The larger purpose, he said, was brotherhood.

"If men don't need other men to talk like this, there's no purpose in any of us being here," Moyer said. "The safest place you can ever go to really be a man and talk about the things that keep you awake at night, as long as we know that that need exists, then we're going to be OK."

That expectation framed the opening of a weekend designed around Catholic men already leading ministries, conferences and local groups, along with aspiring leaders invited by others.

The gathering was deliberately small and relational.

Moyer said Heroic Men wanted to recreate the spirit of the meetings from which the Catholic Men's Leadership Alliance emerged: leaders sitting together, hearing what others were building and wrestling with the future of ministry to Catholic men.

"We're recreating how we launched," he said. "How we launched was by invitation only for leaders or aspiring leaders who somebody else asked to be invited."

The question at the center of those earlier meetings remains the question for the current generation, he said: "What the future of Catholic men looks like."

Remembering what brothers do

For Moyer, brotherhood carries a meaning formed long before his years in men's ministry.

He grew up with four brothers, five boys sharing one bedroom with two sets of bunk beds.

At night, after they were supposed to be asleep, they talked.

"I had four brothers," he said. "Five of us were in one bedroom, two sets of bunk beds. And we laid awake at night when we were supposed to be sleeping, talking."

Years later, one of those brothers was dying from cancer.

During a conversation, Moyer reached back to the bedroom they had shared.

"I said to him one time, 'Let's pretend I'm in that top bunk and you're in the bottom bunk and we're talking.'"

His brother answered with humor: "We don't have to climb out the window to go see girls, dude."

It became one of their final exchanges.

"That's what brothers are," Moyer said.

The story carried the larger point he wanted the men in the room to understand. Brotherhood requires more than attending the same conference, joining the same organization or working in similar ministries.

It requires men who know each other.

The weekend's meals, discussion prompts and open time were designed around that purpose.

Leaders hearing from leaders

Moyer also emphasized that the convocation would differ from a conventional conference built primarily around major keynote speakers.

The greater emphasis would be hearing from men already working "in the trenches."

Different ministry groups would explain who they were, how they began and what they had learned. Breakout sessions would allow leaders to examine specific areas of Catholic men's ministry together.

That structure reflected the earliest gatherings behind the Catholic Men's Leadership Alliance.

At those meetings, ministries came together and presented their work to one another rather than operating within separate circles.

Moyer wanted the current gathering to recover that posture.

"This is for you to hear from your brothers, from the ones who were out there in the trenches doing it, how groups got started," he said.

The convocation, then, began less as a showcase and more as a working gathering.

Men would hear stories, compare experiences, build relationships and consider where Catholic men's ministry should go next.

Returning to the beginning

Moyer placed the weekend within a longer line of Catholic men's leadership.

Before the Catholic Men's Leadership Alliance and Heroic Men, he said, came the National Fellowship of Catholic Men.

That organization held leadership gatherings of its own, including a conference at Franciscan University.

Moyer served as executive director at the time.

The opening keynote speaker at that earlier gathering was Billy Moyer, his son.

Years later, Bill invited him back to open this gathering as well.

“There was a group before Catholic Men’s Leadership Alliance, Heroic Men, the National Fellowship of Catholic Men,” Moyer said. “It morphed later over the years into what you see today.”

The return of the same speaker underscored what Moyer wanted the gathering to represent: continuity across generations, paired with another opportunity to ask where Catholic men go from here.

The formal presentations would soon begin.

But Moyer’s opening challenge had already established the premise for the weekend.

Before men could build stronger ministries, expand conferences or form new leaders, they needed to become brothers capable of speaking honestly, learning from one another and carrying the work together.

Every Leader Has a Shadow | Billy Moyer

Billy Moyer has spent more than three decades talking about leadership.

Lately, he has been thinking about math.

Moyer turned 40 this year. His son Lincoln is nearly 7. His younger son, Lane, is three months old. With a new baby in the house, he said, questions about time have begun arriving with an urgency he never felt earlier in life.

“How many more summers before Lincoln doesn’t want to hold my hand anymore?” he asked Catholic men’s leaders gathered for the opening session of a Heroic Men convocation.

He wonders how old he will be when Lane graduates from high school.

He wonders how many years remain with his own parents.

“That’s the math I’ve been doing lately,” Moyer said.

The calculations have pushed him toward a question he first wrote down when he was 21.

“When it’s all said and done, what will I leave behind?”

At 21, he could put the words on a page.

Nearly two decades later, he said, he is beginning to understand them.

“I don’t think you answer a question like that with a slide,” Moyer said. “I think you answer that question with a life.”

Growing up in his father's shadow

Leadership came early for Moyer.

As a child, he traveled with his father, Bill Moyer, speaking before audiences and serving as his opening act. He shared his own stories, but much of what he taught came directly from his father.

"My dad modeled the way for me," he said. "He led me and I followed."

His father repeated one idea constantly: "People become like their leader."

Moyer repeated the phrase for years.

As a young man, he started a business with his father and wrote books with him. Their first book together, *Seeds of Success*, explored the journey from worldly success toward significance, which Moyer defined as what a person leaves behind.

He helped put his father's life and ideas into sentences.

The words were right, Moyer said. His life still had to catch up with them.

"That's the thing about writing wisdom before you've lived it," he said. "You can get the words exactly right. They sound good. They look good, but you can have no idea what the heck you're talking about."

For much of his early life, leadership meant watching a leader he admired and learning to imitate him.

Marriage and fatherhood changed the test.

He began leading people who pushed back.

Every light casts a shadow

Earlier this year, Moyer published *The Upside Down Leader*, his first book written without his father.

Its central idea is simple:

"Every light casts a shadow."

Every leader, Moyer said, carries a mission: the person he wants to become.

That version may be clear, generous, present and empathetic. It is the version easily described in a biography or leadership presentation.

Then there is what Moyer calls the "shadow mission."

It appears when a leader becomes tired, stressed, frustrated or consumed by ego.

Collaboration can become control.

Clarity can become confusion.

Building someone else up can become defending oneself.

Moyer calls that place “the upside down.”

The problem, he said, is that leaders often fail to recognize it while they are there.

The opposite is what Moyer calls daylight: enough self-awareness to recognize fear, ego and recurring patterns before they determine how a person acts.

Moving toward daylight, he said, happens repeatedly through difficult acts of self-examination.

Marriage gave him one of the first places to practice it.

The night empathy became personal

Moyer has been married to his wife, Ashley, for 15 years.

He entered marriage having spent years teaching leadership concepts. Living those concepts inside a marriage proved different.

About a decade ago, Ashley became a finalist for the Austin Under 40 Awards.

At an event for finalists, she brought Moyer as her guest.

Throughout the evening, people repeatedly assumed he was the finalist.

When they left, Moyer remarked on how strange he found it.

Ashley answered with four words: “Welcome to my life.”

The comment stopped him.

He had walked into rooms his entire life without having to consider whether people would attribute someone else’s achievement to him because he was a man.

Ashley encountered that experience regularly.

Moyer said the moment forced him to reconsider something he had taught for years: empathy.

“Empathy is seeking to understand,” he said. “It’s wanting to understand

someone that's different from you, knowing that you probably never will, but you keep trying anyway."

For Moyer, empathy moved from something suitable for a leadership slide into something he had to practice with his wife.

"It's made me a better husband and a better leader," he said.

Fatherhood would expose him more sharply.

An Eagles game and a destroyed Lego set

Moyer grew up in Philadelphia and remains an Eagles fan.

During one game, the Eagles blew a fourth-quarter lead.

Moyer became angry.

Lincoln had spent hours building a Lego set on the floor. Moyer had already asked him to move it.

He could have stepped around it.

Instead, in anger over a football game he was watching from home, he kicked it.

"I destroyed it," he said.

He remembers the expression on his son's face.

Lincoln forgave him quickly.

Moyer had a harder time moving beyond what had happened.

"The hardest part wasn't him forgiving me," he said. "It was sitting with the question of why I responded that way in the first place."

He recalled another episode from years earlier, when anger and frustration led him to leave a voicemail that cost him a relationship he valued.

Both experiences revealed the same problem.

The shadow was no longer an abstract leadership concept.

His son had seen it.

"He's going to become like me whether I'm trying to lead him or not," Moyer said.

His younger son will eventually begin watching too.

His business gave him authority. Marriage gave him responsibility. Fatherhood made leadership unavoidable.

“I’m fully leading,” Moyer said.

The people he leads most closely are watching him on days he would rather they were looking elsewhere.

What will they say when you are gone?

Fatherhood also changed the way Moyer thinks about death.

A few weeks before the gathering, someone he knew died in a plane crash while returning from a trip with his teenage son.

News coverage described the man as a tech millionaire.

The people who knew him used different words.

They spoke about a husband, father and community leader.

Moyer later attended another funeral and listened carefully to how that man’s life was remembered.

Much of the service focused on professional success, career and what he had built.

Moyer began imagining his own funeral.

He said he is proud of his books. He is proud of his business. He hopes to write and build more.

Those are far from the things he wants to leave behind.

“The shadow version of me, the upside down version, likes accolades, likes people to see me,” he said. “I like to be seen. I like praise.”

The daylight version, he said, asks a different question: Did the people left behind become stronger because he was there?

The distinction brought him back to the premise he had written as a young man.

Success and significance are different.

Look in the mirror

Moyer said leaders can spend years studying other people.

He studied his father.

He now watches Lincoln watching him.

He can tell stories about his own failures almost as though he were describing another person.

The harder work begins when a leader looks directly at himself.

“What version of me is showing up right now?” Moyer asked.

That means examining the version who appears under stress, fatigue and frustration, rather than evaluating the polished version who appears before an audience.

Moyer said his priorities have changed as he approaches 40.

He spends less energy thinking about becoming a stronger executive, coach or speaker.

He thinks more about becoming a better father.

“That is the most important leadership role I will ever have,” he said.

His sons will learn leadership through the same process by which he learned from his father: watching.

From success to significance

Moyer ended by returning to the man who taught him leadership.

His father had spent years teaching him that people become like their leader and that success and significance belong to different categories.

Moyer asked the men in the room to identify something a parent, teacher, mentor or spiritual director had led them toward.

Then he asked them to consider whom they were leading toward that same thing.

A child.

A spouse.

A friend.

A team.

A brother.

That, he said, is where legacy becomes visible.

Moving from shadow toward daylight is a repeated choice rather than a finished state.

For Moyer, the journey from success toward significance now looks less

like accumulating another accomplishment and more like recognizing who is watching.

And choosing, while there is still time, what kind of man they will learn to become.

3

1 Million Men by 2033: Heroic Men calls Catholic Leaders to Make Disciple-Makers | Bill Moyer

Bill Moyer told Catholic men's leaders that the next era of men's ministry must move beyond gathering men into programs and toward forming brothers who make disciples, outlining a seven-year mission built around one repeatable pledge: pray daily, connect weekly and invite monthly.

Billy Moyer had spent the opening keynote describing a leader's movement from his "shadow" toward "daylight," the place where self-awareness allows him to recognize fear, ego and destructive patterns before they control him.

His father gave the metaphor a name.

"The daylight has a name," Bill Moyer told the room.

He asked the men to repeat it.

"Jesus."

"That's the light," Moyer said. "'I'm the way, the truth and the life.' Follow in that light."

For Moyer, the greatest threat to leadership is pride. A man can begin with a desire to serve and gradually allow ego to take over. The answer, he argued, requires more than private self-examination.

It requires another man.

“You need a brother to speak truth to you in a way like you never heard it before,” Moyer said. “And you need to man up and give them permission to do it.”

That brotherhood, he said, is part of the reason the leaders had gathered.

A man walking toward Christ needs men around him who can recognize when he is moving toward ego, sin or isolation and call him back.

Moyer connected that journey with the language Heroic Men has chosen for its mission.

A heroic man, he said, is “a saint in the making.”

The destination is sainthood. The work happens while men are still becoming saints.

Are you making disciples?

Moyer then tested the room.

“How many of you in the room would consider yourself a disciple?”

Hands went up.

Then he gave them another question.

“I want you to write down the names of three or four or five people that you’ve discipled.”

The distinction went to the heart of his message.

Jesus told his disciples to go and make disciples. For Moyer, receiving formation without eventually bringing another person toward Christ leaves the mission unfinished.

“That journey is meant to do one man at a time and go out in twos,” he said. “That’s what real leadership is. It’s inviting.”

He pointed to the simplicity of Jesus’ invitation.

“Come.”

Then:

“Come and see.”

Catholic men, Moyer argued, can make the work more complicated than it needs to be. They build programs, conferences and resources while overlooking the power of one man personally inviting another.

The biblical model also challenges the instinct to carry the mission alone. Jesus formed the disciples before sending them, Moyer said, and then sent them in pairs.

“He sent them out in pairs, in twos,” Moyer said.

The principle matters because men frequently default toward independence. Moyer illustrated it through his grandson Lincoln, who had reached the age when he increasingly tells adults, “I can do it myself.”

Men often retain the same instinct for decades, Moyer said.

His answer was brotherhood.

A call that began in youth ministry

Moyer’s own path into men’s ministry began after 14 years working in youth ministry with his wife.

He loved the work and struggled with the idea of leaving it.

Then, while praying about what came next, Moyer said he received a clear direction.

“God said, ‘I want you to work with men.’”

His first response was resistance.

“I said, ‘I don’t like men.’”

Years of youth ministry had shown him the consequences when fathers became absent, distracted or disengaged.

Moyer remembered prayer circles where teenagers cried over their fathers: fathers who failed to show up, fathers who treated their wives poorly, fathers who stood at the back of activities distracted by work and networking.

He was angry with those men.

Then came the answer.

“What he said is, ‘I want you to go tell men that.’”

Moyer began to see the previous 14 years differently.

“I realized that youth ministry wasn’t my destination,” he said. “It was my training. It was my preparation.”

The following day, his friend Robert Tunmire approached him after meeting with the bishop about the lack of organized ministry to men in the Diocese of

Austin.

The bishop had responded by asking Tunmire when he planned to start something.

Tunmire came to Moyer.

“I feel like you and I are supposed to do this together,” Moyer recalled him saying.

The partnership eventually helped launch the Central Texas Fellowship of Catholic Men.

Moyer described Tunmire as the forceful “Paul” of their partnership and himself as “Barnabas,” the encourager and teacher.

Learning to accept that role, he said, became part of his own formation.

Twenty years later, that local ministry continued under other leaders.

For Moyer, its survival carried an important lesson: founders have to let the work belong to the mission rather than themselves.

Catholic men have tried this before

Moyer then widened the lens.

The attempt to organize Catholic men in the United States stretches back more than a century, he said.

He traced one early national effort to the National Council of Catholic Men, established in 1920 under the National Catholic Welfare Conference.

The organization was created to promote the lay apostolate and Catholic action.

It eventually merged with the National Council of Catholic Women into a broader lay organization.

Within several years, the men’s organization had disappeared.

Moyer said the effects lasted for a generation.

Later efforts emerged.

In the late 1990s, Catholic men returning from Promise Keepers gatherings began discussing the need for resources specifically designed for Catholic men.

“They said, ‘We’ve got to organize. We have to do something,’” Moyer

recalled.

That effort became the National Resource Center for Catholic Men.

The founders initially imagined large gatherings, but Moyer said they eventually identified a more important question: Where does a man go after the conference?

“The magic doesn’t happen at the conference,” he said. “Only the call, only the ‘come,’ comes at that, and then you’ve got to put the work in after that.”

The organization produced resources and eventually became the National Fellowship of Catholic Men, moving beyond content toward leader support and fellowship.

That organization later ceased operating in its previous form.

From those relationships eventually emerged the Catholic Men’s Leadership Alliance.

Moyer said the recurring history carries a warning.

Groups can begin around cooperation and gradually become preoccupied with their own identity, attendance or growth.

“Why does history repeat itself?” he asked.

His answer was pride.

Stop counting the wrong number

Moyer challenged leaders to reconsider how they measure success.

A pastor may proudly say that a parish with 1,000 families has a men’s group drawing 12 or 15 men.

Moyer argued that the number leaders should care about is the hundreds of men still outside the room.

“How many members are part of their men’s group?” he asked.

“All of them.”

The men attending are only the men currently reached.

The mission includes the rest.

“Jesus didn’t say go and make disciples of 10 or 13 or 15 men,” Moyer said.

“He said all of them.”

That principle became central to the Catholic Men’s Leadership Alliance.

The organization, Moyer said, was designed as an alliance because no single ministry, conference or apostolate could reach every Catholic man.

The movement needed groups working together.

Its later development, however, introduced another complication.

When Heroic Men became confused with a platform

During the COVID era, the alliance gained an opportunity to build the digital platform that became Heroic Men.

The platform provided Catholic content specifically for men and eventually developed into an extensive collection of talks, series and ministry resources.

Moyer called its development both a blessing and a curse.

The blessing was infrastructure.

The problem was identity.

As men increasingly encountered Heroic Men through a website or app, many began to understand Heroic Men primarily as another content platform.

That made the alliance appear to be another ministry competing with existing Catholic men's organizations.

Moyer said that was contrary to its purpose.

The original name, Catholic Men's Leadership Alliance, reflected three ideas.

"Catholic men" identified whom they were trying to reach.

"Leadership" meant forming men who could form others.

"We're going to go make disciple makers," Moyer said.

And "alliance" meant working with ministries already serving men rather than trying to replace them.

Heroic Men, he said, exists to equip those leaders and ministries.

"We're going to pull all the things that already exist and everything new that comes, and we're going to become an alliance," Moyer said.

He repeatedly returned to the scale of the unfinished mission.

Even large Catholic men's organizations, he argued, reach a fraction of the men around them.

The answer is cooperation.

The next seven years

Moyer said the organization has spent roughly a year and a half working to clarify that identity and determine the central mission for its next seven years.

The destination is 2033.

That year marks 2,000 years since the events of Christ's death, resurrection and the apostolic mission that followed.

Heroic Men wants to use the years leading to that anniversary around one measurable goal:

1 million men.

"Our mission for the next seven years: a million men," Moyer said.

The goal, however, is larger than registering 1 million names on a platform.

Heroic Men wants 1 million men practicing a common rhythm of Christian brotherhood.

Moyer summarized the mission:

"Heroic Men exists to turn isolated Catholic men into brothers who draw nearer to Christ and to one another through one simple sharable pledge to pray daily, connect weekly, and invite monthly until 1 million are living it by 2033."

The strategy is designed to work inside existing parishes, conferences, apostolates and ministries.

It begins with a man choosing other men.

Pray daily

The first part of the Heroic Pledge is prayer.

Moyer originally considered asking each man to pray for as many as 10 men, though experience suggested three may be easier for many men to carry consistently.

The point is specificity.

Choose men by name.

Pray for them.

Then tell them.

A man might approach someone after Mass and say he has been praying for him and ask whether there is something specific he can bring to prayer.

Moyer described young fathers in his own parish with several children, crowded schedules and little likelihood of attending an early morning men's group.

That does not place them beyond reach.

He can approach them where they already are.

He can pray for them.

He can learn what burdens they are carrying.

The relationship begins there.

"Draw near to Christ every day," Moyer said.

Prayer happens before crisis becomes the only reason a man turns toward God.

Connect weekly

The second action is personal connection.

Once a week, the man reaches out.

The interaction can be a phone call, coffee, a conversation after Mass or another direct encounter.

"Real brotherhood in person," Moyer said.

The man becomes more than another face in a parish.

His needs have a name.

His struggles become known.

The relationship can eventually lead toward deeper fellowship, a men's group, spiritual formation or another ministry.

For Moyer, this is where Heroic Men's national infrastructure has value.

The organization has developed a map of men's ministries and groups and wants to help connect men with leaders already working in their communities.

The digital system serves the personal encounter rather than replacing it.

Moyer said a man touched by a story online ultimately needs "a brother sitting next to" him.

Invite monthly

The third action creates multiplication.

Once a month, a man invites someone else into the pledge.

Moyer offered the kind of invitation he imagines:

“I’ve been praying for you. Would you be willing to pray for three other guys sitting all around you, guys in your life that need prayer?”

Then those men begin the same rhythm.

Pray.

Connect.

Invite.

“This is how it multiplies,” Moyer said.

A conference with 500 men could therefore become much larger than an annual gathering of 500 attendees.

If those men each begin praying for three others, the ministry suddenly touches another 1,500 men.

Those relationships can feed future conferences, parish groups and other ministries.

Heroic Men wants to provide the infrastructure behind that expansion while allowing each local ministry to retain its identity and relationships.

‘We make it stronger’

Moyer repeatedly emphasized that the pledge is designed to layer onto existing ministries.

“No competition, no new curriculum,” he said.

Heroic Men already has media, group directories, coaching, conferences, speakers and other resources.

Those tools serve the central mission rather than becoming the mission themselves.

“We make it stronger,” Moyer said of existing ministries.

The pledge is the shared action that can cross organizational lines.

A parish men’s group can use it.

A conference can use it.

A diocesan ministry can use it.

An individual man can begin without waiting for a program.

Heroic Men, Moyer said, can support ministries with leader development, communications and connections to men in their regions.

The movement depends upon leaders seeing one another as collaborators rather than competitors.

One man, then the next

Near the end of the presentation, Moyer brought the strategy back to the men sitting in front of him.

“The movement moves at the speed of the leaders,” he said.

If the men carried the pledge home, it could spread.

If they guarded their organizations, contacts or influence, growth would remain limited.

Moyer asked the leaders to take the pledge themselves, bring it into their parishes and regions, and invite another man every month.

The scale of the vision is national.

The mechanism remains personal.

“One man then another,” Moyer said.

The goal is 1 million men living the pledge by 2033.

The promise, as Moyer put it, is simpler:

“Build brotherhood one pledge at a time.”

II

Ministry Topics

Rick Self urges Catholic men's conferences to reach beyond the regulars

The Catholic Brothers for Christ leader says personal invitations, ambitious speakers and everyday fellowship can bring disengaged men into the faith

Rick Self remembers attending Mass with his family, sending his children to Catholic schools and leaving church through the back door. He believed faith mattered. For years, he said, it scarcely shaped his own priorities.

"Sports was it, work was it," Self told a gathering of Catholic men's ministry leaders. "I didn't even want to talk to people at church. I'd go to Mass and go out the back door as quick as I could." A retreat when he was 50 changed his life over a weekend.

Now, as a leader of North Texas Catholic Brothers for Christ, Self wants conferences to reach men like the one he used to be. His organization has held conferences for 15 years in the Dallas and Fort Worth dioceses, but he described the work as a ministry that continues throughout the year.

"Every man is invited to take the next step," he said. "Whatever that step is. Some men haven't even taken a half step yet."

Reach the men outside the regular crowd

Self described three groups: men already committed to sharing their faith, men who practice it without making it a priority, and men with little or no faith. He said conferences need the first group to invite the others.

“We need missionary disciples there, but we need those people there,” he said of the disengaged. “You’re not going to get those guys there with just popular Catholic speakers. You’ve got to go beyond that.”

His example was an audiovisual technician named Magnus, who filled in at a conference two years earlier. Magnus was not Catholic, Self said, though his wife was. After working the event, he told the regular technician that he wanted to enter Catholic formation. Self said Magnus later became Catholic.

“That’s what we’re trying to do,” Self said. “Personal invitations bring disconnected men into the community.”

Think bigger about speakers

Self urged organizers to consider speakers with an audience beyond men already involved in Catholic ministry. He pointed to a conference featuring actor Jim Caviezel that brought in \$219,000 in revenue and ended with a \$39,000 surplus, according to figures he shared. Board members initially doubted they could afford the event, he said.

“We can’t just think about how much these speakers cost,” Self said. “Think about who you’re going to get at the conference.”

He recalled attendees saying the event prompted them to return to church, confession or family worship. The speaker drew them in, Self said, while the conference exposed them to reconciliation, adoration and fellowship with other men.

The discussion also turned to Sister Mary Michael Fox, a Dominican sister invited to speak at a men’s conference. Self said he had wondered how the choice would work until he heard her speak elsewhere. She connected with men without condemning them, he said, and spoke to young attendees in a separate session.

“She was telling them, ‘We need to be the men that God made us to be,’” Self said.

Ask supporters to take part

When an attendee asked how to secure sponsors, Self gave a short answer: “Ask.” He and another organizer described meeting supporters individually and explaining how a prominent speaker could bring more men to the event. They also arranged a dinner and photo opportunity with Caviezel for sponsors and ministry leaders.

“These sponsors feel like they’re spreading the word with their sponsorship,” Self said. “They are part of the ministry.”

He said the organization receives about \$45,000 in sponsorships in a typical year. It rotates conference sites among parishes and pays the host parish, he said, rather than drawing on parish funds.

Carry the talks beyond the conference

Catholic Brothers for Christ has recorded its speakers over the years. Self said the group has begun turning permitted recordings into short videos for social platforms and exploring AI tools that could help men search those talks by topic.

“We don’t just want viewers, we want disciples,” he said. The topic-based tool is still in development, he added.

Another organizer said the group asks about recording and promotional use in speaker contracts. Self said it respects restrictions when a speaker’s agreement bars distribution.

Make room for fellowship on the fairway

Self offered a smaller example from Good Shepherd parish: Fairway Disciples, a golf league with about 45 men, many of them retired. Players pray before a round, and a resort outing included fellowship and a rosary around a fire. Skill

at golf is beside the point, he said.

“This has really got people who never were engaged at church into this ministry,” Self said. “Men need fellowship. Period. We’re not made to be alone.”

As the session closed, attendees traded practical ideas on conference themes, speaker coordination, ticket sales and planning timelines. Self returned to the message running through his talk: “Do not be afraid. Go after them. You’ll get the money. The money will come.”

5

The Secret to Reaching Young Catholic Men | Santos Hernandez

The longtime HR executive says succession planning, personal mentoring and giving young men real responsibility helped Western Pennsylvania Catholic groups draw 150 to 200 young men at a time.

* * *

We have a succession problem inside Catholic men's ministry

After 30 years in human resources for Beale and Westinghouse, Santos Hernandez learned to think about leadership through a simple question: Who comes after you?

Now he is asking Catholic men's ministry leaders the same thing.

"Succession planning is finding your replacement," Hernandez told Catholic men's leaders during a presentation on developing the next generation. "As leaders, we recognize it's really critical to keep the momentum going."

Hernandez said the lesson became urgent after watching parish men's groups disappear across Western Pennsylvania.

"In the Diocese of Pittsburgh, we had 150 men's groups about 20 years ago,"

he said. “Today there’s roughly, well before I came back, about 40. And they all died out.

“They aged out,” he said. “And that happens in any movement, any corporation, any community, any ministry.”

For Hernandez, who serves as chairman of the Catholic Men’s Fellowship of Western Pennsylvania and has spent years working in men’s ministry, the answer is active succession planning.

“My job here is to help you understand that, to teach you that we need to raise leaders today,” he said.

Hernandez has begun applying the same leadership principles he used in corporate HR to Catholic ministry. He identifies younger men, brings them into leadership, mentors them and eventually expects them to take over.

“The key thing is identifying who can replace you,” he said.

Young men are searching for faith and brotherhood

Hernandez said the leadership challenge comes during a larger struggle among younger men.

He described young Catholic men in their 20s who are college educated, entering professional life and increasingly isolated from strong communities of faith.

“What we are finding now is that many of these young men are feeling isolated,” he said. “They feel spiritually dry.”

He said many are searching for answers through social media, podcasts and personalities including Joe Rogan, Andrew Tate and Jordan Peterson.

“These are the folks that have been trying to provide answers to a lot of questions,” Hernandez said.

He also pointed to younger adults exploring crystals, tarot cards, horoscopes and paranormal spirituality.

“Millennials are turning their back on traditional religion and continuing to search for spirituality,” he said.

For Hernandez, that search represents an evangelization opportunity.

He recalled taking a priest friend, Father Dan, to lunch at Applebee’s. Their

waitress, a woman in her 20s, wore a crystal necklace that she said a friend had given her because she was experiencing neck and shoulder pain.

Hernandez and the priest began talking with her about faith and eventually asked whether they could pray for her.

“We took a minute to pray, Father Dan and myself,” Hernandez said.

A few weeks later, Hernandez said, Father Dan returned to the restaurant.

“The young lady rushed to Father Dan and said, ‘Father Dan, you healed me. I was healed,’” Hernandez recalled. “And she was wearing a cross.”

“She came back to the faith,” he said.

The conversation revealed something deeper to Hernandez.

“What came out of that discussion was that she didn’t know about Jesus,” he said. “We’re now going into a deeper dive, coming across this new generation where they really don’t know about Christ. So the opportunity is right there for us, brothers.”

Hernandez sees signs of a Catholic resurgence

While Hernandez described serious challenges facing the church, his presentation centered on opportunity.

“It’s happening,” he said. “We’re seeing it.”

He pointed to young Catholics gathering in Washington, New York and other major cities as signs of renewed interest in the faith.

“The Holy Spirit is gaining momentum,” Hernandez said. “He is doing his part, a very important part. But he is asking you and me to do our part.”

That responsibility, he said, belongs especially to existing Catholic leaders.

“We are called disciples of Christ,” Hernandez said. “That means we are to share the good news. We are to grow new leaders, to raise and commission the new Catholic Church, the new leadership.”

“Now is the moment,” he added. “I am very excited because now is the time. The harvest is indeed rich.”

Hernandez, a former evangelical, said that sense of urgency feeds his enthusiasm for Catholic ministry.

“I am excited about my faith and I’m excited about being a Catholic,” he

said.

Put young men on the board

Hernandez has translated that urgency into a specific leadership plan.

Catholic Men's Fellowship of Western Pennsylvania operates as a nonprofit with a board of directors, quarterly meetings and strategic planning. Hernandez said he has commissioned the organization to eventually make at least half of its board members men under 30.

"Our goal is to teach these young men to be leaders," he said.

Hernandez has personally begun mentoring several young professionals.

"They're in their 20s. They're educated. They're professionals," he said. "They have a passion for their faith."

"My job is to mentor them and to coach them and to get them ready to replace me."

That means giving younger men genuine organizational responsibilities rather than keeping them at the margins.

"I'm using my HR hat to teach them how to hunt, how to fish and how to run with organizing conferences, events," he said.

Older leaders still have a role, Hernandez said, even after leaving formal board positions. Some former board members have become trustees or advisers who provide guidance and financial support while younger leaders gain authority.

The goal is succession rather than disappearance.

"We understand the whole concept of succession planning," Hernandez said, describing the retired executives involved with the fellowship. "By taking these guys and adding them on the board, we are mentoring them. We're coaching them to run an organization and to really gain the momentum to do things on their own."

Start with pizza, beer and pickleball

Hernandez said the first stage of developing young leaders was deliberately simple.

He told younger men to gather their friends.

“Go find like-minded men,” he recalled telling them. “I’m going to give you some money and get together for fun.”

The gatherings featured pizza, beer, pickleball, golf simulators, tailgates, Oktoberfest celebrations, bourbon and cigars. Hernandez encouraged organizers to include a young priest who could answer questions and offer spiritual perspective.

“We’re building a confidence level,” Hernandez said. “You want them to come together with like-minded men who want to be with other guys that can share their thoughts, their fears, their concerns.”

The first barbecue and tailgate drew about 50 men, he said. Another gathering around a fireplace in Erie attracted about 15. A Pittsburgh Pirates tailgate drew about 75.

The key was who organized them.

“They are doing it themselves,” Hernandez said.

The events allowed young leaders to develop confidence through smaller successes while building friendships among Catholic men.

“It strengthens the value of brotherhood,” Hernandez said.

His instructions to established leaders were simple.

“Give them an opportunity to come together,” he said. “Give them a little bit of money for beer and pizza, whatever they want to do, and let them run and get out of the way and let them go.”

From social events to 150-man summits

Once the younger leaders gained experience, Hernandez gave them a larger assignment: organize events capable of drawing 100 to 200 young Catholic men.

Their response, he said, was immediate.

“Yeah, we can do it,” Hernandez recalled.

“They had success,” he said.

The young organizers developed a summit around “strengthening masculine leadership” and chose spiritual warfare as its central subject.

“These guys are wanting to regain that,” Hernandez said. “They have this strength in who they are as men, men of faith.”

The summit featured three speakers involved in deliverance ministry, including a diocesan exorcist. Hernandez said the subject connected directly with questions young men were already asking about spirituality.

“We had 150 young men and a lot of questions for the panel,” he said.

Confession and Mass followed the presentations, along with pizza and beer. A later gathering drew nearly 200 men.

Again, Hernandez emphasized that the younger men ran the event.

“I’m sitting back letting them run with this,” he said. “They have been commissioned and empowered, and they are doing it.”

The Young Adult Men’s Summit has since become an annual event. Hernandez said the younger leaders have learned strategic planning, budgeting, fundraising, speaker recruitment and event management.

“We’ll give you the seed money, but at some point you’re going to have to raise your own money to cover the cost,” Hernandez recalled telling them.

The organizers accepted the challenge while keeping their events free.

“They figured how to organize and raise the money,” Hernandez said.

They also began choosing speakers based on their own understanding of who could reach younger Catholic men.

“There are people that I don’t even know who they are,” Hernandez said. “But they feel that these are the guys that can really reach the young population.”

Mentorship begins with an invitation

During the discussion that followed his presentation, Hernandez repeatedly returned to personal mentorship.

“The key thing, guys, is we have to be mentors,” he said. “But that requires

us to go out and reach out and talk to them and invite them.”

Older men can appear intimidating to younger men, he said, which makes the initial invitation important.

“We really need to disarm that intimidating look and reach out to these guys,” Hernandez said. “They really do want to hear from us.”

“They want to be mentored. They want to be coached and they’re open to it.”

Hernandez said he frequently meets prospective younger leaders at restaurants, conferences and Catholic men’s events.

“I make a point to talk to individual men,” he said. “We click, and I always give them my business card, and I usually have lunch with them and talk to them and see if there’s something we can work on together.”

One younger man described having mentors throughout his life but finding greater connection after meeting a mentor who shared his Catholic faith.

Hernandez said older men bring experience that younger men can use.

“We can help them because we’ve all walked and made mistakes,” he said. “They can learn from us because we’ve done the mistakes, and they need to know that.”

He also urged ministries to work with other Catholic organizations rather than treating younger members as a constituency to protect.

“We are interested in partnering,” he said.

‘Find your replacement’

Hernandez closed where he began: succession.

He believes Catholic leaders face a moment in which younger men are searching for spiritual meaning, brotherhood and leadership while many existing men’s ministries face an aging membership.

For him, those problems meet in the same place.

“The harvest is indeed ready,” Hernandez said. “As the Scripture says, we need laborers. And you guys are the laborers.”

His challenge to every leader in the room was personal.

“We need to find your replacement,” he said.

That means identifying someone younger, building a relationship, coaching him, putting responsibility in his hands and allowing him to learn through experience.

“Identify someone,” Hernandez said. “Start to consider mentoring and coaching them and get them involved and get out of the way and let them run with it.”

“They’re going to learn from trial, the mistakes, but that’s how it works.”

For Hernandez, succession planning is more than an organizational strategy. It is how a generation of Catholic leaders can ensure their work continues after them.

“Trust on that instinct,” he said.

6

The 3 Keys to Christian Leadership with Bill Moyer

“If you look behind and nobody’s following, you’re not a leader,” Bill told the men gathered for the session. “It doesn’t matter how many leadership books you’ve written, how many seminars you’ve been to, how many speakers you’ve heard. If nobody follows, you’re not leading.”

His one-word definition was “influence.” That influence can lead people in either direction, he said, and it reaches into families as well as formal organizations. Someone is watching what a leader does, whether the leader realizes it or not.

Knowing is no substitute for doing

Moyers said the first obstacle to becoming a great leader is pride. “You have to get over yourself,” he said. His warning was aimed at the familiar response, “I already know that.”

“If you already know that, why do you know that and you don’t do that?” he asked. “Because knowing isn’t doing, is it? The enemy of growing is knowing.”

Leaders, he said, must model what they teach. A child watching a parent can see the gap between what the parent says and what the parent does. The same test applies to men leading groups. Moyers described Heroic Men’s work as

calling, forming and sending leaders, while building alliances with groups already doing useful work.

“We’re the ones always pointing to the real leader,” he said of Jesus. “That’s what our responsibility is.”

A short guide built for action

Moyers said years of teaching leaders in Poland led him to draw 10 lessons on Christian leadership from the Bible. Those teachings were transcribed and made into a book there. He and Billy Moyers then recast the material as a 26-page ebook, with discussion questions taking up much of its length.

The lessons cover character, dependence on God, integrity, godly values, vision, communication, humble authority, relationships, the greatness of small things and mentoring. Moyers urged readers to take one lesson at a time, write answers to its questions, discuss it with another man and complete one action before moving on.

“Learning isn’t doing,” he said. “Learning’s just learning. You now know what you’re not going to do.”

He described the final lesson as a call to both receive and give guidance: “Be a mentor and have a mentor.” A mentor, he said, can be someone walking the same journey who is only half a step ahead.

Character when nobody is looking

Reading from the first lesson, Moyers said character appears in choices made after the meeting and applause end, under pressure and when no one else may learn what happened.

“Character is who you are when nobody’s looking,” he said. “The work of character is lifelong. You don’t graduate from it.”

He used his marriage to Rose as an example of remaining vigilant. After 48 years of marriage, he said, he is 99% sure he would never cheat on her. He avoids claiming 100% because he believes that certainty would mean letting down his guard.

The guide asks men where their actual character differs from the person they present to others, which weaknesses those they lead might copy, and who has permission to tell them the truth. Moyers urged men in a group to ask one another whether everything they said was true and whether they left out something they should have shared.

“Sometimes they didn’t say a lie,” he said. “But you didn’t tell them the whole truth. You just told them the part that was safe to share.”

He pointed to Jonah as a warning: Jonah knew the mission to preach to Nineveh, Moyers said, yet wanted punishment for its people while God wanted mercy. “It’s possible to know the mission that God sent you on, but still resist God’s heart,” he said.

Three reasons people follow

Moyers closed with three things he said people seek: something to believe in, someone to believe in and someone to believe in them. For Christians, he identified the first as the good news of Jesus Christ. The second demands a leader whose life matches the message.

He recalled leaving the church at 13 during his confirmation year after a teacher who had brought the faith alive for him left his wife and children. Moyers said he stayed away from church, apart from his wedding, for 20 years.

“I couldn’t separate the message, the truth of Jesus Christ, from the messenger who left his wife and didn’t live any of those things that he taught,” he said. “You can still teach truth and not live it. But people won’t understand it because all they see is what you’re doing.”

The third need, he said, is especially personal. Children and others around a leader need to hear two statements: “I love you. And I believe in you.”

“Learn those three things and you can change the world one person at a time by being someone that believes in someone else,” Moyers said. He ended by challenging the men to pray for three other men and carry that care into action.

Stop Waiting for Men to Come to Church | Sean Lynn

A men's group can draw a crowd and still leave most men in its parish untouched, Sean Lynn told a gathering of Catholic leaders. His challenge began with a number: "If you got 5% of the men in your parish going to your men's group, that's a huge success, right? But what about the other 95%?"

Lynn urged the men to look beyond conference attendance and ask a more personal question: "Who is my brother?" That could mean a man in a small group, someone in a parish pew or a baptized Catholic who has stayed away from church for years.

A handshake and a conversation

Lynn described what he calls "handshake outreach": meeting men where they are, starting a conversation and staying in touch. After greeting a young man at a weekday Mass, he learned the visitor was an evangelical Protestant exploring Catholic worship. The two have since met for coffee several times.

"How do we reach these lost, the open, curious?" Lynn asked. "We need the ignited and the missionary to go and find them, right? And that's what we're trying to make here is missionary disciples."

He tied that work to Heroic Men's goal of drawing a million men into its

pledge. “We’re never going to get a million men if we don’t have missionary disciples going out to seek them, to walk with them, to talk with them,” he said.

Staying with men through grief

For Lynn, that commitment took a personal turn when a friend asked him to speak with her two nephews after their father died. The young men, ages 19 and 21, had grown up outside the church. The older nephew, an atheist, asked whether Lynn thought he could have helped his father.

“I started by just talking to him, building that relationship,” Lynn said. “And listening.” He said the brothers were hurting after their father’s suicide. “This is not check mark. I got another one for God. On to the next. That’s not what this is.”

Lynn said he kept in contact with the older nephew and introduced him to a Catholic businessman with an accounting background that matched his career interests. He connected the younger brother, who likes graphic novels, with a member of his team who shares that interest.

What one invitation can begin

Lynn recalled a board member who invited an atheist friend to a men’s conference, offering to buy him lunch. The man later attended an Alpha course and then Catholic initiation classes, initially to learn more. After a process Lynn said took about two years, the man entered the Catholic Church at Easter 2025. He died that October.

“That’s all because one guy cared enough to invite him,” Lynn said. He asked the audience, “Where’s God calling you to go?”

His examples ranged from conversations after Mass to barbecues and service at a youth detention center. The point, he said, was to find the men within reach, including those who might feel out of place in a familiar ministry setting. At a rosary gathering, a man who did not drink or play sports wondered whether he belonged. Other men assured him he did. Lynn pointed to a parish

renewal theme: “You are called, you matter, you belong.”

Give young men a real place

During the discussion that followed, Lynn said inviting young men also means trusting them with responsibility. He described a younger police officer who offered to organize a task for the Knights of Columbus, then stayed away after older members criticized how he did it. The man later joined Lynn’s men’s breakfast and board.

At another youth event, Lynn said young volunteers took over a barbecue. One participant, a young man struggling with addiction, asked his parents afterward whether they could return the next day. “He was part of something,” Lynn said. “We got to make room for them. We got to coach, mentor, and assist them and make room for them.”

That is the measure Lynn kept returning to: men who are welcomed, listened to and given a role. “We have to continue to invite,” he said, “and we have to keep tapping.”

Catholic Fundraising That Works | Robert Tunmire

Heroic Men co-founder Robert Tunmire urged ministry leaders to learn supporters' stories, make the call and keep in touch after a gift

Robert Tunmire has a simple question for leaders trying to fund a men's ministry: "Who should I be talking to?"

The Heroic Men co-founder told a gathering of ministry leaders that raising money requires a belief in the mission, steady activity and the skills to build lasting relationships. The work can take months before an invitation to give, he said, and it continues after a supporter makes a gift.

"We start looking for funds when we need it or we got something coming up," Tunmire said. His answer was "daily consistent activity."

A shared mission can cross denominational lines

Tunmire said he became Catholic in 2004 after learning ministry to men in Protestant circles. He has served on the board of Man in the Mirror, a Protestant men's ministry, and said that experience gives him a view of fundraising in both settings.

He urged Catholic leaders to look beyond the assumption that potential supporters must be Catholic. Three of Heroic Men's largest mission partners are Protestant, he said, and he estimated that Protestants provide about a quarter of its funding.

"If someone's involved or someone believes in ministry to men, whether Catholic or Protestant, doesn't matter. It's the same mission," he said.

Tunmire distinguished between large donors and smaller recurring supporters, saying the paths to reaching them differ. For an individual prospect, his first concern is the person's reason for caring. "Find out what their story is," he said. "What's their passion?" A supporter whose main concern lies elsewhere may have less interest in men's ministry, he added.

Start with the people already within reach

To find prospective partners, Tunmire suggested asking existing contacts for introductions, talking to people involved in the ministry and examining conference databases and phone contacts. "You would be surprised who is in your database," he said.

He framed a fundraising conversation as an invitation into the work: "Invite men in to the mission." He said leaders should give men an opportunity to invest rather than presume a conference attendee would resent being contacted.

Relationships develop over time. Tunmire said some people he begins speaking with may be three to six months away from an ask. He described a group of about 25 people he was getting to know, some of whom he was beginning to approach about supporting Heroic Men.

"Don't be afraid to ask people for investments," he said. "The worst thing they can say to you is no."

For a first conversation, Tunmire favors a call. He said he handles much of his outreach by telephone or Zoom and begins by exchanging stories. "Texts and email, they are simply a communication tool. They are not a conversation tool," he said. "If my goal is to have a conversation with somebody, I'm going to call them."

The work continues after a gift

When asked how to keep a donor engaged, Tunmire suggested an occasional update call and a direct question: “How would you like me to keep you updated?” One older supporter, he said, wants a mailed package instead of emails.

Tunmire called prayer his “best preparation for a call.” He also acknowledged the time involved in maintaining relationships. He said he was spending about five hours a day on Heroic Men at the time of the talk.

For leaders managing many conversations, he suggested keeping detailed notes on each person and the next action, whether in a customer relationship management system or another tool. Reviewing those notes before calling helps him reconnect with the person, he said.

“Every time I don’t do that, I get myself in trouble,” Tunmire said.

A ministry can begin before its funding is in place

In an exchange with another participant, Tunmire agreed that a lack of money should not necessarily prevent someone from beginning a ministry. “The day we started, there was no money,” he said of Heroic Men. He also urged leaders to know the amount they need and the gap between their costs and existing resources.

Asked about smaller recurring gifts, he advised leaders to invite support when they have a group together and show people how to give. The central obstacle, he argued, is often sustained execution: “The biggest challenge you face isn’t the lack of knowing how to do it. It’s the lack of consistently doing it.”

He said staff and board members can help, though one person often carries responsibility for making fundraising happen. He described the work as both relationship building and a numbers game requiring repeated outreach.

Tunmire closed with a direct assessment. “It’s not easy,” he said. “But it can be done if you have the right attitude, right activity, and the right skill set. And learn the skill set, because there is a skill set to it.”

How Men Can Break Free from Porn | Matt Aujero

Fight Club founder Matt Aujero describes a small-group movement, a two-man pilot and the daily discipline he asks of leaders

At a men's ministry gathering, Matt Aujero described a room packed with about 300 college-age men who came to hear him speak about pornography. Another 50, he said, could not get inside. Two of his leaders held a separate session for them.

The turnout suggested an opening for Fight Club, the Catholic ministry Aujero founded to help young men pursue freedom from pornography. His team followed up, hoping to establish dozens of groups. Three emerged.

"We launched three fight clubs out of that 300," Aujero told the audience. He said the ministry looks for leaders who pray, have substantial freedom from pornography and want to reach other men. The result left him asking how to reach the other 297.

For Aujero, the answer begins with a man's own habits, then extends through prayer, friendship and an invitation to speak openly about a struggle often kept private.

The leader's daily fight

Aujero said his ministry cannot begin with advice for other men while its leaders neglect their own prayer and attention. He asks college-age leaders to pray for an hour each day, a commitment he said has to shape the night before as much as the morning itself.

“If we can’t pray more than we’re doom scrolling, there’s a problem,” he said.

A father of eight, Aujero described how watching sports highlights late at night had recently cut into his sleep and shortened his morning prayer. “That little bit of staying up a little bit later leads to going to bed late, which leads to waking up late, which leads to a little bit less time in my hour in my prayer,” he said.

He urged men to examine their own technology use before setting rules for their children. “We can’t ask our kids to do something that we’re unwilling to model ourselves,” he said. Aujero described late-night boredom, stress and social media use as part of the pattern that once preceded his own pornography use.

A place to speak plainly

Aujero said he first encountered pornography in fifth grade, when older siblings had left for college and he was often alone at home with a computer. Looking back at what drew him to it, he connected the experience with loneliness.

He said Fight Club groups give men permission to discuss experiences they might conceal even from people they see every week. “Men desire authentic friendship. Well, how do you get authentic friendship? Trust. Well, how do you get trust? Vulnerability?” he said.

In a group, he said, a participant may meet peers facing the same struggle alongside others who have gone months or a year without pornography. That example can make freedom feel possible. A leader who answered a question later in the session said his group grew more candid over time as its members

heard the leader speak honestly about his own week.

The ministry's approach includes prayer and accountability partners. Aujero also acknowledged that men arrive with different histories, including experiences of sexual abuse, and said the group can refer someone for counseling when deeper help is needed.

Two men on the road

To reach men beyond its existing chapters, Aujero said Fight Club is developing an online course called Emmaus. It would let two men work through a smaller version of the group's method together, read Scripture, share what they learn and hold each other accountable. He said the ministry piloted the approach across 10 campuses during Easter and had yet to release the course.

Aujero recounted a conversation with a commuter student at Ohio State who had struggled to find friends. Through the seven-week pilot, the student connected with another man in Michigan who shared his faith and desire for freedom. Aujero said the student's prayer life grew and his pornography use became less frequent during the pilot.

The aim, Aujero said, is to give men a companion in a fight they often face alone. He urged priests hearing confessions to connect men with a group when one is available.

A vocation after recovery

Aujero closed his prepared remarks with the story of Brendan, a college senior who came to his office after what Aujero described as several troubled years. Aujero invited him to spend five minutes praying with the day's Gospel. During the prayer, Brendan began to cry.

"Matt, I want to see," Brendan told him, drawing on the Gospel account of a blind man seeking healing, according to Aujero.

Aujero connected him with another student in a Fight Club group. He said Brendan began praying in the chapel each day. Two years after graduation, Brendan called to say he had been free from pornography for more than a year

and had applied to seminary. Aujero said he attended Brendan's ordination the week before the talk.

Asked how a ministry focused on pornography could lead someone toward the priesthood, Ryan Derus, who introduced Aujero and had served as a Fight Club leader, pointed to the prayer he learned there. He began with 15 minutes a day and 10 Hail Marys, he said. Over time, his prayer life deepened.

"I found myself falling in love with God in ways that I never could have imagined," Derus said.

Parents and the example at home

During questions, Aujero urged parents to delay social media access for teenagers and to look closely at their own phone habits. One parent observed that children copy what adults do. Aujero agreed and said he wanted to set a concrete goal for ending his own screen time earlier so he could sleep and pray on schedule.

He also described trying to gather other families with similar concerns. The first meeting of a book club he and his family organized drew no one, he said, though several parents expressed interest in coming later. "You got to start somewhere," he said.

Aujero ended by asking the men to pray for participants by name, including their "eyes, mind, and heart" as they pursued the freedom to love. That prayer, he suggested, can begin with any man they know.

III

Allied Partners

What 25 Years of Men's Ministry Taught Us | Brian Topping

A *Paradisus Dei* representative says weekly formation can lead to repaired relationships, new parish leaders and men who invite others into the faith.

An 82-year-old man ended his weekly Catholic men's meeting with words he had waited a lifetime to say to a group of men. "I love you guys," he told them. "I'm 82 years old and I've never had a group of men like this in my life," according to Brian Topping, a fellow member of the group.

Roger, who has since died, had spent several years with the Wednesday morning group. Topping said the men still talk about him, and some now close their meetings with the same three words.

Speaking on behalf of *Paradisus Dei*, the organization behind *That Man Is You*, Topping used Roger's story to explain what the ministry has learned over 25 years: The weekly gathering can become a lasting source of friendship and spiritual formation. He described plans to train more local leaders, support men over years of participation and help them serve beyond their groups.

An invitation when life was suffering

Topping said he understood the need firsthand. Fifteen years ago, professional success had come at the expense of his marriage, family and spiritual life. Men at his home parish invited him to That Man Is You. He initially declined, then agreed to attend.

“At the time, I thought I was signing up for a program,” he said. “But I would come to understand it was much, much more.”

He had asked Catholic men he knew what they were looking for and heard recurring answers: purpose, fellowship, faith, brotherhood, mentorship, authentic friendships and accountability. His own experience, he said, had given those answers weight.

“I learned that my identity wasn’t rooted in my career, but as a beloved son of God, as a husband, and a father,” Topping said. “I found a band of brothers who challenged and encouraged me along the way and allowed me to do the same.”

What happens week after week

That Man Is You meets in parishes for 90-minute sessions, typically 26 times from fall to spring, Topping said. The gatherings include prayer, Catholic teaching and small-group discussion. He said the ministry offers up to nine years of content, along with training and personal support for parishes at little or no cost.

Its practical starting point is direct outreach. “The secret sauce, if you will, is personal invitation,” Topping said. “Men willing to invite men to come and be a part of something.”

He said a continuing cycle of teaching, reflection, friendship and participation in church life helps explain why some men return for five, nine or even 15 years. In his view, its effect unfolds through repetition and relationships.

“What I found was this transformative process,” he said. “Over time my priorities changed, my marriage changed, and my family changed.”

Another member of Topping’s Wednesday group, James, offered a smaller

example. After a discussion about family, James told the men that he had reached out to a brother who had long been estranged from him.

"I have a brother who always gets on my last nerve. But some of it could be me," James said, according to Brian. "So, because of our conversation, I reached out to him. And now we're talking."

"That will never make national headlines," Topping said. "It's the stuff of everyday life. It's the stuff of everyday discipleship."

Training leaders and widening the mission

Topping said Paradisus Dei plans to keep refining its teaching and invest more in core team members and small-group facilitators. He described an upcoming fourth training gathering in Houston for men from across the country. He also said the ministry had created a way to identify and support participants who feel called to help other men.

"One of the greatest joys of this ministry is watching men who were invited become the inviters," he said.

Success, he argued, can mean a man takes on work outside the group. Participants may serve in marriage or family ministry, youth ministry, evangelization or other parish roles. Some may have less time for That Man Is You as a result. "And that's okay," Topping said. "In fact, we see that as a sign of success."

He cited his home parish in Dubuque, Iowa, where Knights of Columbus members started That Man Is You and, he said, the group later brought new members into the Knights. He also recounted a conversation with a man in Naperville, Illinois, who told him the ministry played a large role in his decision to become a deacon.

Topping cautioned against treating one group as the full answer for a parish. If it reaches 5% of its men, he asked, "What about the other 95% of the men in the parish?" He said That Man Is You can work alongside other men's groups and serve as a starting point for wider parish involvement.

"Participants become leaders. Invited men become inviters. Disciples become spiritual fathers and ministries begin strengthening one another," he

said. “That’s our hope.”

7 Keys to Building a Catholic Men's Ministry | Andy Sonnier

Andy Sonnier traces the Catholic men's conference from five volunteers in Orange, Texas, to a larger operation built on prayer, a bishop's support and year-round outreach.

Andy Sonnier had never attended a men's conference when his pastor asked him to organize one. Sonnier and three other men were already forming a retreat team at St. Francis of Assisi parish, and he asked to finish that work first. Two weeks later, he called the pastor back.

"I'm in. I want to do it," Sonnier recalled saying. The pastor took him to his office and showed him what a men's conference could be. "It pinged my chest and my heart immediately," Sonnier said. "I feel God calling me to do this."

That parish effort, founded in 2017, became Christ in You, a Catholic men's conference that expanded across the Diocese of Beaumont. Sonier, its executive director, described the ministry's growth and the work behind its events in a presentation for Heroic Men. For him, the measure of its reach goes beyond the crowd in an arena.

“I don’t like to think of that as attendance. I think of them as opportunities,” he said. “Opportunities for hearts to change.”

A conference that kept going

The first event in September 2018 featured Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers giving five talks over two days. Father Larry Fr. Larry followed in the same format the next year. When COVID disrupted gatherings, Sonnier said his pastor insisted on an in-person conference, even if only 10 men came. The team also made the event available on Zoom for those unable to attend. Sonnier said 72 men came in person.

The organization later became a nonprofit and opened the event to men from across the diocese and beyond. It moved from the parish to Beaumont in 2022, then to Lamar University in 2023. The university arena posed a practical problem: Men on the floor had to climb to the concourse for restrooms. The conference moved again to a larger arena that Sonnier said better served its needs and offered room to grow.

The first conference drew about 200 men, Sonnier said. Even as the numbers grew, he said the ministry’s purpose stayed rooted in Galatians 2:20 and the call to let Christ live through each man.

“The growth of this conference is not about attendance numbers,” he said. “It’s about men being renewed, restored, and sent back to their families, parishes, workplaces, and communities, carrying Christ with them.”

The work behind the day

Sonnier described a board whose members each have a working role, with a four-person executive committee making day-to-day decisions. Other leaders handle fundraising, liturgy, registration, tickets, supplies, communications and outreach. Parish captains work with clergy to spread the word through pulpit talks and bulletin announcements.

“Everyone has a job to do,” Sonnier said. As executive director, he oversees the operation while entrusting other members with the tasks that add up to a

conference.

Sonnier laid out seven elements for organizers building a Catholic men's ministry:

1. **Put prayerful men in charge.** "The entire team should be prayerful men doing the work," Sonnier said. "We're a ministry to men, by men, for men, serving men." He urged the men themselves to take responsibility for the work.
2. **Get the bishop's endorsement.** Sonnier called a relationship with the bishop essential for support and oversight of visiting speakers. He said organizers should keep the bishop informed and ensure speakers are vetted. Sonnier credited Bishop David Toups with attending the conferences, celebrating Mass and spending time among the men.
3. **Bring parishes into the work.** Parish captains and clergy help reach men through pulpit talks, bulletin announcements and direct outreach. "You need to have those guys on board with what you're doing," Sonnier said.
4. **Set clear objectives.** Sonnier said the focus should remain on ministry to men and strengthening men. Earlier in the presentation, he described the aim as men returning to their families, parishes, workplaces and communities with Christ living through them.
5. **Raise the money to sustain the event.** A parish event can cost relatively little, Sonnier said, while a larger venue brings bills for speakers, travel, sound and lighting. He estimated that a conference drawing men in the upper hundreds or more than 1,000 could require a \$45,000 to \$50,000 budget. "All those things add up."
6. **Bring in strong speakers.** Sonnier said a recognizable headliner can draw men, with other strong speakers rounding out the program. He described meeting prospective speakers at events and discerning whom to invite.
7. **Keep men engaged throughout the day.** Prayer, breaks, fellowship, vendors and interaction give attendees more than a series of talks. "People are going to fall asleep on you. They're going to lose interest. It's a long day," Sonnier said.

Beyond one gathering

Christ in You has added a Spanish-language track, with a diocesan multicultural director helping bring in speakers. Sonier said the track serves newer immigrants who would benefit from hearing the talks in Spanish. The ministry also runs men's retreats and father-son retreats, conducts interviews and produces a podcast.

Sonier described the conference as a place where men can carry what they learn back to their families and parishes. The event should also be enjoyable, he said: "We want to have fun. We come to this event every year and we have a great time."

His closing advice returned to the faith that launched the effort. "Always know that God wills it," Sonier said. "It's God's will."

How One Diocese Is Rebuilding Catholic Men's Ministry | Adam Carlisle

When Adam Carlisle returned from a Catholic men's leadership summit in 2023, he considered bringing several speakers to the Diocese of Metuchen for a men's conference. Then he asked what would happen when the event ended.

"But what do we do after the men's conference?" Carlisle, the diocese's secretary for evangelization and communication, asked in a presentation to Catholic men's ministry leaders. "The diocese needs to be a part of the solution."

His answer is a four-year effort to build ministry in parishes before holding a diocesan conference. Metuchen has hosted six of eight planned leadership summits, one for each of its deaneries, Carlisle said. The next phase would establish deanery leadership councils and a diocesan council so men from different parishes can exchange ideas.

"Rather than starting with a men's conference with a top-down model, let's build ministry to men from the ground up," he said.

The parish as the destination

The Diocese of Metuchen covers four counties in central and western New Jersey and has 90 parishes, 27 schools and about 650,000 Catholics, according to Carlisle. He said the parish must be central to any effort to reconnect men with the church and with one another.

“We need to put people back in touch with the parishes,” he said. Digital Catholic resources can reach people, he said, but their use alone does not establish a parish community.

Carlisle also drew on his own path into Catholicism. Raised Protestant, he was received into the Catholic Church in 1996. He said a personal relationship with Jesus Christ remains essential to him, while the church and its sacraments provide a place of encounter.

“How do we know how we are supposed to live? What is a man? Well, we need to look at Jesus Christ,” he said.

Eight summits, then local councils

Carlisle said he approached John Edwards, who conducts parish missions, with a proposal to work across Metuchen’s eight deaneries from fall 2023 to spring 2027. For each summit, Carlisle asks pastors to identify men suited to attend. The men gather with others from nearby parishes, then return to work with their pastors.

“What we try and do is inspire, equip and empower them to go back to their parishes to work with their pastor to offer ministry to men in the parishes,” Carlisle said.

He described the diocese as “program agnostic.” It works with the Knights of Columbus and That Man Is You, among others, while leaving the form of each parish’s ministry to its pastor and men.

“We just want to make sure that the pastor and the men of every single parish are working together to strengthen ministry to men,” he said. “It’s not for the diocese to determine what ministry to men looks like in each and every parish.”

Once all eight summits are complete, Carlisle said, the diocese plans to form councils in the deaneries and then a diocesan council. He pointed to uneven participation across neighboring parishes as a reason to keep their leaders talking. At St. James in Basking Ridge, he said, a regular men's meeting draws about 250 people, yet thousands of men live in the surrounding parishes.

A diocesan pilgrimage would follow the councils. Carlisle placed the diocesan conference fourth in the sequence, after local ministry has had time to develop.

Encounters beyond an event

Carlisle applied the same question about what follows a single event to the diocese's annual Blue Mass for police officers. He said he wanted to know whether the church was helping those officers grow in faith beyond that service.

The diocese subsequently held a formation and resiliency conference for officers, with Father Larry Fr. Larry and Deacon Harold Burke-Sivers among the speakers. Carlisle said the aim is to pair a Blue Mass in the fall with a formation event in the spring each year.

That effort reflects the principle he said should guide Catholic media and ministry alike: "It is not simply a matter of generating content, but of creating an encounter between hearts."

His closing appeal returned to the parish. "The parish ought to be where we're funneling people back to," he said.

Building Battle-Ready Catholic Men: A Practical Plan | Joe Valentic

Joe Valentic says prayer, an honest look at life and a band of brothers can help men turn a moment of conviction into lasting action.

“How do we go from the mountaintop conference experience to actually initiating action and taking action?” he asked. His answer grew out of a conversion, a painful lesson about family priorities and a men’s group that began meeting weekly to hold one another accountable.

Valentic described a process built around self-assessment, a long-range vision, quarterly plans and daily tasks. He and his group have also put that process into an app, where men can track their progress and share results with brothers they invite.

A conversion and a correction at home

Valentic said he was raised Catholic but his parents did not practice the faith. At 30, two friends invited him to a Promise Keepers event. “That weekend, I gave my life to God, and I’ve never looked back since,” he said.

The experience left him with a question about why it had happened outside the Catholic Church. While visiting a school with his wife before their first daughter entered kindergarten, he told her he was unsure what he believed.

She urged him to speak with a priest. The priest invited him to return and get reacquainted with the faith, Valentic said. Within six months, he had gone from serious doubts to teaching in the parish's initiation program.

His eagerness to serve quickly took a toll at home. "Before my wife knew it, the man who seemed to be having a conversion was now making her a widow to the church," he said.

Valentic recalled asking God what he should reduce. At a driving range, he unexpectedly met his mentor, John Levasco, who told him: "Joe, God wants you to focus. Pick maybe one or two things." Valentic said he came to understand that he was being called to serve as a father and husband first. He told the audience that he and his wife have been married 34 years, have seven children, including two who have died, and have five grandchildren, with two more on the way.

A prayer through a difficult season

About seven years before, several crises hit the family and community in succession, Valentic said. His father-in-law nearly died twice. His oldest daughter married and divorced within six months. His employer was failing, and the family's longtime pastor was removed amid a sexual scandal.

"Literally everything in my life seemed to be chaos," he said. He went to another parish in tears and told God, "I'm done with crosses. You got to give me a break." That day, the parish distributed prayer cards titled "Total Abandonment."

Valentic said he began praying the prayer every day. His copy remains on his bathroom mirror, worn from being crumpled, thrown away and put back up. At first, its opening words — "I abandoned myself into your hands. Do with me what you will" — made him flinch. Over time, he said, he began to find peace.

About a year later, Valentic said he heard God tell him, "You have no idea what I can do with your life if you would let me." He began asking what he should do with his gifts. Over the next seven years, he said, he started two businesses, became an author and founded a men's group.

A band of brothers with a plan

Valentic said he started the group partly because he wanted a “band of brothers” himself. Its aim was to help each man develop the gifts God had given him and “intentionally pursue sainthood.”

The men devised quarterly “battle plans” and met each week to review them. Each plan included a daily task with a clear yes-or-no measure. At week’s end, members could see their completion rates and ask each other, “Where you at, brother?”

The group eventually urged Valentic to share the process more widely. He said he resisted at first, then spent two years praying about how to bring it to other men. The resulting app begins with a choice between a quick-start checklist and a fuller daily rule. It guides each man through discernment rather than prescribing the same practices for everyone, he said.

“What is my path? What is my plan, my life plan, my quarterly plan?” Valentic asked.

Assess, schedule and follow through

An eight-part assessment is meant to help users examine their lives before writing a plan. It ranks areas from weakest to strongest and points out specific areas for growth. Valentic emphasized that the assessment also identifies strengths men can develop and use.

From there, users can create a life vision that may change as they learn more about themselves and God. They can select three or four visions, then use the assessment to identify priorities for a quarterly battle plan. Daily missions flow into a planner, where men can assign them a time and mark them complete.

“When are you actually going to complete that prayer?” Valentic asked. “Pick a time for it and put that time on your calendar.” The app records completion, shows weekly results and lets invited group members see one another’s progress. It also provides private messages and a separate space for prayer requests, along with daily readings and formation resources.

Valentic said he hopes the resource collection will help connect men with material from other Catholic organizations, including Heroic Men. He described that wider aim as bringing resources together “so that men can become who God created them to be, which is saints.”

Building a Men's Conference from the Ground Up | Scott Hadwin and Travis Wingo

Scott's weekly Band of Brothers began with a few men and a rosary. Travis Wingo's first conference drew 950 men after its organizers set a goal of 250.

Scott went to a Heroic Men virtual summit in February 2024 and woke up the next day to an email from a coach he had never expected to meet. The conversation that followed led him to start a small men's group. Speaking alongside Boise conference organizer Travis Wingo, he described how that group changed his relationship with his son and, he said, changed him.

Wingo's undertaking began with bus trips to a men's conference in Pendleton, Oregon. If 250 men would travel to a conference there, he thought, Boise could gather that many too. He began calling speakers before he had money or a venue.

A place to bring their intentions

Scott called his group Band of Brothers, or "Bob." He had imagined a large program, but it became a weekly gathering of about eight men.

"In my head, I was creating this large group, but really what I was doing is creating large results from a very small group," he said.

The men meet on Tuesdays. They spend about half an hour checking in,

share prayer intentions, pray a rosary and discuss Catholic men's programming. Scott said the question that opens up the conversation is simple: "Ask him what his intentions are."

The group brought an unexpected change at home. Scott's son joined, and over the following year and a half their relationship grew.

"My son, and this sounds really weird, has become my brother," Scott said. "We are actually equals, not just in the group, we're equals now within the family."

He had thought he was building the group for the other men. "God was building this for me," he said. "I needed this so badly." His wife and children, he added, have seen how much he has changed over the past two years.

Scott said a conversation about the Heroic Men Pledge later gave him an opening to bring the effort into his parish. When he approached a priest who had earlier directed him to run the group through the Knights of Columbus, the priest welcomed the pledge. Scott hopes it will help more men find brothers.

"I thought I was good," he said. "But men absolutely need men."

Calling speakers before finding the money

About 15 years earlier, Wingo and his brother-in-law had traveled by bus with other Idaho men to a conference in Pendleton. Its turnout stayed with him.

"I was like, we can do this in Boise," Wingo said. "We got to be able to. We can get 250 guys."

Eventually, he began contacting the speakers he wanted, including Father Larry Fr. Larry and Jesse Romero. He and his fellow organizers had no funding or backing. They then discovered another group of local men had been calling the same speakers with plans for an event.

The groups connected. When a new organizer, Russ, asked how he could help, Wingo asked him to find money. Wingo said he hoped for \$1,000. Russ returned with \$10,000.

"I'm kind of sweating this at this point," Wingo recalled. "We got speakers coming. We have no money. We have no idea where we're going to have this."

The organizers secured a facility at Boise State University through a student

organization connection. They chose the weekend before the Super Bowl, when Wingo figured men would have fewer competing sports events. They also worked with Salt & Light Radio, which handled administrative work for the conference.

As registrations passed 300, the organizers felt they had exceeded their original goal. Wingo said about 950 men attended that first conference.

The lives behind the attendance figure

Wingo described one attendee from the first year whose mother bought him a ticket after he had considered taking his life the week before. Wingo said the man went on to have more children and lead ministries.

“If all we did is got him back on track it’s all worth it,” Wingo said.

He has also watched the conference become part of his own family’s life. His father and sons have attended. Men’s groups and other ministries have grown from the gathering, he said.

For anyone considering starting a ministry, Wingo’s appeal was direct: “Start knocking on those doors.” Prayer and trust mattered throughout the conference’s beginnings, he said, alongside perseverance: “You just got to keep grinding and be willing to say yes.”

Putting Jesus First: Building Men Through Brotherhood | Tom Melton

A Nevada Knights of Columbus leader says a lack of faith formation for men at his parish led him to build something his council had been missing: a place for men to pray, talk about Jesus and grow together.

Tom Melton described how his council adopted Cor, a Knights of Columbus initiative centered on prayer, formation and fraternity. He urged men to start small groups in their own parishes and to make time for faith formation even during council meetings.

“Every time men gather there’s an opportunity to bring them to Christ,” he said.

A parish with a gap to fill

Tom said his Southern Nevada parish had a men’s group that did mostly social activities and parish Bible studies open to men and women, but “nothing just for men.” After the parish welcomed a Knights council, he served two years as its first grand knight. He and his officers made faith formation a priority, organizing Advent and Lent retreats and rosaries.

“We just tried to build a faith formation,” he said. “And it worked very, very well.”

When another council member told him about Cor, Tom recognized an approach close to what they were already doing. He later became Nevada's evangelization and faith formation director and attended training in New Haven, Connecticut, where he learned more about the initiative.

"It's prayer, formation and fraternity," he said of Cor's three pillars. "You get men together."

From a kitchen conversation to Cor

Tom recounted a story he heard about an encounter between a man at a small group and Patrick Kelly, who later became supreme knight. The man asked what it would mean to bring Jesus Christ to the Knights' roughly 2 million members, Tom said. He attributed the story to someone he met at a later gathering and presented it as part of Cor's origins.

At a Knights training event, Tom said he heard Kelly call for the order to be known for bringing men to Jesus Christ as well as for charity and service. The message matched what Tom and his friends had wanted at their parish.

"All I ever wanted, that's all my buddies ever wanted, was some place for men to go and talk about Jesus," he said. "We never had it until the Knights of Columbus came."

Tom said the following year's training drew a much larger group, with representatives from nearly every Knights jurisdiction and priests from several countries. He saw that turnout as evidence of Cor's growth.

An invitation beyond the Knights

Cor groups should welcome all men, Tom said, whether they belong to the Knights or another parish men's group. He argued that men seeking faith formation and brotherhood may choose to join the order after taking part, without a separate membership pitch.

"They need faith formation. They want the authentic brotherhood. They want to come together," he said.

At one parish, he said, the council gained 30 members in a year without

holding a membership drive. He attributed that growth to its small groups and Cor gatherings. His council now has four or five small groups, including one at his house and others at the church. He said groups can also meet in coffee shops or parks, and can begin with only three or four men.

Tom acknowledged that some men push back against spending more time on faith formation. One told him the new council was doing “too much faith stuff,” he recalled. His response was that it needed to build its foundation before expanding its charity work. He said the council now does both.

Putting Jesus first in council meetings

Tom said he also changed the order of council meetings in Nevada to put faith formation near the start. After the Pledge of Allegiance and opening prayer, members move into a 20- to 30-minute small-group discussion that he calls a “Jesus first moment.”

“What’s wrong with putting Jesus first?” he said he asks men who object.

He called on those listening to form groups in their own parishes and collaborate across Knights councils and other men’s clubs. A group need not be large or meet in a church classroom, he said. What matters is giving men a place to talk about Jesus and become better husbands, fathers and brothers.

“Knights can team up with your men’s club. Men’s club can team up with your Knights,” he said. “It’s a men’s club thing.”

Why Every Catholic Parish Needs a Men's Group | Dcn. Mark Fair

At one large Catholic parish, men once left Mass and headed straight for the parking lot. Now, Deacon Mark says, some stay to talk, pray together and make plans beyond Sunday.

His parish men's group, founded about two years ago, draws about 80 men each week, he told a Heroic Men gathering. It is one example of the Central Texas Fellowship of Catholic Men's approach: build enduring relationships in parishes and give men a way to bring others along.

"After Mass, they're staying together, they're congregating, they're doing things outside of Mass," Mark said. "They're really interested in each other. And to me, that's been a blessing."

A group in every parish

The fellowship has what its leaders call dynamic men's groups in about 50 parishes in the Diocese of Austin, which Mark said has 127 parishes organized into 11 deaneries. Mike, a past president of the fellowship, said its vision is that "no man is left behind."

"What that means is that every single man in the diocese has an opportunity to be part of a dynamic men's group," Mike said. "That's the backbone of

ministry to men.”

In those groups, men gather for fellowship, prayer and spiritual growth. The organization also holds an annual conference, which Mike said typically draws 600 to 800 men, and a men’s Mass with the bishop. Its executive director guides deanery leaders who approach pastors, find a core group of men and help launch and maintain parish ministries. Parish leaders then keep the groups going.

Mark said his own pastor was initially less welcoming to the idea than he had hoped. After becoming a deacon, he persuaded the pastor to try it. “Let the Holy Spirit guide us,” Mark recalled telling him. “If it doesn’t work, we can always stop and do something else.”

The group grew in a parish of about 3,000 families. Mark said its members are building connections that continue after Mass. He described the group’s guiding principle this way: “If you strengthen the man, you strengthen the family. If you strengthen the family, you strengthen the parish. And when you strengthen the parish and church, you have an opportunity to change the culture.”

He wants the fellowship’s reach to grow beyond 100 parish groups. “It can be done,” he said. “It’s spreading the word.”

One conversation that lasted for years

For Mike, the work began during an eight hour drive to a Boy Scout camp in Colorado in 2000. He and a friend spent the trip talking about faith, then asked their pastor whether they could start a Catholic men’s fellowship group.

“Wouldn’t it be great if other men could experience this bond that we’ve developed?” Mike recalled them asking each other. The group they started still meets every other week, he said.

At his current parish, about 30 men have met on Wednesdays for eight years. Their ages range from the early 20s to 90. That mix has given younger men access to the experience of older members, some of whom have told him they wish they had learned these lessons decades earlier.

“Why didn’t I learn some of this when I was in my 20s and 30s?” Mike said

he hears men in their 70s and 80s ask. “My life would have been very different than it turned out to be.”

A new path from parish to campus

After the group watched a video series by Father Larry Fr. Larry , one member urged Mike to consider what more they could do. Nine men began discussing possibilities. A recent graduate at St. Mary’s Catholic Center in College Station suggested they mentor college seniors preparing to leave campus.

Mike said nine men from the parish group took part in a pilot program during the most recent semester, meeting with graduating men in a four part format. The conversations included pornography, a topic he said the campus ministry wanted mentors to address directly.

“The guy that I mentored, we had a very good talk about pornography,” Mike said. “By the end of it, he and I became very good friends after only four meetings. And we plan to stay in touch with each other.”

The fellowship hopes those graduates will carry the idea into the parishes where they settle. “If there’s no Catholic men’s fellowship or dynamic men’s group in the parish you’re going to, you start it,” Mike said they tell them. “And if you need help, you contact us and we will get it started.”

Men of Christ: The Power of the Tap | Tom O'Brien

Tom O'Brien remembers going to his first Men of Christ conference with notes for a confession he had put off for roughly 25 years. He planned to take them to a priest who did not know him. When he reached the confessional, the priest was his pastor.

"I had at my first conference a life confession," O'Brien said. "I went through things that I did that were terrible that I brought to my priest." On his way home, he stopped to buy flowers for his wife, part of the penance he received.

That experience is central to how O'Brien describes Men of Christ. The annual gathering draws thousands, he said, but its purpose reaches beyond a day in an auditorium: bringing men back to the sacraments and into lasting relationships at their parishes.

A conference that leads back to the parish

Men of Christ's first conference drew 1,250 men, O'Brien said. About 200 had registered a week before it began. For the 2026 conference, he said, 3,700 men registered through the organization's website. Over the years, its conferences have drawn more than 50,000 attendees, according to O'Brien.

After a pandemic interruption and a period of smaller gatherings in parishes, the organization has been bringing men together again for its larger conference. O'Brien said the effort has also led to a Women of Christ conference, a student conference, a Eucharistic procession initiative and Virtue Sports.

"When you come to the Men of Christ conference, it's not just a conference," he said. The aim is for men to join groups at their parishes afterward. O'Brien cited about 130 such groups, including groups using That Man Is You and Father Larry Fr. Larry ' Be a Man program.

"The conference is a one-day event, the Men of Christ conference, but it's a catalyst to get guys to become more involved in their parishes," he said.

The invitation begins with a tap

The organization calls its primary way of bringing men in "the tap": approaching a man personally, learning about him and inviting him to the conference or a parish group. Leaders even practice the conversation at meetings.

"Tap a man on the shoulder," O'Brien said. "I see you at Mass every Sunday," he offered as a possible opening. From there, the conversation can grow into a friendship and an invitation.

"That is our number one way of getting men to the conference," he said. "Engagement personally, really talk to them, find out about them, build friendships."

A man who cannot attend the conference can still meet for coffee or a beer, O'Brien said. He urged leaders to accompany men rather than rely on an announcement to reach them.

"The bulletin, nobody reads the bulletin. Email, nobody reads email," he said. A call that includes a personal account of what changed in the caller's life, he argued, carries more weight.

Leaders in counties and parishes

Men of Christ has a board, regional leaders assigned across the Milwaukee Archdiocese and parish captains who work with support teams. O'Brien said that structure helps parish leaders invite men locally and connect them with groups after the conference.

The organization uses a registration system called Gathering Line to track past attendees, their parishes and contact information. Parish leaders can see whom they have called or texted, O'Brien said, and reach out to a man who attended years earlier but has since stopped coming. The system also handles ticket sales and donations. O'Brien said ticket revenue alone does not cover the conference's cost.

Priests and bishops have a role in the effort, though O'Brien acknowledged that some priests have resisted the organization. He said support from successive archbishops and the availability of priests for confession have been crucial.

"Our bishops are encouraging the priests to participate and to send their men in and to be available to go to confessions," he said.

Confession and a call to serve

O'Brien said the conference typically has 80 to 100 priests available for confession. At a gathering of 3,500 men, he estimated, about 3,200 go to confession that day.

"That is key, bringing the men back to Christ, bringing them back to his church," he said.

He also described a growing response when young men are invited forward to consider the priesthood. About three came forward at an early conference, he said, compared with about 100 now. He said the archdiocese has more than 100 seminarians, while declining to credit Men of Christ alone for that growth.

"Did the Men of Christ do this? No. The Holy Spirit did this," O'Brien said. "But we've allowed the Holy Spirit to work through our apostolate."

For O'Brien, the attendance figures matter because they represent men who

can reach others. “The numbers mean a lot. It’s great to have all those men there, but we want to empower those men to be further disciple makers,” he said. “We are in the disciple-making business. That’s what Men of Christ is all about.”

IV

Send Off

Stop Arguing and Start Living Like Jesus | Fr. Larry Richards

Father Larry Richards challenges men with question: When people look at us, do they see Jesus?

Reading from the First Letter of John, Fr. Larry pointed to the call for a person who claims to abide in Christ “to conduct himself just as he did.” For Fr. Larry, that meant setting aside the urge to promote an opinion, a group or even a conference.

“We have one thing to push. Jesus Christ. Period,” he said. “A lot of people push their agenda instead of Jesus.”

He aimed some of his sharpest words at men who post political opinions on Facebook. “Nobody’s going to change their life ’cause they read your Facebook post today,” he said. “The only thing that matters is Jesus.”

A witness people can recognize

Fr. Larry told a story of an American prisoner during World War II who shared his food with a tortured Japanese prisoner held in the same cell. When the American believed the man was dying, he spoke to him about Jesus. Fr. Larry recounted the Japanese man’s reply: “If this Jesus Christ is anything like you, I can’t wait to meet him.”

“People must be saying that about us,” Fr. Larry said. He asked whether a man’s neighbor, children or wife could say the same thing.

He followed with a story about a child who prayed that her mother would be as nice to people at home as she was to people at church. Fr. Larry turned the question toward the men in the room: Could their children ask God to make their father as kind at home as he was at a men’s conference?

“We are called to be Jesus. First of all to our children, first of all to our wife, first of all to the people in our life, but then to everybody else,” he said.

Read the Gospels with one question in mind

Fr. Larry gave the men homework: Read all four Gospels, starting with Matthew, two chapters a day. He told them to pray to the Holy Spirit and keep a journal called “Getting to Know Jesus.”

“Do you really know Jesus? I mean know him,” he asked. “You might know about him.”

As they read, Fr. Larry said, they should focus on Jesus: “What does Jesus say? What does Jesus think? What does Jesus do?” He urged them to write down what they find and pray, “Jesus, make me like you.”

He used Matthew’s genealogy to explain why that attention matters. Jesus entered a family marked by sin and struggle, Fr. Larry said, and entered the human mess rather than separating himself from it.

“First of all, it means that Jesus enters into my mess,” he said. “And then, what does he want me to do? Enter into the mess of others.”

Pray for the people you are tempted to judge

Fr. Larry described a caller to one of his EWTN programs who said he would refuse to attend his cousin’s church wedding because the couple was living together. Fr. Larry asked the caller to fast on bread and water every Friday for the six months before the wedding and pray for their conversion. The caller hung up, Fr. Larry said.

“We love to stand back in judgment of the world,” he said. “Would you sit

there and fast for them to come to conversion?”

He tied that challenge to Jesus’ death for sinners. When people want to fight the darkness of the world, Fr. Larry said, they should ask how Jesus dealt with sin and hatred: “He died for it.” He called on the men to be willing to sacrifice for people who hate them, rather than stand apart from them.

“Do you pray and hope they get to sit next to you forever in heaven?” he asked of the people who have hurt them most.

Pray, love, witness

Fr. Larry closed with an order of action for men who want to bring others to Christ: “You got to pray for them, you got to love them, and then you got to witness to them.”

He told them to make a list of at least three people and pray over their names every day. Then, he said, they must love those people where they are, without conditions. Witness comes after that, through a personal account rather than a warning about someone else’s sins.

“Your job is to say this is what Jesus has done for me and this is what Jesus can do for you,” Fr. Larry said. “It’s a witness.”

He ended where he began, urging men to get themselves and their opinions out of the way so that Jesus could work through them: “We need to pray for them, love them, and witness to them.”

The Pledge Every Catholic Man Needs | Bill Moyer

After a weekend of missed keys, rushed preparations and little sleep, Bill Moyer watched men who had arrived as strangers gather and talk. “There was such a buzz in the room,” he recalled. By that night, he said, he had finally slept well.

The experience brought his mission back to a human scale. “I think we think we’re saving the world. I want to save one man,” he told the gathering.

From there, he laid out a call for Catholic men to put God first, form real friendships and take responsibility for inviting other men into a deeper life of faith. Heroic Men’s ambition is to reach 1 million men by 2033, but Moyer argued that the work begins with one man learning another man’s name.

Faith begins at home

Moyer described a change in his marriage after he began putting his relationship with God first. After 48 years of marriage, he said, his wife, Rose, is “my second great love,” a place she took 10 years into their marriage.

“Everything changed when she was second,” he said. If men are called to love as Christ loves, he argued, that love must come from their relationship with God.

He spoke about finding time to pray before the day begins and about learning

to pray with Rose despite their different habits. Morning prayer gave them something they could share. Without prayer at the beginning and end of the day, he said, “we’re out there fighting for ourselves and not out there being the servants that we’re called to be.”

That service requires humility. Pointing to the small names on the gathering’s badges, he asked whether leaders want to serve God or be known for their work. His instruction to men forming leadership teams was direct: “We have to get over ourselves and we really have to pray and trust.”

Brotherhood beyond the conference

A remark from another attendee stayed with him. Speaking about a grown son with whom he had connected through faith, the man had said, “My son is now my brother.”

Moyer recognized that bond in his own relationship with his son. “We’re really more like brothers. I’m the much older brother,” he said. Heroic Men exists, he added, to help men make those connections and then extend them to men its staff could never reach alone.

He urged ministry leaders to share resources and help one another build local groups. The alliance he described would support existing conferences and ministries under their own names. “We don’t want to control you. We want to serve you,” he said.

Conferences can bring men together, but he questioned what happens when they go home. For some attendees, he said, the experience fades soon after they leave. He asked organizers to connect men with parish groups, help start groups where none exist and guide new leaders through the work.

Three names and a larger mission

Moyer recalled asking men at an earlier session whether they were disciples. Their hands went up. When he asked them to name three or four people they had helped form as disciples in recent months, hands went down.

His proposed starting point was simple: choose three men nearby, learn

their names, pray for them and build a relationship over time. He gave the example of a father bringing young children to Mass. "Find out their name," he said, then see them again the next week and the next. Eventually, ask them to reach out to others.

"That's all it is. It's a spiritual multiplication," he said.

Heroic Men wants conference attendees to take a pledge and name three men they intend to reach. The speaker said organizers could introduce it through a personal invitation and a card linking to the pledge page. He asked conference leaders to give attendees Heroic Men's magazine, explain it during their events and invite men to take the pledge before they leave.

He tied the approach to the goal of 1 million men by 2033. The number describes the reach he hopes the pledge will have across ministries; each commitment still depends on men following through with people in their own lives.

Leaders who pass on what they learn

Moyer also introduced a 26-page resource on 10 biblical principles of Christian leadership. 'Led to Lead' is developed from lessons he taught to leaders in Poland and revised with his son, it pairs brief readings with reflection questions, group discussion and an action to complete before moving ahead.

"It's designed to take you there, take you into the Bible, and find out more," he said. Its final lesson calls men to have a mentor and become one.

He asked established ministries to help nearby groups as "field coaches," passing on what they have learned while allowing those groups to organize locally. Heroic Men could offer leadership launches, coaching and connections, he said, while local leaders remain responsible for the men in their communities.

He ended with a question about the spirit in which they would do it. Recalling a priest who once asked him whether he had joy, the speaker said he answered yes. The priest put his hands on his face and replied, "Tell your face."

Joy, Moyer said, gives another man a reason to ask where that peace comes from. "We're introducing you to our best friend," he told the leaders.

“That’s our call to you as heroic men.

“Join us in that.”

