

## Catholic Men's Ministry Phase II (An AOTM Report)

I believe that it's time to launch Phase II of the contemporary Catholic men's movement. Before I describe where we need to go, let's briefly survey where we've been.

When St. Joseph's Covenant Keepers began organizing men's conferences during the early 1990s, we had to practically beg a parish or diocese to host a Catholic men's conference. Many potential organizers simply didn't believe that men would attend. Time has healed most doubts about Catholic men's willingness to attend a male-only conference. For the past two decades I've witnessed the encouraging spread of various Catholic men's conferences throughout North America.

Why is a Phase II needed in the Catholic men's movement? The reason is that a once a year men's conference is probably not enough to sustain Catholic men who are facing a culture that is hostile to authentic manhood. They need additional support when living in the midst of such an unparalleled situation.

What's the remedy? Many groups are proposing a weekly men's meeting for activities like: bible studies, holy hours, book discussions, and prayer groups. All of these activities are obviously very worthwhile, but the reality is that only a small percentage of men will participate in weekly groups for the longer term.

For Phase II of the Catholic men's movement, leaders should consider a monthly large group meeting. Existing weekly smaller group meetings can co-exist and perhaps thrive in conjunction with the larger group monthly meetings. Anyone who has attended a good annual Catholic men's conference knows that the dynamics of such events send you home with renewed energy, encouragement, and commitment. A good monthly large group meeting will do the same. I know because I recently attended one of the most encouraging Catholic men's events I've experienced.

Last week I was the speaker at the [Argument of the Month](#) (AOTM) Catholic men's club in St. Paul,

MN. If anyone is interested in launching a monthly large group men's meeting, then I strongly suggest a visit to the AOTM in St. Paul, Minnesota. The meetings are held in the basement of St. Augustine's Catholic Church. In good weather, men drive from all over the twin cities and various parts of Minnesota to attend.

The evening starts with Mass at 5:30. On the night I attended a Latin Mass was offered. On previous nights the Novus Order was celebrated. Most interesting was that the AOTM is composed of traditionalists, so-called "conservative" Catholics, and a bunch of Catholic guys just struggling to hang on to their faith. The AOTM was not divided up into segmented groups. They were simply guys united in the bonds of a strong Catholic manhood.

After Mass it's time for fellowship, appetizers and beer. There were two full-sized kegs (one light and one dark) along with bottles of wine. It was a great time for regular guy conversations without the touchy-feely atmosphere of sitting in a circle and sharing your feelings.

It was encouraging to have three priests mingling with the men throughout all of the evening's activities. One of the priests, Fr. John Echert, the pastor of St. Augustine's, is obviously a busy man with all his pastoral duties and answering daily biblical questions on EWTN's website, while also serving as a Military Chaplain for the Minnesota Air National Guard. I was impressed that a priest with such a demanding schedule made the priority to attend the entire AOTM meeting.

The "manly" meal, usually with lots of meat, is cooked by club members in St. Augustine's kitchen. Dinner is followed by dessert. The cost for everything is only \$15.

After dinner is the time for the talk. The speaker introductions are done by moderator Michael Matt, the editor of *The Remnant*, a Catholic newspaper. Usually the talk is in a debate

format with time for any man in attendance to make a supporting point, or to challenge the speaker. Contrary to the opinion of some, men are not like fragile teacups that shatter emotionally after a bit of criticism or debate. In fact, men's friendships and comradery thrive in the midst of a robust debate.

Leading a group of volunteers for AOTM is Kent Wuchterl. It was my observation that Kent was a key to the successful manly atmosphere at the AOTM. Besides serving as the director of AOTM, he also was the cook in charge. When it came time to discuss the needs and direction of the AOTM, Kent came up in front of the few hundred men wearing a filthy white apron and a wide smile. He was an unpretentious leader completely void of plastic piety. His leadership style was a breath of fresh air.

Many of you know that I think highly of the [Calgary's God's Squad](#) Catholic men's conferences held every March. There is a similar leadership dynamic in both the Calgary God Squad and the AOTM that any Catholic men's group should seriously consider when selecting a leader.

Kent in St. Paul reminded me of Sean Lynn in Calgary. Sean, a police officer, is a real guy without the artificial religiousness that men find so off-putting. When Sean is leading the Calgary men's conferences, he's usually wearing jeans and a hockey jersey. During lunch you'll find him outside, sometimes in freezing weather, with a cheerful grin at his over-sized grill cooking cholesterol-laden eight-inch sausages to go into our hoagie rolls.

At both Calgary and St. Paul, you find leaders exuding a down-to-earth manly genuineness that's attractive even to men who are often put off by the "churchy" type of men's ministries.

There's nothing better than a firsthand view of the type of men's ministry you hope to build. If you are looking for a good model for an annual Catholic men's conference, then head to Calgary on March 20th. If you are ready for Phase II, a monthly large group gathering, then visit St. Paul on the second Tuesday of the month, October through May.

Be advised that just as an annual conference involves lots of work, likewise, a monthly large group men's meeting demands a significant commitment on the part of a leadership team. Most men don't mind hard work so long as the effort pays dividends. At the AOTM it does.

### **"Catholic Men Will Not Attend a Talk about Freedom from Pornography"**

The pornography crisis among Catholic men has reached crisis proportions. If you doubt this, ask any priest about what he constantly hears regarding the type of struggles men are facing. For over a year, I've offered a [Freedom Seminar](#) designed to help Catholic men escape the clutches of Internet pornography. Every inquiring group, except one, told me, "Catholic men will not attend a talk about pornography." Most everyone believes that you just can't be up front about the topic of pornography and have men attend. The only option is to slip it into the wider format of a men's conference.

Guess what? On February 10<sup>th</sup>, 300 Catholic men came out in the aftermath of a snow storm to hear me talk about pornography at the AOTM. My topic was well-publicized beforehand and 300 men turned out.

One of the reasons for the successful turnout for an advertised pornography talk was that the AOTM club hasn't limited itself to safe, tame, and non-challenging topics. They have built up a strong foundation for the Catholic men attending the AOTM meetings. So when the topic of pornography was brought up the men didn't flee for cover.

So were any of the men at the AOTM currently struggling with pornography? Of course they were. I talked with some of them. Yet they came because they had a trust level in the leadership that they would be treated like men, even though it was a sensitive topic.

AOTM has broken the ice. Now it's time for other parishes, dioceses, and men's groups to tackle pornography straight-on. To watch an interview on why it's important to deal with the topic of pornography with Catholic men [click here](#).