**Intervention Design**

**Purpose and Objectives**

The primary goal of this intervention is to introduce and invite Catholic men who are members of parishes within a 15-mile radius of the Christian Retreat Conference Center (Bradenton, FL) to MMFC. This researcher will engage with no less than 800 men ranging from the priest to the parishioner, which is an average of 100 men per parish. This intervention seeks to yield 20 new Catholic men attend each Phase 1 weekend at the Christian Retreat Conference Center – Bradenton[[1]](#footnote-1) (dates in the timeline below). These men will be engaged individually and in groups, in whatever manner it takes to reach the most people. Jesus’ ministry took the same strategy, from public speaking to speaking to the people he met individually. This research will hope to humbly emulate this missional tactic to attain the project’s goal.

**Sociological Theory**

Social capital is a strategy *and* an outcome of this intervention. Social capital, the building of networks and relationships is a main strategy for engagement. The intervention will be operationalized on a foundation of building and fostering relationships with local Catholic parishes and the men within. The strategy is to gain access to the men in the church community in order to invite them to attend a Phase 1 weekend. A key element required to build these relationships is trust, which is also a key element of social capital (Putnam 2000, 2010; Fukuyama 1995, 1996, 1999; Woolcock 1998, 2001; and World Bank, 1999).

The impact of this intervention will be stronger relationships and more engaged men in their families, community, and parishes (Putnam 2000, 2010). Stronger relationships and more trust within the church community will, by definition, result in an increase in social capital (Fukuyama 1995, 1996, 1999 & Putnam 2000, 2010). The ability exists to pre and post-test for levels of social capital in a community. However, this is beyond the scope of this project.

**Faith-Based Theory**

The Christological Constellation is based on Christocentric theology and developed by a theologian who had a strong desire to unite Christians of all denominations (Balthasar, 1951 & Howsare, 2005). Balthasar’s writings have inspired much of this research and the goals associated with it. This research will Christ centered and informed by Balthasar in two main ways.

First, his understanding and explanation of Jesus’ relationships while on earth. The way in which Christ influenced the special, and spiritual, gifts of each person with whom he was close. From Peter to John, and James to Paul, Christ saw the gifts that each man possessed and empowered them to use those gifts to spread the Gospel.

Balthasar’s relationship with Karl Barth was very special (Balthasar, 1951). The disagreed on many things, but remained friends. They were able to critique each other, but also allowed themselves to be positively influenced in their theological and spiritual beliefs. This project will strive to activate the same ecumenical spirit in application of the intervention. Balthasar’s book, “The Theology of Karl Barth,” is a critique and memorial to his friend (Balthasar, 1951). It takes a special person with the heart of Christ to be able to respectfully synthesize opposite ends of the theological spectrum.

**Integration of Sociological and Faith-Based Theory**

Balthasar’s focus on the principals of networks and relationships provides a unique lens through which we can view the social theory of social capital, which also focuses on relationships and networks. Where social capital focuses on the centripetal forces of societal relationships, the Christological Constellation identifies the centrifugal force and resultant tension of that force. The opposing forces might seem contradictory at first glance, however the recognition of “tension” can strengthen the relationship.

The intersection of social capital and the Christological Constellation, can be explored through the lens of community formation, shared values, and relational networks within religious contexts. There are at least three main ways this project will be viewed through a synthesized lens of social capital and the Christological Constellation:

1. **Community Cohesion and Engagement:** Social capital refers to the resources, trust, and networks available within a community. When communities include those members of the religious whose values are centered on the Christological Constellation in Christianity, social capital will increase. The faith-based and secular communities will benefit from stronger bonds of trust, reciprocity, and mutual support among members. The result may be found in increases in bonding and bridging social capital, which will benefit the community at large.
2. **Shared Values and Bonding:** The Christological Constellation embodies a set of shared beliefs, values, and narratives within Christian communities. These shared values serve as a basis for social integration and cohesion, which is a form of bonding social capital. facilitating the formation of social networks and the cultivation of trust among members. Within the context of social capital theory, shared values rooted in the Christological Constellation contribute to the development of solidarity within religious communities.
3. **Interdenominational Dialogue and Social Capital Bridging:** Exploring the Christological Constellation in interdenominational contexts can also contribute to social capital bridging – the connections and relationships formed across different religious communities. Building social capital on a foundation of a shared theology will create ecumenical opportunity between denominations. Conversation and collaboration with individuals from diverse religious backgrounds fosters understanding, empathy, and cooperation, thus expanding social capital beyond the boundaries of a particular faith tradition.

While the Christological Constellation is primarily a theological concept within Christianity, its implications extend to social dynamics within the religious communities, where it contributes to the formation of social capital. By recognizing the interconnectedness of religious beliefs and social relationships, insights can be gained into how the Christological Constellation shapes social capital formation and community resilience within diverse religious contexts.

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**Target Group**

The Diocese of Venice covers the ten counties in the Southwest region of Florida. The Diocese estimates that it serves more than 235,000 Catholics. There are currently 61 Parishes and 10 Missions within the diocese. There are approximately 265 priests and 32 permanent deacons that serve the Catholics of the Diocese.

One of the main retreat facilities the ministry uses for its “weekend experience” is in Bradenton, FL[[2]](#footnote-2). This project focuses on eight Parishes within approximately 15-miles of the Bradenton retreat site. These parishes are: St Francis X Cabrini, Holy Cross, Our Lady of the Angels, St Mary, Sacred Heart, St Joseph, Saints Peter and Paul the Apostles, and Our Lady Queen of Martyrs.

**Strategies and Activities**

The intervention strategy will focus on fostering relationships with key personnel in each Catholic parish in the target area. Each parish will have some combination of groups that focus on adult faith formation, volunteer groups and a chapter of the Knights of Columbus. Engagement with the parish will always start with an introduction to the parish’s Pastor (head Priest). Ministry leaders, usually part-time employees or volunteers, are a second order focus of engagement.

Introduction to the MMFC ministry will be done verbally, and primarily, in person. The in-person introduction will be supplemented with standard MMFC flyers, handouts, and business cards. Samples of these media can be found in Appendix D.

Since Social Capital and the Christological Constellation are based on the foundation of relationships and networks. It makes sense to use the same strategies to bring men to the ministry. Bridging social capital includes the goal of bringing disparate groups together and bonding social capital’s goal is to bring homogeneous groups closer together (Herberg 1960; Gordon,1964; and Smith, 1978; & Gilchrist, 2004).

Including these elements of social capital in the intervention activities will only strengthen analysis of the results of the intervention. Including a Catholic theologian’s theory in the explanation of the project will help to allay the fears of bringing Catholic men to an interdenominational ministry. Its not uncommon for non-Catholic, from a place of good intention, to try to “save” Catholic men. This can cause hesitancy for Catholic men to want to attend such events. Bringing the researcher’s Catholicity and Balthasar’s theology to the conversation will help to calm those fears.

**Resources Needed**

The most important resource required for this intervention is time. Creating relationships with multiple people and teams in multiple parishes will take time. This is a reality that is expected and accepted by the researcher. The timeline enumerated below will require flexibility and determination.

MMFC has a mature and well developed marketing resources. These resources include: a website; videos; flyers; handouts; and scripts. All of these resources are available for evangelization efforts from MMFC headquarters.

**Timeline**

*Upcoming MMFC Phase 1 Weekends*

The objective of this project is to invite men to two upcoming MMFC Phase 1’s in the Bradenton (Christian Retreat Conference Center) area. There are multiple options in Florida, to which men will be invited, but the two closest MMFC locations to the parishes are the primary objectives.

Upcoming Phase 1 Experiences in Florida:

* August 16, 2024 – Christian Retreat Conference Center, Bradenton\*
* September 17, 2024 – Church of the Nazarene
* October 18, 2024 – Camp Kulaqua
* December 6, 2024 – Church of the Nazarene
* February 7, 2025 – Christian Retreat Conference Center, Bradenton\*

The Phase 1 in the held at the Church of the Nazarene is an approximately four-hour drive from the Bradenton, FL area. The Camp Kulaqua location is closer to the Bradenton area, approximately 2 hours from the Bradenton area.

MMFC accepts registrations for Phase 1 up to the day prior to the weekend. It is not uncommon for men, staff and first-time attendees, to experience “spiritual warfare” that can keep them from attending. There is a strong network of prayer and communication that hopes to intervene and ensure men show up. Therefore, it is essential that leaders maintain flexibility and bend to the will of the Holy Spirit when it comes to finalizing the attendance roster.

*Intervention Timeline*

The timeline will serve as a guideline for executing the intervention strategy. Gaining access to parishioners will be different for each parish. It might be necessary to swap parishes if one becomes more difficult to engage than another. Parishes will be numbered for the purposes of this section of the paper. However, after prospectus approval the specific parishes will be assigned a weekend for engagement.

Timeline:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Parish** | **Engagement Week** | **P1 Target Weekend** |
| 1 | 6/2 | 8/16 - Bradenton |
| Flex | 6/9 | 8/16 - Bradenton |
| Off | 6/16 | NA |
| 2 | 6/23 | 8/16 - Bradenton |
| Flex | 6/30 | 8/16 - Bradenton |
| Off | 7/7 | NA |
| 3 | 7/14 | 8/16 - Bradenton |
| Flex | 7/21 | 8/16 - Bradenton |
| 4 | 7/28 | 8/16 - Bradenton |
| Flex | 8/4 | 8/16 - Bradenton |
| Flex | 8/11 | 8/16 - Bradenton |
| Staff | 8/18 | 8/16 - Bradenton |
| 5 | 8/25 | 10/18 – Camp Kulaqua / 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| Flex | 9/1 | 10/18 – Camp Kulaqua / 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| 6 | 9/8 | 10/18 – Camp Kulaqua / 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| Flex | 9/15 | 10/18 – Camp Kulaqua / 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| 7 | 9/22 | 10/18 – Camp Kulaqua / 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| Flex | 9/29 | 10/18 – Camp Kulaqua / 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| 8 | 10/6 | 10/18 – Camp Kulaqua / 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| Flex | 10/13 | 10/18 – Camp Kulaqua / 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| Staff | 10/20 | 10/18 – Camp Kulaqua / 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| Off | 10/27 | NA |
| TBD | 11/3 | 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| TBD | 11/10 | 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| TBD | 11/17 | 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| Off | 11/24 | NA |
| TBD | 12/1 | 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| Staff | 12/8 | 12/6 - Church of the Nazarene |
| Off | 12/15 – 12/29 | NA |
| TBD | 1/5/25 | 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| TBD | 1/12/25 | 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| TBD | 1/19/25 | 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| TBD | 1/26/25 | 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| Flex | 2/2/25 | 2/7/25 - Bradenton |
| Staff | 2/9/25 | 2/7/25 - Bradenton |

The planned timeline is aggressive and will undoubtably change as the intervention begins. A decision will be made when the goal of engaging 800 men and 20 men registered and/or attending each of the Phase 1 weekends is met. If this happens early enough, a decision whether to stop the intervention will be made prayerfully and with the consultation of this project’s advisory committee.

**Anticipated Challenges**

The main challenge anticipated lies in the antithesis of social capital, a deficit of trust. As a practicing Catholic and a resident of the local community, the researcher is starting with some level of natural trust. However, trust must be earned and proven, which can take time and for others in, or near, the community to validate the researcher’s trustworthiness. Small, mature communities, especially churches, are often leery of “outsiders” approaching parishioners/congregants with “new ideas” or “opportunities.”

This researcher has been in contact with Father John Lager, co-founder, of MMFC and has requested his thoughts on this project and his backing for credibility. Father John has agreed to assist in making introductions or answering questions from trepidatious priests of lay people within the parishes.

**Measuring Success**

Success will be assessed in two ways. The first, and most obvious, is if the intervention strategy results in meeting the specific, quantifiable metrics established above (800 men engaged and 20 MMFC participants). However, it must be recognized that this project will be working at God’s pace and with His intentions at the forefront. The intervention can’t be rushed or forced, and shouldn’t be treated as a sales pitch. John 4:36 tells us, “Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and is gathering fruit for eternal life, so that the one who sows and the one who reaps may rejoice together.” This project may serve to solely to sow the seeds of introduction to, or interest in, attending a MMFC Phase 1 weekend. Although metrics have been defined, not meeting these metrics may still be a success depending numerous other, non-quantifiable events. It is difficult to imagine all the gifts and lessons that await the researcher during the operationalization of the intervention.

Observations of the following will be recorded in the researcher’s field notes, and if significant, will be reported upon conclusion of the intervention. The following list will serves as a guide in the researher’s field notes in order to assess progress during the intervention.

* How many parishes were engaged?
  + How many touch points were made at each parish?
    - Bible Studies
    - Small groups
    - Knights of Columbus
    - Other
  + How many men from each parish were engaged/invited to the weekend?
  + How many men from each parish attended the P1 Weekend?
* Were there anecdotal reactions to the weekend?
* How did the process have to change as it was implemented?
  + What were the changes?
  + Why were the changes necessary?
    - Cultural misunderstanding
    - Sales pitch
    - Personality of the church
    - Support from the pastor
  + Were the changes effective?
* How was the researcher received?
  + What was the feedback?
* How is the researcher’s faith walk changed through this process?
* Was the project/intervention more difficult that anticipated? Easier?
  + What were the challenges?
  + How were challenges overcome?

**Ethical Considerations**

**Adherence to Professional Ethics**

Any and all ethical standards and guidance will be followed during the implementation of the intervention and the post-intervention analysis.

**Respect for Persons**

A key element of the MMFC process is to provide a non-judgmental and loving environment for men to be truly authentic. All will be welcome and all will be invited. Spiritual wounds are deep and invisible. It is assumed that all are sinners, including the researcher, and in need of God’s grace. It is vital that men aren’t individually targeted because the “look like” they need more help than another man. It is important to be willing to take “no” for an answer and focus on loving invitation to a weekend, rather than to become competitive and forceful. Openness to the guidance of the Holy Spirit will be a key element of the intervention strategy. Prayer will always precede an engagement.

**Confidentiality and Privacy**

Privacy and confidentiality are not only important to ensure the academic rigor of this project, it is an imperative with respect to any association with MMFC. The ministry relies upon the promise of privacy in order to ensure men are able to be transparent and vulnerable. It is only through vulnerability and openness to the process and reception of the Holy Spirit that true healing is experienced.

No names or rosters of those contacted/invited will be captured or collected. Engagement numbers will be accomplished with a simple counting method, e.g., number of engagements, flyers distributed, etc. Identities of any men who attend a Phase 1 weekend will be held in complete confidence according to MMFC rules and procedures. Additionally, the identities of the men will be protected providing testimonies and/or feedback.

**Avoiding Harm**

Any sense that the intervention is causing more harm to a man or a group will cause the intervention to be paused. This project must ensure that harm is not done to the reputation of the MMFC ministry, to any man introduced to the ministry, or the potential for ecumenical advances in the local area. The intervention will be implemented with intentionality, patience, and prayer. Additionally, guidance will be sought throughout the process from the project’s academic advisory committee.

**Cultural Sensitivity**

Cultural issues are not anticipated in the execution of this project.

**Addressing and Disclosing Bias**

Researcher bias will be present in at least two ways in this action project. The first is the fact that the researcher is a practicing Roman Catholic. Second, the researcher is an active member of the MMFC ministry. Each of these biases are addressed below.

*Practicing Roman Catholic*

As a researcher who identifies as a practicing Roman Catholic, personal beliefs and affiliations will inherently influence scholarly inquiry and the approach to the intervention. It is imperative to acknowledge the potential biases that exist throughout the research process, which may surface in the form of: Taking the process too personally, exhibiting excessive institutional loyalty, and/or confirmation bias.

Faith practices, at their very essence, are a personal endeavor, which will undoubtably elicit emotions. The emotions that emerge during implementation of the intervention will potentially have a positive or a negative impact on the process itself.The researcher will have to have ensure that the passion that initially drove interest in this issue and the recognition of the “problem” doesn’t drive the results and analysis in a biased way. It will be easy for the researcher to take negative responses “personally”, which would negatively impact the integrity of this project.

An inherent sense of institutional loyalty and allegiance is present towards the Catholic Church, its teachings, and ecclesiastical authority will be present during the action phase of this project. Loyalty needs to tempered and priority given to the research and the academic process rather than a specific institution. This is related to the potential bias above, but this researcher must not be focused on defending a faith practice, but on implementing the intervention with integrity and academic rigor.

The final bias that may be present in this project is confirmation bias. The research must be separated from the researcher’s beliefs and values. The manner in which action research encourages the participation of the researcher in the research offers a unique perspective on the problem, solutions, and challenges. However, the researcher must ensure that the results aren’t driven toward a specific outcome other than those specifically stated as goals.

In conclusion, an awareness of the potential biases arising from the researcher’s Catholic identity underscores the necessity for methodological rigor, critical reflexivity, and intellectual honesty in scholarly endeavors. By acknowledging and critically interrogating these biases, the research will facilitate a more nuanced understanding of this issues.Top of Form

*Active Member of MMFC*

As an active member of MMFC engaging in a research project to recruit men to attend an MMFC retreat, it's essential to acknowledge the potential bias inherent in my affiliation with the organization. Like the researcher’s Catholicity, active involvement in MMFC fosters a deep personal investment and advocacy for the organization's transformative impact. This personal connection may overly predispose the intervention toward promoting MMFC retreats as a profound and beneficial experience for all men. However, not “all” men will be ready when they’re presented with this opportunity. As a matter of fact, some will never be willing or ready to participate. The intervention must be open to all responses and individual timing.

In the process of recruiting men to attend an MMFC retreat, there's a possibility of selectively presenting information that accentuates the positive aspects of the retreat experience while minimizing or omitting potential concerns or criticisms. This selective presentation may stem from a genuine desire to inspire participation and facilitate transformative experiences, yet it may inadvertently obscure a comprehensive understanding of the retreat's dynamics and potential implications.

In summary, active membership in MMFC may introduce bias into the research project, influencing recruitment efforts and information dissemination. By acknowledging and critically examining these biases their impact will be impacted.

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**Transparency and Accountability**

A field journal will be maintained throughout the intervention and post-intervention analysis. A simple spreadsheet will track engagements, invitations, and acceptances. No names or any other demographic data will be collected.

**Site Permissions**

Two categories of permission will be required for the implementation of the integration strategy. The first will be acceptance of MMFC local leadership for this effort. A meeting is scheduled with Brian Schroth, MMFC Florida Lead, during the week of 5/5/24.

Additionally, each parish will require different levels of permission to address members of the faith community. This research will comply with specific permission requirements of the individual parishes.

Requirements for site permission is a work in progress.

1. The primary target weekends are those in Bradenton. However, the weekend at Camp Kulaqua will also be a target weekend for Bradenton men as well. Phase 1 weekend’s held in Northern Florida, Church of the Nazarene, will also be made an option for those with scheduling issues, but possess the will to drive 4-hours for the experience. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The researcher lives in Bradenton, FL approximately 2.5 miles from the Bradenton retreat site. God definitely had a plan when He gently guided the researcher’s move to this area. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)