



THE
MELCHIZEDEK
PROJECT

LEADER GUIDE

DEAR YOUTH LEADER,

Every young, Catholic man who loves Jesus Christ and His Church should seriously discern whether God is calling him to be a priest.

That is the simple reason I wrote *To Save a Thousand Souls* and the reason we created the Melchizedek Project—to give young men the information they need to thoroughly explore the possibility of priesthood.

As a youth leader, you're in a primary position to help young men discern their vocations. Think about how powerful that is. You literally can help a man make the most important decision of his life! This has huge ramifications for the Church, for the New Evangelization, and for the salvation of souls.

The most challenging part of the Melchizedek Project is getting young men to join the discernment group. Because priesthood is not well understood, young men often dismiss it right away and are reluctant to join. I often stress that those who participate in the Melchizedek Project *do not need to want to become priests*. I even tell young men that perhaps in the future, God will call one of their sons to the priesthood, and that they need to be well-equipped to guide their sons. This works amazingly well to relieve any anxiety they may have.

Why is it so important to help men explore the priesthood? Simply put, because we desperately need more good, holy Catholic priests! As Pope Benedict told us, "Nothing can replace the ministry of priests in the heart of the Church." Without the priest, we have no Eucharist. Without the Eucharist, we have no Church.

I'm so thrilled that the Our Sunday Visitor Institute continues to underwrite this valuable program. Their support has helped hundreds of men complete a "diligent discernment."

And so I invite you to take the initiative to begin a Melchizedek Project discernment group—either led by you, or if possible, by a local priest. Do your best, and trust the Holy Spirit to do the rest! Maybe there is a future priest in your parish or school!

God bless you,

Fr. Brett Brannen



THE MELCHIZEDEK PROJECT

The goal of the Melchizedek Project is to give men the information they need to adequately discern their vocations—and to do so in a group that offers fraternal support.

These discernment groups can be led by a priest, youth minister, or school campus minister. There are seven 90-minute meetings throughout the semester.

The group uses as a guide Fr. Brett Brannen's inspiring book, *To Save a*

Thousand Souls: A Guide for Discerning a Vocation to Diocesan Priesthood.

Books should be given out at the first meeting. During the meetings, participants are directed to read aloud key passages from *To Save a Thousand Souls*. Don't worry if the students don't read the entire book. However, it may be helpful to direct them to appendix of questions so they can read specific passages of interest to them.

✠ FORMING THE GROUP

1. Vision and Prayer. Before beginning the planning for a discernment group, it is important to seek the Lord's guidance in prayer. Pray for clarity in the vision for what the group should look like. Ask the Lord to protect the souls of the men who will join the group. Pray also for their journey and discernment throughout the study.

2. Read the Material Before Group Begins. Be sure to read through all of the study materials and assignments before the group begins. Make any notes on specific sections

or points that may need more explanation or time. Being familiar with the material before the group begins helps bring clarity when promoting the group to others.

3. Invitation.

- **Vocation Director.** Before forming the group, be sure to contact the local vocation director. Invite him to join the group or to come whenever his schedule allows. If possible, ask him to come and lead one of the sessions during the study. This is a good way for him to get to know the men who are discerning a vocation to the priesthood.

✠ THINGS TO REMEMBER

- **Pastor or Priest.** If the leader of the group is not a priest, invite the local pastor or priest to be a part of the group as a spiritual guide and leader. Having a priest who can speak from personal experience to the group can help make many of the studies more applicable to the men in the group. The constant witness and presence of a priest living out his vocation is invaluable to men discerning priesthood.

- **Participants.** Inviting men to join the group will take boldness and courage. Do not be discouraged when your invitation is turned down. Keep asking!

- **Large Group Invitation.** After large group gatherings like youth group nights, bible studies, holy hours, or special events, make an invitation to the men to join the discernment group. Be creative in the presentation of the group. Create a promotional video or give reasons why the men should join.

- **Personal Invitation.** Although some of the men will respond to a group invitation, a personal invitation can be much more effective. Seek out the men who might be interested in the group and make a personal invitation to join. Keep in mind that many men, especially young high school age men or college age men, are reluctant to broadcast to their friends (especially girls) that they may be interested in priesthood.

1. **Support.** Although the discernment group might be exclusive to the men, having outside support is critical to the success of the group. Invite members of the church community to help support the group by cooking meals or donating needed supplies. Invite other priests to commit to being a prayer partner for one of the men in the group throughout the duration of the group.

2. **Sensitivity.** This kind of group should be built on brotherhood and confidentiality. What is shared in the group should be kept confidential among the members. Be sensitive to the men when sharing and encourage honesty. Also, understand that some men might stop attending the group for various reasons. Encourage attendance but respect the decision to not attend.

3. **Schedule.** When scheduling when and where to hold the group, be sure to look at calendars for the schools, church community, and holidays. Pay special attention to sporting events such as football and baseball schedules. Holding the group on Thursday, Friday, or Saturday may prevent many men from attending. Take a poll before the beginning of the group for the best day and time to hold the group. Be sure to reserve a comfortable meeting location that offers privacy for discussion and is the appropriate size for your group. Privacy is important, so be conscious of when

and where you schedule the meeting.

4. Translation. Some of the content in the study group may be a little more advanced for younger men. When preparing for the group, be sure to translate the language of the study so that the young men can digest it. Use examples from culture that can help make the points more relatable. Doing so will make the group discussion time more meaningful and fruitful.

5. Joy. Although discerning a vocation to the priesthood is a serious matter, do not forget to include elements of joy into the study. This can be accomplished through the time before the group time begins or during the meal.

6. Community Building. Organize a few extra events that take place outside of the group time. Incorporate both elements of serving within the local community and elements of social activities like sporting events, movies, or bowling. Having separate community building outside of the group time can help solidify the community built within the group.

✠ COMMUNICATION

1. Social Media. Consider creating a Facebook Group (not a profile) to communicate with members. This allows you to create events and send messages about meeting times to men in that group only.

2. Email and texting. Request email addresses and phone numbers from participants. *Always* send a reminder the day before your meeting—and consider another reminder two hours before it starts.

3. Follow up. As much as possible, keep in touch with men who miss a meeting.

✠ MEETING FORMAT

1. Basic structure. Most successful discernment groups have a similar structure: begin with prayer, then have discussion, and conclude with a meal. The whole gathering, including a meal, shouldn't last more than two hours.

2. Begin with prayer. The meetings should always begin prayerfully. Opening and closing prayers are included in the discussion guide. You may want to point out to participants that there is a Discernment Rosary in the appendix of *To Save a Thousand Souls* that they could use outside of the meetings.

3. Discussion. The discussion portion of the meeting should not last for more than an hour and a half. Because college students lead very full lives, be sure to respect the value of their time and do not let discussion drag on.

4. When you meet, eat. Offering a meal helps with attendance. It could be as simple as pizza, or the group leader could treat everyone

at a nearby restaurant. If a full meal is not feasible, at least offer snacks.

✚ THE FIRST MEETING

The first meeting is critical because men will decide whether it is worthwhile or not to keep attending.

1. Build fraternity. Be sure to have men introduce themselves to the group. At the first meeting, one option is to share a meal *before* discussion begins.

2. Low pressure. Be aware that some guys will be nervous about discussing the possibility of priesthood, so make it clear this is a *discernment* group – a place to explore vocation options – not a priesthood training group.

3. Respect privacy. At the first meeting, make it clear that the discussion stays in the room. Even the names of the men in the group should be kept private, as many men don't want others to know they are discerning priesthood.

✚ LEADING DISCUSSION

1. Steering discussion. At first participants will tend to aim their remarks at the leader rather than each other. When this happens, the leader should break eye contact with the speaker and look at the other men in the group. This naturally steers the speaker to direct his comments to the other participants.

2. Be comfortable with silence. Sometimes there can be periods of silence after a discussion question is raised. The leader should not be too quick to jump in. Let ideas percolate. If the silence lasts more than the space of a silently prayed Hail Mary, the leader can prompt discussion with a comment.

3. Don't be pushy. Don't push participants to share their deepest thoughts and emotions. Let that come naturally (if at all), as the men become more familiar with each other.

4. Dealing with "talkers." Often one or two outgoing people can dominate group discussion. Say, "Okay, let's get some other perspectives on that." Then direct a question at a quieter man: "Brian, what do you think about that?" In some cases, you may want to take a fellow aside after the meeting and gently ask him to allow time for others to participate more.

5. Bring the Catechism and the Bible. Sometimes conversation will drift into tough theological questions (which is okay, within limits). For this reason, it's good to have authoritative sources on hand such as the Bible and the Catechism of the Catholic Church. For the toughest questions, the leader should feel free to admit he does not know the answer and offer to research the topic before the next session.

READY TO START?

To ensure you have enough copies of *To Save a Thousand Souls*, you'll need a count of students who will attend the first meeting. At least ten days before your first meeting, let us know how many books and discussion guides you need. We'll ship them out to you immediately, free of charge.

REQUEST FREE MATERIALS

www.MelchizedekProject.com

877-585-1551





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