

# STRONGHOLD FAQ

## What is a Stronghold?

*Blessed be the Lord... **my stronghold** and my deliverer, my shield and he in whom I take refuge. PSALMS 144:1-2*

A Stronghold is a group of men or women who come together under a Common Call to support each other's spiritual growth through prayer, service, commitment, and friendship. Within a Stronghold, the committed members discern a particular devotion, spiritual practice, or virtue in which they would like to grow together. For example, a Stronghold may be made up of participants who feel called to deepen their relationship with the Blessed Mother. Another Stronghold may be made up of members who seek to exercise the Corporal Works of Mercy. Still another could be a group specifically focused on vocational discernment. What matters is that the participants discern their Common Call and then, focusing on that Call, they commit to the essential practices that distinguish a Stronghold from a club, team, or group of friends.

Why should someone join a Stronghold? Prayer, knowledge of the faith, and frequent reception of the Sacraments are essential components of a mature Catholic life. But intentional community is also essential. Being in a Stronghold is an opportunity to learn how to build intentional Catholic community so that when you leave Christendom you will know how to seek out and build the friendships you need to continue growing in your faith. Strongholds are an opportunity to be intentional with your faith life and make the most of your time at Christendom. For older students, Strongholds are a great way to exercise leadership and share with underclassmen how you have grown in your faith while at Christendom.

A Stronghold can exist for multiple years, regularly bringing in new members and passing down their commitments from year to year. Strongholds can also exist more temporarily, with members making a defined commitment to a Common Call for a set period time and then forming a new Stronghold once the initial goal or intention has been realized.

Joining a Stronghold is not a passive activity. It is not like being assigned to a residence hall or selecting from a list of pre-existing clubs. Strongholds are organic, peer-led groups that form out of a shared interest. The best way to become involved in a Stronghold is to talk to those around you about your spiritual interest and how you want to grow this semester. When you find some shared interests or goals, you have the freedom to create a Stronghold together.

## What are the essential features of a Stronghold?

*For where two or three are gathered in my name, three am I in the midst of them.*  
MATTHEW 18:20

Every Christendom student can benefit from coming together with a smaller group of peers who are committed to prayer, support, and spiritual growth. Participating in a Stronghold should compliment and strengthen the academic, Sacramental, and personal formation you receive throughout your time on campus. At the same time, not every Stronghold needs to look the same. They may vary in size, longevity, community involvement, or means of formation.

Below are the essential components that are required of every Stronghold, followed by a few non-essential recommendations that a Stronghold may or may not adopt depending on whether the participants find them useful for spiritual growth.

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## Essential Features:

**Men's and Women's Groups**—There is great value in men and women coming together in the classroom, Chapel, clubs, and other social areas and pursuits on campus. At the same time, there is also value in being able to grow together in ways that are specifically and distinctly male or female. For this reason, Strongholds are made of up of only male or female participants. Throughout the semester all Strongholds will have opportunities to come together for shared prayer and socializing. Strongholds are also encouraged to support each other through prayer and acts of service by committing to be “brother” or “sister” Strongholds if there is a similarity in their Common Call or purpose.

**Common Call**—A commitment to a particular devotion, spiritual practice, or virtue is what defines and distinguishes a Stronghold. Members are asked to go through a period of discernment (explained below) to discover their shared Common Call. Each member should feel that committing to this Common Call through the Stronghold will benefit him or her spiritually. Therefore, it is important to have a diversity of Strongholds with different Common Calls. The strong friendships built on campus are some of the greatest fruits of life in the Christendom community, but pre-existing friendship or affinity are not the defining characteristics of a Stronghold. A Stronghold is where men or women come together because they feel called to pursue a particular facet of spiritual growth. In this way, the Common Call is what bonds the group. Hopefully, the growth experienced in a Stronghold helps to build up the bonds of friendship outside of the Stronghold and strengthens the entire community.

**Commitment**—For a Stronghold to build momentum and substantially impact its participants for the good, each member needs to be committed for at least a semester. This means members agree to attend the regular meetings, participate in the agreed upon formation and devotions, and actively contribute to the growth and well-being of the Stronghold. There are many ways to grow spiritually and personally on campus, but the distinct benefit of a Stronghold is that it is fundamentally peer-to-peer; students help each other to grow as brothers or sisters in Christ. Ending your commitment to your Stronghold is not sinful (and does not need to be confessed!), but that decision should be made with due consideration.

**Regular Meetings**—Strongholds need to meet regularly to remain committed and benefit from sharing in prayer, support, accountability, and formation. We suggest meeting for one hour once a week, but not everyone's schedule allows for regular meetings. What's important is coming up with a regular meeting day and time at a frequency that works for your Stronghold and sticking to it.

**Minimum Four Participants**—Four members seems to be the threshold for real growth and support in a small-group setting. Four people provide a range of insights, ideas, experiences, and strengths that can keep a group from becoming insular or stagnant. While there is no set maximum number of participants, we suggest that each member should still be able to know and be known by all other members of the Stronghold.

**Shared Communal Prayer**—An essential element of a Stronghold's regular meeting is communal prayer. This can range from saying the Rosary together, reciting the Divine Office, praying for each other's intentions, or another form of communal prayer. The communal prayer should be connected to your Common Call and serve to build up the personal prayer lives of each member.

**Stronghold Leader**—One person should be identified within the Stronghold as the Stronghold Leader. This person is responsible for ensuring that the Stronghold is staying true to its common call and group commitments, as well as communicating with Student Life about Stronghold resources and events. Each Stronghold can decide how to identify their Stronghold Leader, and that person can change from semester to semester, given his or her academic and social commitments.

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## Non-Essential Recommendations:

**Formational discussion**—Incorporating a relevant discussion topic during each meeting allows for an intentional and educational encounter for the Stronghold to deepen their relationship with Christ and each other. A formational discussion can help a Stronghold have structured conversation on a topic related to their Common Call, a relevant issue in the lives of the Stronghold members, or a shared spiritual interest of the group. These discussions allow the members to bring their individual experiences and knowledge to the topic being discussed and enrich each other's lives with their input.

**Group Accountability**—Some Strongholds may benefit from an agreed-on challenge or commitment that the group does week-to-week. This can be anything from a set amount of personal prayer time, an act of charity, or focus on exercising a virtue. It can also include more personal/social commitments such as exercise, outreach, or academics. Some Strongholds find that committing to a form of fasting or sacrifice (e.g., not eating between meals, taking cold showers, waking up early, etc.) to be a positive way to build discipline and to be united with Christ and the members of their Stronghold.

**Patron/Patroness**—Not every Stronghold's Common Call will automatically lend itself to also adopting a patron or patroness, but if it does consider building a devotion to one Saint who is a model of your Common Call.

**Shared Spiritual Devotion or Practice**—Similarly to the share communal prayer, members of a Stronghold may want to commit to a shared devotion outside of regular meetings. A Stronghold committed to Divine Mercy may commit to saying a daily Divine Mercy chaplet, whether they are together or not. Members will certainly have their own personal prayer outside of the Stronghold, but participation in a Stronghold should help you with having a consistent devotional life.

**Faculty/Staff Mentor**—Strongholds are meant to be student-led and an opportunity for peer-to-peer growth and formation. At the same time, having a relationship with a trusted faculty or staff mentor can keep a Stronghold on track and growing. Consider inviting a faculty or staff member to mentor you with advice on creating your Common Call and then meeting with you quarterly or semesterly to hold you to your group commitments and share ideas to encourage your growth as a Stronghold.

**Stronghold Co-Leader**—Each group needs to identify one Stronghold Leader to manage the Stronghold. Larger Strongholds may benefit from having a Co-Leader as well. This can be helpful especially if the main Leader is planning on going to Rome or graduating soon and can smoothly transition the Co-Leader to be the main Leader at the end of a semester or school year.

## How do you choose a “Common Call”?

*And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. ROMANS 8:28*

The uniting principle that guides a Stronghold is as important as the members who make up the group. We use the term “Common Call” to describe the main reason for the Stronghold's existence and, potentially, its continuation. For Strongholds to have value on a campus that is already full of spiritual, academic, and social resources and opportunities, they must add something distinct into the lives of their members. Being able to unite around a particular shared interest, devotion, or virtue is what makes a Stronghold different than a group of friends or a class. While friendship may be a fruit of a Stronghold, it should never be the sole basis for its existence. By organizing a Stronghold around a Common Call, the Stronghold is built on growing in virtue or devotion rather than pre-existing affinities or friendships.

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The Common Call serves to define and distinguish one Stronghold from another. At the same time, all Strongholds are united by their Common Calls because they are each grounded in a fundamental desire for spiritual growth.

Hopefully you have some inkling of your Common Call when you begin to organize a Stronghold. Maybe you're a group of men who have a devotion to the Blessed Mother and have already committed to saying a daily Rosary together. Maybe you are freshmen women who know that you want to stay focused on acts of service, even as you adjust to college life. Whatever it is, if you're reading this guide you probably already have an idea of why you want to start a Stronghold. The next challenge is to take that idea to prayer and allow the Lord to speak into His desires for your Stronghold.

As a group, discuss some of the following questions to start a discussion about your Common Call:

1. What spiritual interests do I have that keep coming up in prayer, reading, and conversation?
2. What needs do I see in the community or the world that I want to be better prepared to serve?
3. Where do I need to be challenged most in my spiritual life? (This is a different question than "Where am I weakest?" Your personal and spiritual strengths may still be the place where you need the most challenge to keep growing and sharing. Focus on what would cultivate a positive rather than what would eliminate a negative.)
4. What devotion or interest do we all share and believe we could grow in together?

These questions should hopefully start a conversation that results in a shared interest or focus that you can take to prayer as a group and individually. We recommend setting a specific amount of time to discern your Stronghold's Common Call. This can be anywhere from a week to a month (longer than that may hinder your group from ever really starting). If, after a period of discussion and prayer, you cannot decide on a Common Call, consider beginning the process again with a new group of men or women. Remember, Strongholds are founded on a shared Call, not on an affinity for a particular group of people (though those two things aren't mutually exclusive.)

Once you have prayed about what bonds you as a Stronghold, come together to share what you have learned in prayer. As a group, come up with your "Common Call". This should be a brief description of why your group exists and what commitment you want to make. This does not need to be an essay, but rather a few simple sentences that serve to distinguish the purpose of your group. Here is an example of what a Common Call may look like:

*"We, the Soldiers Surrendered to Christ, will strive to wage war against sin to become men of virtue and prayer through regular accountability under the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola."*

## What are the steps for creating a Stronghold?

Creating a Stronghold is meant to be a fairly simple process. The following is a general guide for creating a new Stronghold. Each group's process may look a little different.

1. **Gather**—Meet with a group of men or women who share an interest in committing to a Stronghold.
2. **Common Call**—Discuss and pray about the questions above that will help you decide on your Stronghold's Common Call.
3. **Organize**—Set a regular meeting time and decide on your shared communal prayer or spiritual devotion. If you haven't already done so, choose a Stronghold Leader.

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4. **Commit**—Your Stronghold Leader should share the Common Call and a roster of Stronghold members with Student Life. Once this step is completed, the Stronghold is official and can apply for funds and other formation resources.

## What does a typical Stronghold meeting look like?

Stronghold members are committed to meeting regularly to explore and grow in their Common Call. That regular meeting will look different for each Stronghold, but it should include some essential elements that ensure the meetings are fruitful for spiritual growth and examination.

1. **Opening Prayer**
2. **Common Call**—each member shares how they lived-out or connected with the group’s Common Call in the past week. This can include sharing something they learned in prayer, connecting a challenge they encountered with what the group has been discussing, or a new understanding of an element of their Common Call. This is meant to keep the group grounded in its original purpose and to encourage the members to be living the Common Call outside of meetings.
3. **Formation**—this is when your Stronghold makes use of a resource to learn more about a topic or idea connected to your Common Call. It’s completely up to the Stronghold to choose the resource and how the group uses it. It could be a FOCUS Bible study, a chapter of a book, or an essay by a relevant Saint. The group can choose to read it outside of the meeting and come ready to discuss it; read and discuss it in the meeting; or ask a different member to prepare the formation and discussion questions each week. There are many options for the materials and arrangement of formation, but it’s important that, in addition to personal reflection and discussion, regular meetings include an outside resource that provides new and relevant formation.
4. **Communal Prayer**—every Stronghold should have an agreed upon shared communal prayer. This can be saying a Rosary together, reciting the Office, or another form of group prayer.
5. **Action point**—each member says how they hope to live out or experience something connected to the groups Common Call in the coming week. For example, if a Stronghold’s Common Call is about growing closer to the Blessed Mother, one member may say they want to commit to living out the virtue of accepting God’s will, while another may commit to saying a daily Rosary.
6. **Closing Prayer**

## What resources are available?

A Stronghold can ask Student Life for money to support their spiritual formation. Funds are available for expenses such as books, Bible study materials, or other devotionals. The Stronghold Leader can ask any Student Life staff member for funds for formation materials. Funds are not available for social activities (e.g., getting coffee or snacks, going to a movie together) for the Stronghold, but they may be requested for events that seek to serve or involve the greater community.

Here is a list of suggested books, Bible studies and other small group driven programs that your Stronghold could consider implementing:

### Spiritual Classics

*Total Consecration to Jesus Christ Through Mary* - St. Louis de Montfort

*Introduction to the Devout Life* - St. Francis De Sales

*The Imitation of Christ* - Thomas à Kempis

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## Books

*Men and Women and the Mystery of Love* - Dr. Edward Sri. Outlined for a group to walk through JPPI's Love and Responsibility.

*Searching for and Maintaining Peace: A Small Treatise on Peace of Heart* - Fr. Jacques Philippe

[Ascension Press Books](https://ascensionpress.com/collections/collection-book) (https://ascensionpress.com/collections/collection-book)

[Catholic Answers Books](https://shop.catholic.com/books/) (https://shop.catholic.com/books/)

[Catholic Market Books](https://catholic.market/books/) - Augustine Institute (https://catholic.market/books/)

[FOCUS Store](https://shopfocus.org/collections/books) - Browse a variety of books, including Bible studies. (https://shopfocus.org/collections/books)

[Ignatius Press Books](https://www.ignatius.com/Books-C1002.aspx) (https://www.ignatius.com/Books-C1002.aspx)

[St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Books](https://stpaulcenter.com/product-category/books/) - Dr. Scott Hahn (https://stpaulcenter.com/product-category/books/)

## Bible Studies

[Ascension Press Bible Studies](https://ascensionpress.com/pages/popular-studies) (https://ascensionpress.com/pages/popular-studies)

[Catholic Answers Bible Studies](https://shop.catholic.com/books/bibles-and-bible-study/) (https://shop.catholic.com/books/bibles-and-bible-study/)

[Augustine Institute Bible Studies](https://www.augustineinstitute.org/program-and-resources/lectio-bible-studies) (https://www.augustineinstitute.org/program-and-resources/lectio-bible-studies)

[FOCUS Equip](https://focusequip.org/bible-study-resources/) - Bible studies, articles and guidance for small group leaders. (https://focusequip.org/bible-study-resources/)

[Ignatius Press Bible Studies](https://www.ignatius.com/Biblical-Commentary-C1044.aspx) (https://www.ignatius.com/Biblical-Commentary-C1044.aspx)

[St. Paul Center for Biblical Theology Bible Studies](https://stpaulcenter.com/bible-studies/) - Dr. Scott Hahn (https://stpaulcenter.com/bible-studies/)

## Consecrations

[Marian Consecration - 33 Days to Morning Glory](https://www.buffalodiocese.org/documents/worship/33-Days-to-Morning-Glory-Companion-Book.pdf) - Morning Glory is a type of Marian consecration inspired by St. Louis De Montfort, Pope St. John Paul the Second, St. Teresa of Calcutta, and St. Maximilian Kolbe. (https://www.buffalodiocese.org/documents/worship/33-Days-to-Morning-Glory-Companion-Book.pdf)

[Consecration to Divine Mercy - 33 Days to Merciful Love](https://www.shopmercy.org/33-days-to-merciful-love.html) - Merciful Love is a consecration to Divine Mercy, in large part through a study of the revolutionary theology of St. Therese of Lisieux. (https://www.shopmercy.org/33-days-to-merciful-love.html)

[Consecration to St. Joseph - 33 Days to Consecration to St. Joseph](https://www.shopmercy.org/consecration-to-st-joseph-the-wonders-of-our-spiritual-father.html?source=cts) - This is the year of St. Joseph. Start it off by consecrating yourself to him and asking him in a special way to be your father! (https://www.shopmercy.org/consecration-to-st-joseph-the-wonders-of-our-spiritual-father.html?source=cts)

## Ascetical Specific

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**[Exodus90](https://exodus90.com/)** - Exodus 90 is a ninety-day spiritual exercise for men based on three pillars: prayer, asceticism, and fraternity. All three of these pillars are essential aspects of the Christian life. It is for this reason that taking up this spiritual exercise requires taking up all three of these pillars humbly. (<https://exodus90.com/>)

**[Nineveh90](https://www.romancatholicman.com/what-is-nineveh-90-2/)** - This a prayer campaign for resolute spiritual "WARRIORS!!" who seek to join ranks with tens of thousands of others in this "Supernaturally Charged" 90-Day crusade to deal the last blow to the culture of death. (<https://www.romancatholicman.com/what-is-nineveh-90-2/>)

## WOMEN

**[Fiat40 with Benedictine College](https://fiatbc.weebly.com/)** - Several years ago, a group of Benedictine College women began Fiat90, a 90-day spiritual retreat. Fiat90 is a retreat of fasting and prayer for the sake of praising the Lord through our bodies, minds, and souls as women. (<https://fiatbc.weebly.com/>)

## Lent Specific

**[40Days40Ways with the Diocese of Arlington](https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/40days40ways/)** - Our diocese has created a Lenten campaign of daily reflections and challenges, connecting people across our diocesan community (<https://www.arlingtondiocese.org/40days40ways/>)

## MEN

**[Exodus90 - 40 day journey through Lent](https://exodus90.com/)** (<https://exodus90.com/>)

**[5 Lenten Disciplines - Inspired by Exodus90](https://media.ascensionpress.com/2020/02/26/5-lenten-disciplines-inspired-by-exodus-90-spiritual-exercises/)**

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**[Nineveh90](https://www.romancatholicman.com/what-is-nineveh-90-2/)** (<https://www.romancatholicman.com/what-is-nineveh-90-2/>)

**[Daily Fast for Lent](https://thosecatholicmen.com/articles/consider-a-daily-fast-for-lent/)** (<https://thosecatholicmen.com/articles/consider-a-daily-fast-for-lent/>)

**[775 Challenge Plan](https://catholicexchange.com/a-lenten-plan-for-catholic-men)** - *Stands for 7 challenges to take effect over a 7-week period of time and the 5 ways to obtain the graces needed in order to give us the inward strength to complete these challenges.* (<https://catholicexchange.com/a-lenten-plan-for-catholic-men>)

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