

Shalom

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# tidings

**WHEN  
GOD  
HEALS  
MY HEART'S  
WOUNDS**

the world truly becomes  
a better place to live

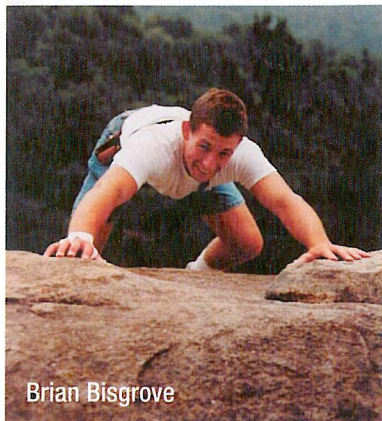




# CHALLENGE & CONQUEST

Brian Bisgrove perhaps understood that the need of his time was going to be a need for all time. The Holy Spirit surely moved him to reach out to young people in such a way.

By Joe Sebastian



Brian Bisgrove

## HISTORY

When he was in the eighth grade, Brian Bisgrove entered minor seminary at the Immaculate Heart Apostolic School in Center Harbor, New Hampshire. The seminary experience—highlighted by a personal relationship he developed with the Lord—was so enriching and fulfilling. When he completed his minor seminary studies and graduated High School, he re-engaged his friends from the past and he sadly discovered that they had been swallowed up by the world. Their focus became on material

things and perceived popularities.

Taking their common niche—playing sports—Brian would engage his friends and begin sharing his faith and speaking about his personal relationship with Jesus and his prayer life. The fruits of this evangelization was so evident that Brian—through the help of his businessman father—was able to get funding from local businesses to begin the first Conquest program in his hometown of Auburn, New York.

The program was up and running in 1996. But, soon Brian was run-down. What began as a small sinus problem was soon diagnosed as cancer, a terminal brain tumor. One day after surgery, his doctor showed Brian the button to press for morphine. Brian asked for the button to be removed. He did not want the temptation. The doctor urged Brian to reconsider as soon he was going to experience excruciating pain. The doctor then pleaded with Brian's father. When he spoke with his son, Brian asked his father to explain to the doctor that he did not want him to take away this opportunity of suffering, and that if the doctor still did not understand, to ask him to stand before a Crucifix in the hallway. Brian wanted the doctor to witness the suffering of Christ on the Cross. For Brian, he welcomed the suffering. And he wanted to offer

it for the Conquest program. Brian went to be with the Lord on February 2, 1998 at the age of 21.

Brian's father, Jack Bisgrove, picked up the torch from his son. Within a few years, the program was professionally institutionalized and then grew by leaps and bounds.

## THE PROGRAM

The Challenge (for girls) and Conquest (for boys) programs are found under the umbrella of the Mission Network Programs USA, which is a ministry of Regnum Christi. Headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia, the programs offer resources for parishes and youth ministers as they serve the youth in their diocese.





Active now in 300+ parishes in the United States and Canada, the mission of the Challenge and Conquest programs is to “offer useful and effective methods and materials for Catholic Youth Ministry to families, parishes, and schools.” The target audience for the programs are fifth to twelfth graders, although they also offer younger virtue programs for boys through Conquest.

From the Bisgrove’s leadership to today, the programs have been updated to meet the modern needs of parishes. Initially, Mission Network was heavily involved in parishes, chartering clubs and conducting training and certification for its leaders. Over time, they realized that parishes wanted programs that they could claim ownership over, which could be flexible enough to meet their individual needs. Essentially, the program becomes part of the Youth Ministry of each parish.

With the Pastor’s approval, individual parishes apply for an annual membership, which gets them a year’s worth of resources and enough kits to start the program. As the program grows, parishes can purchase more kits as needed. Mission Network staff often reaches out to the individual parishes to find out more about the parishes and what they are interested in having the youth focus on or participate in within the parish. Each Club Leader receives a Handbook, CD, Team Leader Training Guide, and a Club Planner.

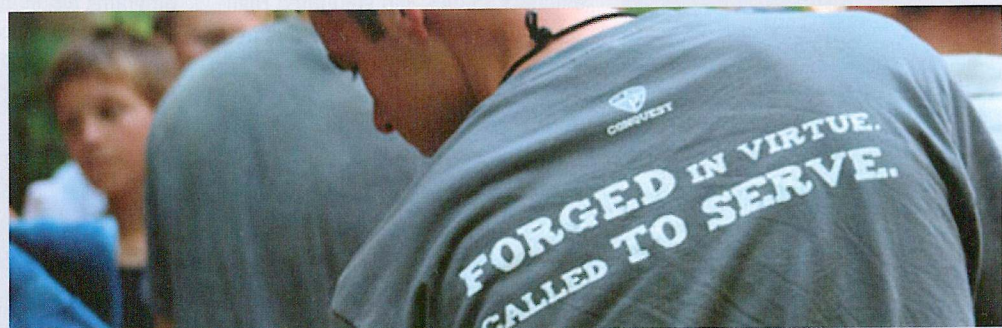
The guidebook has been developed to be intuitive. The Club Leader then trains a Team Leader, who is a few years older than the team of youth they lead. The programs follow a peer-to-peer model.

The programs are developed to meet the learning styles of boys and girls. Conquest follows a mission-style format, centered on physical activities. Challenge involves more hands-on activities such as crafts and fun games. Fifth to eight-graders have four eight-week tracks in a year. High school students, because they usually have more commitments on their time, have four six-week tracks.

A typical week’s discussion features an introduction prayer and follows the theme of “Experience. Connect. Decide.” A Gospel Reflection is offered to provide Christ’s answer within Scripture to a question of the week. Each member is asked to commit to an action (which is reviewed the next week).

## THE FUTURE

The Challenge and Conquest models provide several unique features. In speaking with youth ministers, one of the main challenges they face is how to find the time to assist a growing number of youth. With these programs, however, a Youth Minister (Club Leader, usually a parent) needs only to train Team Leaders (maybe 2-5 individuals), who then lead the members (youth). The Youth Minister is available to assist when necessary. The Challenge and Conquest national directors at Mission Network provide bi-monthly video resources to keep local program Club Leaders informed and up-to-date. The programs recognize the unique roles we have as girls and boys, as women and men, in society,



and the programs speak to the uniqueness of our roles. The programs fully acknowledge that we are created as men and women in God’s image, separate but equally special.

As churches have downsized, for various reasons, in the past, youth ministry was often one of the first programs to go. More and more parishes have come to understand that to truly fulfill our call for New Evangelization, youth have to be taught at a

young age through programs that enrich and engage, that are steeped in Scripture, and which develop a personal relationship with Christ. The fire and passion for Christ can be developed young and programs such as Challenge and Conquest can aid in that.

Brian Bisgrove perhaps understood that the need of his

time was going to be a need for all time. The Holy Spirit surely moved him to reach out to young people in such a way. His legacy lives in the 6500+ youth, 300 adult leaders, and 700 teen leaders who are already influenced by Challenge and Conquest.

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For more information about how to bring the Challenge and Conquest programs to your parish, visit [www.challengeclubs.com](http://www.challengeclubs.com) or [www.conquestclubs.com](http://www.conquestclubs.com).