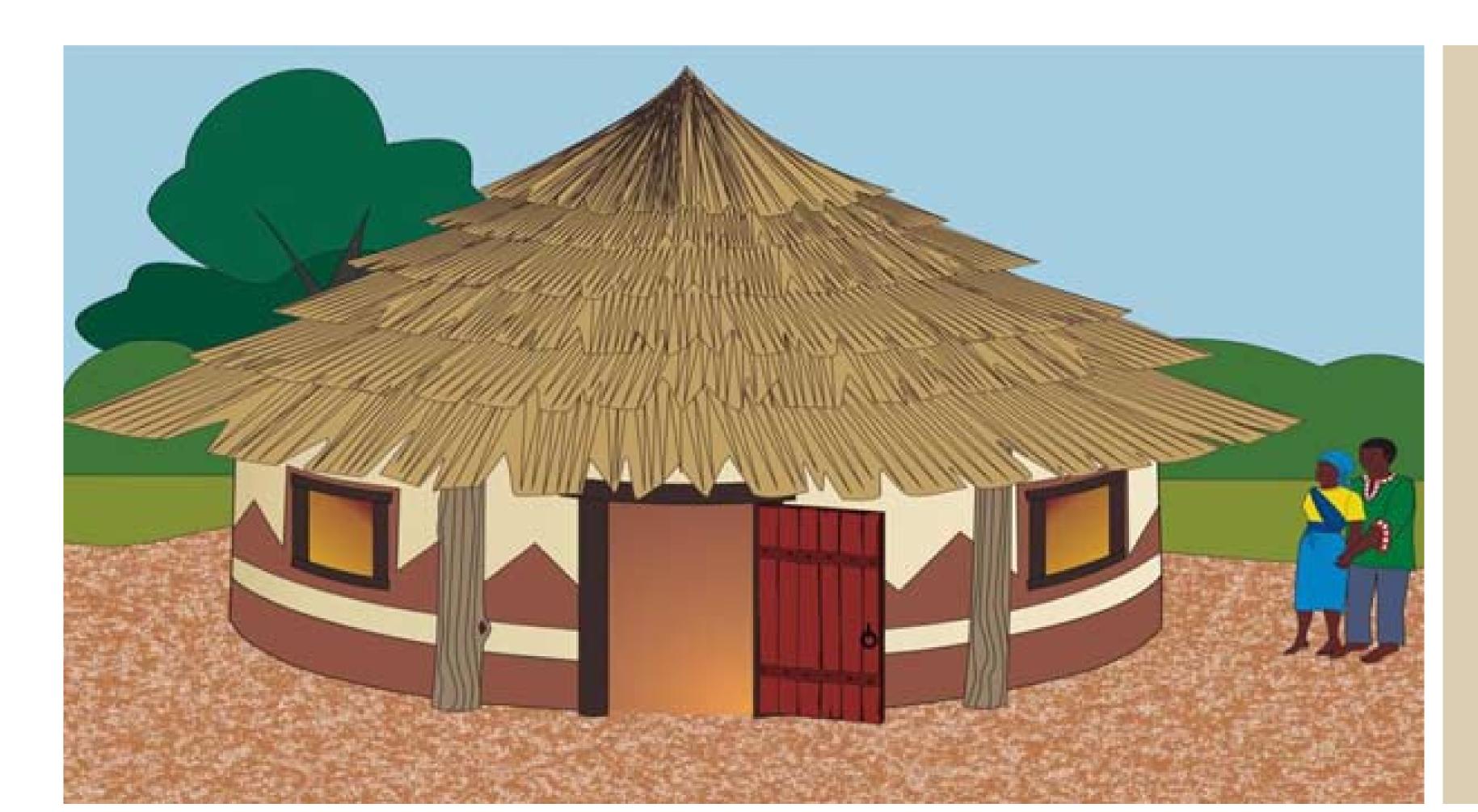


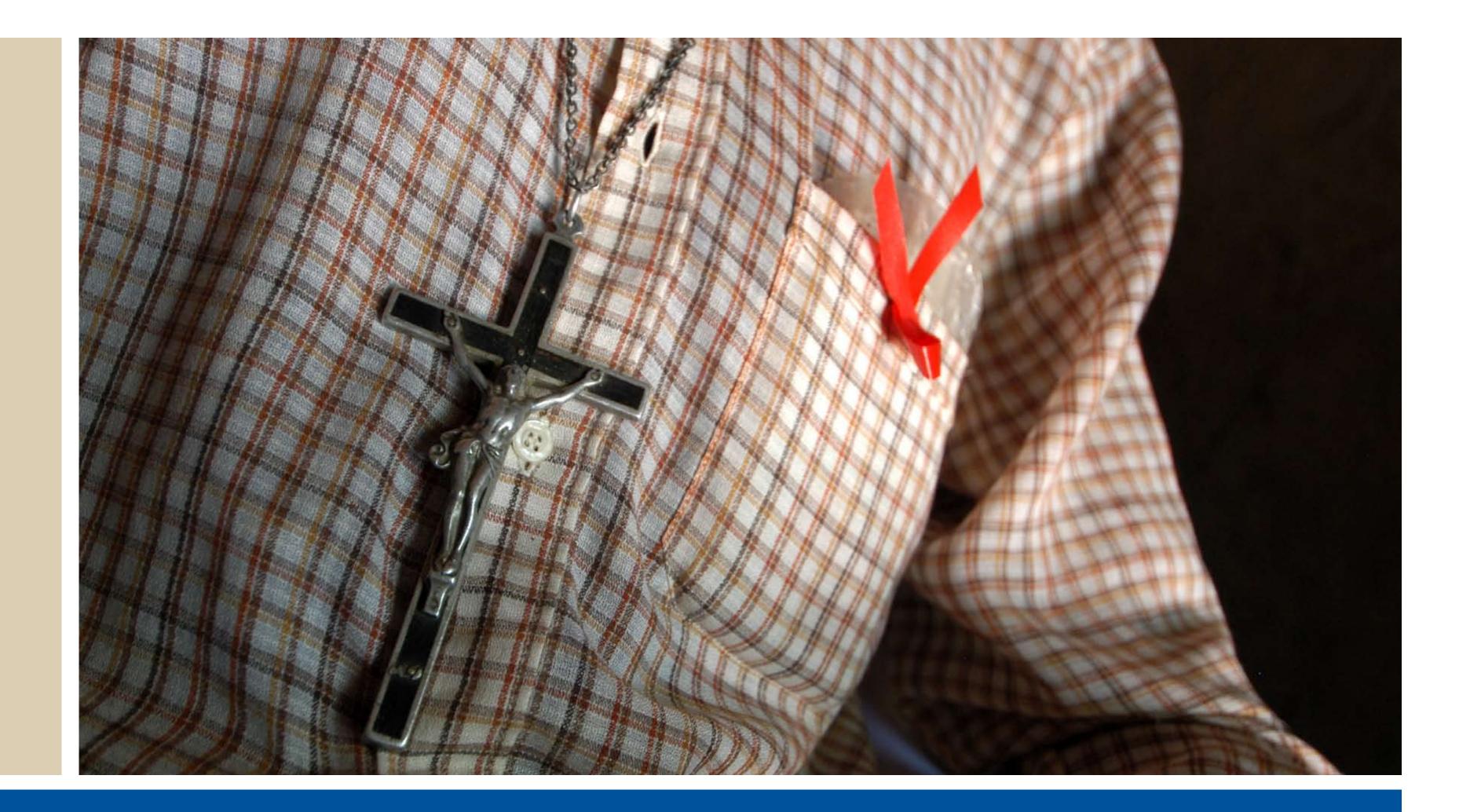
# Faith and Fidelity: Scaling up and sustaining HIV prevention activities for couples in the Rwandan Catholic Church

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## Background:

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in Rwanda promotes HIV prevention for adult couples by promoting the reduction of multiple concurrent partners. The curriculum used for this activity is entitled Faithful House (FH). The results from Faithful House workshops showed that the workshops are well-received and are having the desired impact in changing attitudes and behaviors. The Faithful House workshops are taught by married couples who are trained to facilitate the FH training with other married or engaged couples thereby providing them with the tools for enhancing mutual fidelity. In preparation for scale-up of FH training, in 2008, CRS began an operational research study on FH facilitation to determine the best facilitation method for expansion and sustainability of FH's objectives.



Research Question: Are lay couples or catechist couples the best facilitators for yielding long-term and wide-spread results from Faithful House workshops?

## Design:

The research was designed to test the theory that targeting FH training toward catechist couples will increase the reach, quality, and sustainability of the FH program. While catechist couple facilitators have a relationship with their parish, the lay couples may be more representative of the general population and better positioned to reach the general community.

This research compares two groups of peer facilitators: catechist couples (one or both spouses are certified in religious instruction) and lay couples (neither spouse is certified to provide religious instruction) who underwent 5 days of intensive training on the FH curriculum. Twenty-one lay couples and 20 catechist couples were compared using a pre-test survey and two post-test surveys collected at 3 months and 12 months following their training. In addition, key stakeholders such as parish priests, religious leaders and project staff were interviewed using a structured guide. This was done in order to assess the extent to which the FH activity had been integrated into the existing church structures and activities. Focus group discussions were also conducted with participants in FH training to understand their thoughts and feelings about lay and catechist facilitators.

## Results:

#### Attitude change:

The study revealed that 91.8% of the participants have self-reported attitude change around marriage (93.7% of the participants trained by lay couples; 93.3% of participants trained by catechists and 86.6% of participants trained by both). These changes in attitudes were also reflected in questions such as the importance of joint decision making around important family issues.

#### Behavior change:

Self-reported behavior changes within the marriage were similarly high with 96.5% of participants reporting this in the post-test with only a small difference among those trained by lay people (95.8%) and both (95.5%). Willingness to openly discuss and share financial information around family income with their spouse and improved spouse communication were some of the areas where behavior changes were most noted in a comparison between pre and post tests.

#### Dissemination:

Ninety-eight percent of those facilitated by the lay people and 62.5% of those facilitated by the catechist couples reported disseminating knowledge.

#### Participant satisfaction:

Workshop post-tests with participants revealed that lay couples tended to score higher in the method of giving instruction and stimulating participants' discussion whereas catechist couples performed better in guiding the discussion throughout their sessions.

**Parish satisfaction:** In the interviews with key stakeholders, parish leaders noted their preference for working with catechist couples for conducting FH workshops.

### Conclusions:

The FH program aims to reduce multiple concurrent partnerships in adult couples through peer learning workshops. This research compares the implementation outcomes of two groups of trained peer facilitators.

- There was no difference in attitude changes and only small differences in behavior changes of the participants based on the category of facilitator.
- The participant satisfaction was high in both groups, but lay couples were better at instruction and stimulating discussion.
- The lay couples were also found to be more interactive and available to the community leading to wider dissemination of messages from FH training.
- The catechist couples were preferred by parish leaders as the facilitators for FH training.

## **Implications:**

This operations research will be used to inform future implementation of the FH in the following ways:

- When the primary target audience is church couples, such as in premarital counseling, catechist couples should be the trainers.
- In settings where there are limited opportunities for outreach by the church, the preference would be to strengthen church relationships by utilizing catechist couples and integrating their training into church activities.
- When the setting is favorable for church outreach, lay couples are recommended as the FH trainers.
- A "Couple's Handbook," written to help both lay couples and catechist couples to dialogue with their community, will be widely disseminated to improve outreach of FH messages by both sets of trainers.