

# What is Cursillo®?

## INTRODUCTION

To explain Cursillo to someone who has never experienced Cursillo is at best, difficult. Often, for those who have experienced Cursillo it is still somewhat mystifying. This is not because the Cursillo Movement is a "secret" organization. The reason behind the mystery is God. No one can fully explain how God touches each person in His special/unique way throughout the various elements of the Cursillo Movement. This booklet cannot explain the mystery of God. The booklet will; however, attempt to explain the human aspect behind the Cursillo Movement.

Throughout this booklet you will find references to concepts that at one time seemed foreign to Catholics. Evangelization is probably the one that comes to mind first. For many years Catholics looked upon evangelization as "something the Protestants did." Today, in Church, we hear a great deal about evangelization. Still for some of us, we automatically think of going out two-by-two (with Bible in hand) and knocking on people's doors. Nothing could be further from the truth.

In the Cursillo Movement, we approach evangelization as a very natural act of being Christlike within each of our daily activities. We realize that while most people would like to live their lives in a Christ-like manner, the pressures of the world often make this difficult. The Cursillo Movement provides a method and a technique to provide each of us with the tools, the mentality, the strength, and the support to make this natural type of evangelization possible.

Sometimes this booklet will have other statements that are basically the same as evangelization. Statements such as: 1) proclaiming the Gospel, 2) fulfilling our Baptismal responsibility (some of us were not even aware that our Baptismal responsibility required us to do something), 3) leavening the environments, and 4) living what is fundamental for being a Christian. We should not allow these statements to scare us off. These are nothing more than by-products of living our lives in a fully Christian manner.

The Cursillo Movement can assist each of us in developing a deeper understanding of what it means to be fully Catholic by being fully Christian.

## THE HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

The Cursillo Movement is a movement of the Catholic Church. The name Cursillo is Spanish, meaning short course, and is often associated with a 3-Day weekend—which is only one aspect of the Cursillo Movement. The proper name is Cursillo de Cristiandad (short course of Christianity). There is much more to the Cursillo Movement than just a 3-Day weekend.

This Movement evolved from Spain, where it got its origin, in the 1940s. The Cursillo Movement did not develop by accident. It began when a group of men dedicated themselves to bringing the young men of their city of Mallorca, Spain, to know Christ better. It developed as they prayed and worked together; it developed as they talked together, sharing their thoughts about the state of the world and the effectiveness of their efforts to bring the light of Christ to it.

On the natural level alone, the story of the Cursillo Movement is exciting. It's a story filled with the adventure of new discoveries and works of outstanding dedication, tragic misunderstandings and setbacks, as well as impressive patience. These young men and the clergy who supported them endured many unpromising situations in the faith that God would work.

But it is even more an exciting story on the spiritual level. It is the story of how God taught a group of men how to work for Him in an effective way, a way that bears fruit. In the late 1940s, the first Cursillo was given and the Cursillo Movement began. Those who make Cursillo's today would find much of the first Cursillo familiar. The Cursillo has been refined and changed somewhat, but today's Cursillo weekend remains basically the same as those first Cursillo's.

It was, however, no accident that the first Cursillo was so fully formed that a movement could begin from that date. The first Cursillo was neither a lucky accident nor a blueprint which came directly from heaven, but grew out of a process of development. Nor were the first leaders just a chance collection of men. They had been working together for some time trying to bring men to Christ so they could work together to Christianize the world.

But the Cursillo, on the other hand, was not just a well worked out human product. It grew in the climate of spiritual renewal. It was developed by men of prayer who were seeking to serve the Lord. It was formed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit working in men who had dedicated themselves to bringing others to a knowledge of Christ.

The Cursillo Movement came to birth in the movements of renewal that preceded the second Vatican Council. Vatican II was such a major event in the history of the modern Catholic Church that there is a certain tendency to date everything from the Council. But Vatican II was itself born out of an effort of spiritual and pastoral renewal that had begun years before. The liturgical movement, the scriptural renewal, Catholic Action and other movements of the lay apostolate had begun years before the Council. Everywhere in the Church, people were seeking to find ways of "bringing the Church to life in the hearts of men" (Romano Guardini). The Cursillo Movement came from the work of such individuals.

The first stirrings of what later was to become the Cursillo Movement began on the Island of Mallorca during World War II. The Spanish Civil War had ended in 1939, and the years after the Civil War were a time of ferment in the Spanish Church. Before the war, a pilgrimage to the shrine of St. James at Compostela had been planned. This spiritual journey to the great Spanish pilgrimage center of the Middle Ages would provide a time for the young men and women of Spain to dedicate themselves in a renewed way to the work of the apostolate. After being postponed several times by the disruption of war, it was finally rescheduled for 1948.

The pilgrimage set a tone. The spirit of pilgrimage is a spirit of restlessness, of dissatisfaction with spiritual lukewarmness, of moving onward, of "ultreya ." It is also a spirit of brotherhood among fellow pilgrims who are striving together to reach the goal of a life fully given to the love of God and man. The pilgrim style has marked much of the spirituality of the Cursillo Movement.

Preparation for the pilgrimage gave rise to efforts of renewal in the different Catholic Action groups in Spain, among them the branch for young men in the diocese of Majorca. As a result of the preparations for the pilgrimage there was greater interest in finding an effective way to work apostolically. The groups responsible for preparations for the pilgrimage to St. James were the diocesan councils for the young men's branch of Catholic Action. Catholic Action was the official organization of the lay apostolate in Spain (and in many other countries). Most organized efforts of Catholic laity taking part in the work of the Church were part of Catholic Action (which was supported and directed by the hierarchy). In Spain, Catholic Action was divided into the men's branch, the women's branch, the young men's branch and the young women's branch. The leaders of the young men's branch on the island of Majorca were the founders of the Cursillo Movement. Those who first developed the Cursillo Movement worked together as a team from the very beginning.

They worked as a leaders' team that prayed together, share their Christian lives together, studied together, planned together, acted together and evaluated what they had done together. Together they worked at the task of forming Christian life among the young people in Majorca.

Out of their common efforts, something new in the life of the Church was born. Church renewal, spiritual renewal, pastoral renewal, the pilgrim style, a pastoral plan, teamwork among leaders—the Cursillo Movement grew out of all these things. It developed not by accident nor through a clearly specified plan, but was an organic development of the efforts of a group of men who had dedicated themselves to the work of God.

At first, the Cursillo's were just "little courses" (little course is the literal meaning of the Spanish word—Cursillo) which were given by the diocesan council of the young men's branch of Catholic Action. They were given to members of Catholic Action groups as a way of forming them so they could become effective apostles.

The first Cursillo in the United States was held in Waco, Texas, in 1957. The key figures in the beginning were Father Gabriel Fernandez and two airmen from Spain, Bernardo Vadell and Agustin Palomino, who were training with the United States Air Force. Father Gabriel had arrived in Waco in 1955 from Spain where he had made his three days under two of the founders of the movement, Father Juan Capo and Eduardo Bonnin. The priest and the airmen were responsible for putting on the first two weekends in Waco.

Airmen Vadell and Palomino were transferred to Mission, Texas, just after they had completed the second weekend in Waco. By late 1957, the traveling airmen had put on the first weekend in Mission. In 1958, they started a center in Laredo, Texas, and soon after, the movement was introduced in Corpus Christi.

In 1959, the Cursillo spread throughout Texas and to Phoenix, Arizona. In August of that year the first national convention of spiritual directors was held, and *Ultreya* magazine began publication. In 1960, the growth of the Cursillo quickened in the Southwest, and weekends were held for the first time in the East in New York City and Lorain, Ohio.

Until 1961, all weekends were held in Spanish. That year the first English-speaking weekend was held in San Angelo, Texas. Also in 1961, first weekends were held in San Francisco, California; Gary, Indiana; Lansing, Michigan; and Gallup, New Mexico. By 1962, twenty-five more English-speaking weekends had been held.

In 1962, the Cursillo Movement came to the Eastern United States. Weekends were held in Cincinnati, Brooklyn, Saginaw, Miami, Chicago, Detroit, Newark, Baltimore, Grand Rapids, Kansas City and Boston. In the West, the first weekends were held in Monterey, Sacramento, Los Angeles, Pueblo and Yakima.

The movement spread rapidly with the early centers carrying the Cursillo to nearby dioceses. As of 1981, almost all of the 160 dioceses in the United States had introduced the Cursillo Movement.

The Cursillo Movement in the United States was organized on a national basis in 1965. At this meeting a National Secretariat was organized, and a National Cursillo Office (currently in Dallas, Texas) was established. The Cursillo Movement has the support of the vast majority of the American hierarchy. It is joined to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops through an official liaison in the person of Most Rev. James S. Sullivan, Bishop of Fargo, and through the Bishops' Secretariat for the Laity in Washington, D.C.

Today, it is a worldwide movement with centers in nearly all South and Central American countries, the United States, Canada, Mexico, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Great Britain, Ireland, France, Germany, Austria, Italy, Yugoslavia, Australia, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and in several African countries. The movement is a member of the International Catholic Organizations of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in Rome. In 1980, the Cursillo Movement

established an international office, the OMCC (Organismo Mundial de Cursillo's de Cristiandad), in Santo Domingo to coordinate the three existing international working groups of Latin America, Europe and the International English Language Group. The international leaders of the movement meet periodically to further its work.

At one of these meetings in Rome in 1966, Pope Paul VI had the opportunity to address the movement. Among his words of encouragement were the following:

*"Cursillos de Cristiandad, that is the word, purified through experience, affirmed by its fruits, that today travels with citizenship papers throughout the world ..."*

*"Whether some methods become obsolete, whether new manifestations of the Spirit arise, the permanent task of the layman will continue to be the infusion of Christianity into life through the encounter and personal friendship with God and in communion with his brothers. The layman, upon forming himself in Christianity, reforms his mentality and conforms his life to Christ's image by means of faith, hope and charity; acting with complete responsibility he transforms the temporal structures in which he is immersed, guided in his action by the glance of Christ he continually tries to remake the world according to God's plan and design ...."*

*"We know that in your plan of spirituality and apostolate in the Cursillo Movement the 'Sensus Ecclesiae' (mind of the Church) is the guiding light that orients you ...."*

*"Beloved sons and daughters: Our soul is so oppressed by the vision of the evils which afflict the Church and mankind. But permit us to express our overwhelming joy that, at this moment, floods our soul before the immense chorus of your manly faith in Christ, your fidelity to the Church, your fervent loyalty to this Chair of Peter and to the ministry of the episcopal hierarchy."*

*"Cursillos de Cristiandad! Christ, the Church, the Pope, are counting on you!"*

Pope Paul VI,  
First World Ultreya, Rome  
May 28, 1966

In 1980, Pope John Paul II, addressing the first National Italian Ultreya in Rome said,

*"Your movement, which recently celebrated its thirtieth anniversary, devotes itself to drawing forth from Christians a commitment to live lives consistent with their faith whether individually or as a community—and to bring this ferment to the environments where you live."*

*"You have discovered anew the explosive truth of the evangelical message: God, Father of all, comes to us as we encounter him in Jesus Christ to reunite us through the grace of the Spirit in one family which is the Church."*

*"In her, we are truly able to experience even now the love which will be the inexhaustible fountain of eternal joy in heaven. Here then is the synthesis of all of Christianity. This is the news that all human hearts hope for without realizing it. Therefore dedicate yourselves more and more to being tireless apostles in your environments."*

*"My apostolic blessing goes with you as a pledge of this divine grace which enables you to live forever."*

## WHAT IS THE CURSILLO MOVEMENT?

Cursillo literature cites several different definitions for the purpose of the Cursillo Movement. While the wording (definitions) may vary, the idea is the same. This is due, in part, to the fact that the purpose of Cursillo is multi faceted. No one definition can truly explain what Cursillo is. However, all the definitions can give a much richer meaning to the purpose of Cursillo.

- One definition states: "The purpose (or goal) of the Movement is to make Christian community possible in neighborhoods, parishes, work situations and other places where people live the greater part of their lives. It makes possible for anyone in the world to live a Christian life in a natural way."
- Another definition lists the purpose of the Cursillo Movement as: "The leavening of environments with the Gospel." In other words, changing the places we spend time by being Christlike in our thoughts, words, and actions.
- Still another definition states: "Since it is a movement of the Church, the Cursillo Movement has the same apostolic purpose as the Church herself. And the Church, as Pope Paul VI told us, exists to evangelize."
- There is yet another definition that describes the purpose as such: "The Cursillo Movement is a movement of the Church which by means of its own method makes it possible for people to live what is fundamental for being a Christian, and to live it together; it helps people discover and fulfill their personal vocations, and it promotes the creation of core groups of Christians who leaven their environments with the Gospel." These "core groups" are now referred to as "Environmental Groups."

As mentioned earlier, while the wording of these definitions may differ, their ideas are the same. The Cursillo Movement is focused to help each of us fulfill our baptismal responsibility: to go forth, as apostles, and proclaim the Gospel. We can no longer afford to sit passively by and "hope" that the world comes to know Christ. We must make a conscientious effort to "tell" the world about Christ. The Cursillo Movement provides us with the necessary tools for fulfilling our baptismal responsibility along with the training for using those tools.

In determining the purpose of the Cursillo Movement, it is important that we focus on two important aspects. The first aspect: We are communal people. The second aspect: We are teamwork people.

### **WE ARE COMMUNAL PEOPLE**

By our very makeup (which was conceived by God), we need relationships (interaction of two or more persons). A relationship of husband/wife was required to bring about our conception. A relationship of mother/child was required to bring about our birth.

Our growth from newborn to adulthood is filled with relationships in school, family reunions, Church, vacations, etc. When we enter into the working environments we find ourselves thrust into completely new relationships. Neighborhoods can also provide various opportunities for relationships. Social/Civic/Political involvement(s) most definitely depend upon relationships. Therefore it is part of our nature to be part of various communities in our everyday life.

## **WE ARE A TEAMWORK PEOPLE**

Early in our youth, many of us came to understand the value of teamwork. Even if one was not involved in a formalized sports program, most were involved in some form of team competition during P.E. (Physical Education class) at school. We also learned the value of studying together in an attempt to improve our grades.

For those that serve (or have served) in the military, they realize that the purpose of Basic Training is to de-emphasize the individual and emphasize the team. Besides all these examples of teamwork, Christ gave us the encouragement to work as a team: *"Again, [amen,] I say to you, if two of you agree on earth about anything for which they are to pray, it shall be granted to them by my heavenly Father. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."* (Matthew 18: 19 – 20).

## **BACK TO THE TITLE**

The purpose of the Cursillo Movement is to bring about a change in the environments. The Cursillo Movement is a deliberate act to bring Jesus Christ into the world. Cursillistas (those that have gone through the 3-Days and are living the Cursillo method) become agents for change in their families, work situations, neighborhoods, social gatherings, etc. Cursillistas are the part of the Christian community (communal) that links together with others (teamwork) to bring Jesus Christ to the world.

## **DURING THE CURSILLO WEEKEND**

### **OVERALL**

Each day of the Cursillo Weekend begins with Morning Prayers and ends with Night Prayers. Mass is celebrated daily (except Thursday). Each participant should be aware that, since prayer is such an intricate part of the Cursillo Movement, there will be other cursillistas that will be continually praying and offering up sacrifices—for the success of the Cursillo Weekend. There will be proper nourishment provided and also adequate rest periods. Those that have special needs, such as a particular diet or physical needs, will be attended to properly.

### **THURSDAY NIGHT**

This is a time to get to know each other and to have an overview of the Cursillo Weekend. This is also the retreat phase of the Cursillo Weekend, which is designed "To awaken the moral consciences of the participants, beginning with an analysis of their own lives and causing them to desire to encounter God." The retreat phase (done in silence and ends Friday morning after Mass) includes three meditations and "The Way of the Cross." The meditations are: 1) Know Yourself, 2) The Prodigal Son, and 3) The Three Glances of Christ (this is given Friday morning).

### **FRIDAY**

The focus of Friday should be to help each participant to have a better understanding of themselves. Friday should help them discover what motivates them in different situations.

During this day the participants will hear five presentations. Three presentations will be given by members of the laity and they are: 1) *Ideals*, 2) *The Layperson as the Church in the World*, and 3) *Holiness*. The other two presentations will be given by the Spiritual Directors and they are: 1) *Grace* and 2) *Faith*. While the presentations provide the participants with information and witnessed experiences, it is the table discussions (following each presentation) that prove to be one of the real dynamics of the Weekend. The sharing, which takes place during the table discussions, provides the participants with an opportunity to share their own insights about the presentation. Furthermore, the participants have the opportunity to hear how other participants perceived that same presentation.

After each presentation and table discussions, the participants will draft a written summary of the presentation and table discussion. Later the participants will have an opportunity to graphically illustrate their ideas of the presentations and table discussions. That evening, each table group will share their summaries and graphic illustrations with the other participants and team members.

## **SATURDAY**

The focus for Saturday is to combine that fully realized self (that they learned about Friday) with a wonderful and loving God. Saturday helps the participants to understand the current relationship that they have with God and should spawn a desire for a still deeper and fuller relationship with God.

The schedule for Saturday follows the same format as Friday. Again, there are three laity presentations entitled: 1) *Formation*, 2) *Evangelization*, and 3) *Leaders*. As with Friday's schedule, there are also two Spiritual Director presentations entitled: 1) *Sacraments*, and 2) *Obstacles to a Life of Grace*. Table discussions again play a very dynamic role in generating various insights concerning the presentations. The summaries (of each presentation) and the graphic illustrations are shared with all, just like on Friday.

## **SUNDAY**

The focus for Sunday is the understanding of ourselves, our relationship with God, and how we can help Him in fulfilling His Will. We learn what environments we belong to and how we can affect those environments.

The same format is used on Sunday, except there is only one Spiritual Director presentation—Christian Life. There are the usual three laity presentations, which are: 1) *Study and Evangelization of the Environments*, 2) *Christian Community*, and 3) *Group Reunion and Ultreya*.

Sunday night at the Clausura (Closing), the participants come face to face with the larger Cursillo Community that has been so supportive during the entire weekend. It is during this meeting that the participants enter this Cursillo Community.

## **AFTER THE CURSILLO WEEKEND**

The Cursillo Movement realizes that it will not be an easy task for us to try to bring Christ to our environments. Therefore, the Cursillo Movement has two very important tools to assist each of us. These tools are the Group Reunion and the Ultreya.

## **GROUP REUNION**

The Group Reunion is a small group of Cursillo friends that meet on a regular basis. The purpose of this meeting is to share with one another the growth that has taken place within each of us. We share our spiritual growth as well as our growth in becoming a person who strives to bring a Christ-like attitude to our environments. This meeting is referred to as a Friendship Group.

As we make attempts to bring Christ into our various environments, we will sometimes become frustrated. The group Reunion also provides the continual support we need in order to persevere as a part of God's plan.

## **ULTREYA**

The Ultreya (Spanish word meaning Onward) is the larger Cursillo community. It is the time for the members of the Group Reunions to meet with members of other Group Reunions. The Ultreya is also beneficial in providing the support and encouragement that each of us needs.

## **PENETRATING ENVIRONMENTS**

The Cursillo Movement helps each of us to understand what our various environments are. Furthermore, it helps us develop a plan to change those environments.

## **CONCLUSION**

We, as laity in the Church, can no longer take our role lightly. The future of our society is in our hands. We must realize that we, as individuals, can have a great impact on our society. More importantly, we can have an even greater impact when we find other individuals that are ready and able to accept the challenge.

Throughout history, great things have happened because individuals decided to do more than was "expected." In the Catholic Church we refer to some of these individuals as saints.

It has been said that Mikhail Gorbachev in ending Communist control was inspired by the Polish Solidarity Movement leader, Lech Walensa. Walensa was himself inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King who was inspired by Rosa Parks, a black woman who refused to sit in the back of the bus.

In the introduction, we referred to the mystery of God. How else can we explain the events that shape our world?

In the past, the Cursillo Movement was primarily thought of as a source of individual spiritual growth. Today, we must realize that this individual spirituality is just not enough. Today, we must add to that spirituality. Our society needs us to be apostolic. Our Church needs us to be apostolic. Our world needs us to be apostolic. But most of all, our Lord wants us to be apostolic.

Let us strive to be Christ-like. He chose individuals to become "fishers of men." Should we do any less?