



The Cursillo Movement

What Is It?

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This booklet does not pretend to explain what Cursillo is, nor does it explain the mystery of God. The booklet will, however, attempt to explain the human aspect behind the Cursillo Movement.

A Brief History of the Cursillo Movement

The Cursillo Movement, a gift of the Holy Spirit to the Church, did not occur by accident. It developed after a series of events.

During an address given in Rome on February 6, 1940, Pope Pius XII acknowledged that there were a great number of people who had moved away from living a Christian life. He challenged the Church leaders to make every effort possible to help people return to their Christian values. The reading of this address, along with Eduardo Bonnín's initiative, inspired the founders to carry out a thorough and deep study of the current situation and atmosphere in a more serious and systematic approach. The plan was to win the environment and transform it to Christ.

In 1941 the top council for young people in Catholic Action, motivated by its National Chairman, Manolo Aparici, gathered 100,000 young men who lived in God's grace for a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela (Shrine of St. James the Apostle).

In preparing for the pilgrimage, it was determined that a need existed for some courses to help in training the pilgrimage leaders and scouts. Week-long courses were held twice a year, once at Easter time and once at Christmas time. This was the only time these leaders could be absent from their employment. These week-long courses were called "Cursillos of Pilgrim Leaders" (Cursillos de Jefes de Peregrinos).

Faced with the fact that in everyday life most people do not have an entire week to interrupt their activities, Eduardo Bonnín created a method of three complete days — what we know today as "Cursillos in Christianity" (short course in Christianity). A method to achieve and, by God's grace, obtain what is most urgently needed: that the Good News of the Gospel, good for all and always new because it renews us, reach as many as possible, and above all reach the men and women of today, the ordinary person.

The first and most formative period in the history of the Cursillo Movement extends from the first Cursillo held during August 20-23, 1944, in a chalet at Cala Figuera of Santanyí, Majorca, Spain.

The different parts of the method took form during that time period. The Movement was born from a small group of friends whose restlessness to bring Christ to the environments was evident. They met often as a group to grow in friendship and in grace. Those who experienced the Cursillos used the same format

of sharing. Besides the Group Reunion, the enthusiastic desire to share, everyone with everyone, gave origin to other weekly reunions open to all Cursillistas. This is known today as the Ultreya. The Ultreya was a natural development from groups of Cursillistas meeting together (reunion of the groups) to give each other encouragement in the joy of being united in the same pilgrimage.

From the very beginning the Cursillos experienced opposition. As early as 1949, during the 11th diocesan assembly, Bishop Juan Hervás publicly and solemnly affirmed the Cursillos, saying: “I bless them; and I bless them not with one but with two hands” — and he continued to always defend them.

Despite several setbacks, the Cursillo Movement continued to spread. Today it is a worldwide Movement with centers in nearly all South and Central America 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 several African countries.

The Movement in the United States

The first Cursillo in the United States was held in Waco, Texas, in 1957. The key figures at its beginning were two airmen from Spain, Bernardo Vadell and Agustín Palomino, who were training with the United States Air Force, and Father Gabriel Fernandez. Father Fernandez had arrived in Waco in 1955 from Spain. He had experienced his Cursillo in Spain under the direction of Father Juan Capó and Eduardo Bonnín. The priest and two airmen were responsible for putting together the first two Cursillo Weekends in Waco.

Airmen Vadell and Palomino were transferred to Mission, Texas, after they had completed the second Cursillo Weekend in Waco. By late 1957 these same airmen had put on the first Weekend in Mission, Texas. In 1958 they started a center in Laredo, Texas, and right away the Movement was introduced in Corpus Christi, Texas.

In 1959, Cursillo spread throughout Texas and to Phoenix, Arizona. In August of that same year the first national convention of Spiritual Advisors was held. In 1960, the growth of the Cursillo Movement accelerated in the Southwest, and Weekends were held for the first time in the East, in New York City and in Lorain, Ohio.

Until 1961, all Weekends were held in Spanish. That year the first English-speaking Weekend was held in San Angelo, Texas. The first Weekends in English were also held in San Francisco, California, in 1961; Gary, Indiana; Lansing, Michigan; and Gallup, New Mexico. Twenty-five more English-speaking Weekends were held by 1962.

In 1962 the Cursillo Movement spread farther in the Eastern United States. Weekends were started 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 because the early centers took the Cursillo to nearby dioceses. By 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 at a meeting in Kansas City in 1965. At this meeting a National Secretariat was organized and a National Cursillo Office was established.

The Cursillo Movement has the support of the vast majority of the American hierarchy. It was joined to the National Conference of Catholic Bishops through an official liaison in the person of Most Rev. James S. Sullivan, Bishop of Fargo, ND. In 1991 the Cursillo Movement was recognized through the Bishops' Secretariat for the Family, Laity, Women and Youth in Washington, D.C.

The Movement is a member of the International Catholic Organizations of the Pontifical Council for the Laity in Rome. The international leaders meet periodically to continue the 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 in Christianity, 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 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 in Christianity! Christ, the Church, and the Pope, are counting on you!

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

In 1980 the Cursillo Movement established an international office in Santo Domingo, the OMCC (Organismo Mundial de Cursillos de Cristiandad) to coordinate the four international groups of Asia Pacific, Europe, Latin America, and the North American / Caribbean Group.

Also in 1980, Pope John Paul II, addressing the first Italian National 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 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.

— Pope John Paul II, Rome, 1980

Mentality of the Cursillo Founders

The world was in chaos because baptized men were not aware of the potential that the Grace of God gives them to be and live as Christians.

Cursillos put its emphasis on being Christian, not on doing Christian things; it opted for an apostolic movement based on the associated strength of friendship.

In summary, the mentality of the Cursillo Movement consists of:

*Proclaiming the best news
of the best reality:
That God, in Jesus Christ, loves us;
Communicated by the best means;
Which is friendship;
Towards the best of each one,
Which is His being person,
His capacity of:
Conviction, Decision, Constancy.*

The Essence

The Random House College Dictionary describes essence as: “the basic or necessary constituent of a thing.”

Cursillos — what are they, and what do they pretend?

The word Cursillo means short course.

It is a method to enable the baptized person to have the knowledge and conviction to live and share what is fundamental for being Christian: to love God and neighbor; which engenders an apostolic movement that tends to vertebrae Christianity in society — that is to say, to give it a Christian backbone.

Cursillo Method: the process that gives the baptized knowledge and conviction to live and share what is fundamental for being Christian.

Cursillo Movement: to vertebrae Christianity in our society.

To vertebrae Christianity in our society is to create groups of Christians who, while living what is fundamental in a conscious, ever-growing and shared manner, instill Christian and spiritual criteria into the environments and structures in which they are immersed, while exercising their own vocation.

The Purpose

The purpose is the reason why we do what we do. The Cursillo Movement, therefore, pursues a two-fold purpose — an immediate one and an ultimate one:

Immediate Purpose

To provide a foundation so the person may live what is fundamental for being Christian: love of God and love of neighbor, experienced through three essential encounters — an encounter with oneself, with Christ, and with others.

Ultimate Purpose

To vertebrae Christianity in society, through those who live what is fundamental for being Christian — the love of God and neighbor — in their daily lives, by making a conscious effort to speak to the world about Christ while strengthening the three encounters that are nourished by the Group Reunion and the Ultreya.

During the Cursillo Weekend

Each day of the Cursillo Weekend begins with Morning Prayers and ends with Night Prayers. Mass is celebrated daily except on Thursday. Each participant should be aware that, since prayer is an integral part of the Cursillo Movement,

there will be other Cursillistas who will be praying and offering sacrifices for the success of the Cursillo Weekend. Proper nourishment is provided along with adequate rest periods.

Thursday Night

This is a time to begin knowing each other and to have an overview of the Cursillo Weekend. Thursday is also the retreat phase of the Cursillo Weekend, designed to awaken an interest in the Cursillo, beginning with an analysis of their lives and causing the participants to desire to encounter God. The retreat phase 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, which is presented Friday morning. The silence portion of the retreat ends Friday morning after Mass.

Friday

The Cursillo participants and team members are assigned to groups in order to facilitate the activities and sharing by everyone during the weekend. These groups are called decurias. There are fifteen presentations provided throughout the weekend. Because of their simplicity, the presentations are called rollos.

The focus of Friday is to help each participant have a better understanding of self — to encounter self. 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 a layperson: (1) Ideal, (2) The Layperson in the Church, and (3) Piety. The Spiritual Advisor gives the other two presentations of the day: (1) Habitual Grace and (2) Actual Grace. While the presentations provide the participants with information and personal witness, it is the group discussions that follow each presentation that prove to be the real dynamics of the Weekend. The sharing, which takes place during the group 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 group discussion, the participants will draft a written summary of the presentation and group discussion. Later the participants will have an opportunity to graphically illustrate their ideas of the presentations and group discussions. That evening, each 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 was discovered on Friday with a loving and merciful God — an encounter with Christ. Saturday helps the participants to understand the current relationship they have with God and should generate a desire for a deeper relationship with Him.

The schedule for Saturday follows the same format as Friday. There are three presentations given by a layperson: (1) Study, (2) Action, and (3) Leaders. As with Friday's schedule, there are also two presentations given by a Spiritual Advisor: (1) Sacraments and (2) Obstacles to a Life of Grace. Group discussions play a vital role in generating various insights concerning the presentations. The summaries of each presentation and the graphic illustrations are shared with everyone.

Sunday

The focus for Sunday is for all participants to have an encounter with others — in other words, a deeper sharing with everyone in the Cursillo. This will help the participants see and understand each other's reality and the circumstances surrounding them in their environments. Participants learn how to influence their environments through living a life of grace.

The same format is used on Sunday, except that there is only one Spiritual Advisor's presentation: Life in Grace. There are four presentations given by a layperson: (1) Study of the Environments, (2) Christianity in Action, (3) The Cursillista Beyond the Cursillo, and (4) Total Security (Group Reunion and Ultreya).

This day also helps each participant realize the great benefit of sharing in groups, as they have throughout the weekend — thus generating a desire, and even the need, for having a Group Reunion as soon as possible after the Cursillo.

On Sunday, during the Closing (Clausura), the participants are welcomed by the Cursillo Community, who has been a spiritual support throughout the weekend. It is during this encounter that the participants enter the Cursillo Community.

After the Cursillo Weekend

The Cursillo Movement realizes that the essential mission of the Church is to evangelize, and that each baptized person has a mission to fulfill. Because of his or her place in the world as a layperson, he or she is called to personify Christ in all the environments where his or her daily life takes place. Therefore, the Cursillo Movement has two very important tools to assist each person. These tools are the Group Reunion and the Ultreya.

Group Reunion

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

As we attempt to bring Christ into our various environments, we will sometimes become frustrated. The Group Reunion provides the continual support needed in order to persevere after the Cursillo in doing God's will.

Ultreya

The Ultreya — a 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 person needs.

Transforming Environments

The transformation of environments will be realized when there are persons who are truly converted to Christ and therefore leaven their surroundings with the Gospel.

Conclusion

As laity in the Church, we have a mission to fulfill. The future of our society is in our hands. We must realize that we, as individuals, can have a great impact on society. More importantly, we can have an even greater impact when we find other individuals who are ready and able to accept the challenge.

Throughout history, great things have happened because individuals decided to do more than was “expected” of them. As Church, we are called to be apostles, saints, and men and women of our times.

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 holy apostles. We must incarnate Christ so that we can proclaim Him to each person in the environments where God has planted us.

Let us strive to be Christ-like. He chose ordinary persons to become “fishers of men.” Should we do any less?

