



What is Cursillo?

RELATIONSHIP • EVANGELISM • RECONCILIATION

THE CURSILLO MINISTRY

Cursillo, known as a short course in Christian life, is a ministry of the Episcopal Church, under the authority of the Presiding Bishop and Diocesan Bishops. It is a ministry of clergy and laity within and governed by the Church. The goal of Cursillo is to bring the world to Christ by empowering adult Christian leaders through the use of a specific method that is taught as part of the Episcopal Cursillo Weekend. The method, an evangelistic tool, enables and encourages

Christians to live out their Baptismal Covenant and to change environments for Christ. The real centerpiece of the Cursillo Ministry is the Fourth Day (the rest of one's life after having attended a Weekend). The Weekend is merely a catalyst to inspire and empower Christians to be witnesses for Jesus Christ in the world.

The goal of the Cursillo Ministry is to change the world for Christ - to create "authentic disciples," Christians empowered by a vision for apostolic action and strengthened through prayer, sacraments, study and community. This goal links directly to Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's invitation to all Episcopalians to become more and more Christ-centered followers of Jesus - that is, disciples who are deeply in love with and changed by Jesus - and then to welcome others into loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God, with each other and with creation.

Guided by the priorities set by the 2015 General Convention, Episcopalians everywhere are learning what it means to grow in loving, liberating and life-giving relationship ...

- ... **with God: EVANGELISM** - To embrace evangelism and the sharing of the good news of God's incredible, reconciling love that we know in Jesus.
- ... **with each other: RECONCILIATION** - To embrace serious work of reconciliation between human beings across all the divides.
- ... **with creation: CREATION CARE** - To care for the whole of God's Creation...We are called to protect people and the planet, living our faith in relationship.

THE JESUS MOVEMENT — FOUR STEPS FOR CURSILLO ACTION:

1. **Find Christians** who have the potential to influence their environments, which may be home, work, church, geographic, or social in nature;
2. **Encourage those Christians** – help them to see that God is calling them to do His work where they are and help them offer themselves to that work;
3. **Empower those Christians** with the means God offers through the Church to be effective apostles, help them identify their particular Christian vocation within their environments;
4. **Link those Christians** with one another for the work of apostolic action through spiritual direction, regular small group reunions, and frequent gathering of the groups for encouragement—Ultreya!

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WHERE DID CURSILLO COME FROM?

The first Cursillos developed in the Roman Catholic Church in Mallorca, Spain. Pilgrimages originally planned for 1937 were postponed several times because of a civil war and then World War II. The pilgrimages finally took place in 1948. Under the leadership of their bishop, several laymen began to formulate a way to draw active laymen into the work of “Christianizing” the everyday life settings where they lived.

Eventually, what came to be known as the Cursillo Method found interested parties in the United States. At first, these were still held in the Spanish language, and were available only to Roman Catholics. In time, however, they were also being held in English, and a few Episcopalians were invited to participate in the weekends. The first official Weekend in the Episcopal Church was conducted with help from Roman Catholic sponsors in the Diocese of Iowa in 1970. Soon, Weekends were being held in various parts of the country.

As other Fourth Day communities began to adopt similar methods, the Episcopal Cursillo developed a formal agreement with the Roman Catholic Cursillo to continue to use the name “Cursillo” and to use the specific methods of the Ministry. After years of growth as separate ministries, in 2015 the Roman Catholic Cursillo acknowledged that the Episcopal Cursillo could continue to pursue independent interpretations of its ministry.

Today, the Episcopal Cursillo Ministry continues to grow and develop in companionship with other Fourth Day movements. A desire to keep the Cursillo ministry authentic to its historical roots while still serving current and future generations has been a common connection for all the modern Fourth Day movements.

Fourth Day activities and the associated Cursillo Weekends have been a valuable tool within the Episcopal Church to equip and inspire Christians for the work of ministry and mission. Today, that development is proceeding and is characterized by an appreciation of the roots of the Ministry while acknowledging changes in the Church and society. There has been a more comprehensive attempt to define the purpose of the Ministry in simple, cohesive terms. Thus, Cursillo is emerging as a mature instrument in the hands of committed clergy and lay Christians to bring relationships, evangelism, and reconciliation to the church and world.

CURSILLO GOALS

Cursillo is intended to help Christians learn and live what is fundamental to being a Christian. And, help these same Christians to discover and live out a personal vocation. Cursillo strives to make *saints* and *apostles*. Saints are people who know God, who know God’s love and grace, and who live their lives from this relationship. Apostles are saints who have a mission to share that same knowledge with others. The goal of Cursillo is to use specific methods and tools to grow Christ-centered leaders for the work of mission and ministry.

Cursillo strives to reach its goals by:

- 1) Helping Christians discover the depths of their faith to appreciate its reality and richness;
- 2) Inspiring Christians to pursue their mission in the world by hearing and heeding God’s call;
- 3) Connecting Christians in networks that empower them to carry out their mission;
- 4) Holding up examples of Christians who are carrying out their mission in ordinary life settings.

The embodiment of its goals and primary characteristic of Cursillo is the use of an intentional Method meant to promote and support Christians in their ministry to the world. The Cursillo Method is a carefully articulated strategy designed to achieve its purpose. This purpose of can be described in the phrase: “*For us . . . for others.*” That is, it captures the Old Testament sense of the call of Abraham, “I will bless you so that you will be a blessing (Gen. 12:2).” This blessing is for a purpose – not just to be received – “for us” – but also to be handed on – “for others.”

CURSILLO?

Reflecting its history and heritage, the word Cursillo (cur-SEE-oh) is Spanish. It means “a short course of lectures.” The full title, *Cursillos in Cristiandad* has been translated as “short courses in Christian living.”

Many Episcopal Cursillo communities retain some Spanish words as part of their activities. However, they are not a required element of the Cursillo experience. Their use is up to the preferences and traditions of individual Cursillo dioceses.

WHAT IS THE CURSILLO METHOD?

To fully understand and participate in the Episcopal Cursillo Ministry, it is important to fully understand the Cursillo Method and its components. This Cursillo Method consists of three parts: *Pre-Cursillo, the Episcopal Cursillo Weekend, and the Fourth Day.*

PRECURSILLO - PREPARING

What did Jesus do when he wanted to bring his Gospel to the world? He went out to look for certain types of individuals. He chose leaders. Or, potential leaders — people who had the potential to influence others. Cursillo works in the same way. *Since the goal is to penetrate everyday living situations with the Christian witness*, it makes sense to try to find those individuals who are already active members of their churches. and have already shown the potential to be effective witnesses.

PreCursillo is composed of many activities that are all directed toward identifying both environments to be penetrated by Christian witness, and the Christians who have the potential to penetrate them. Clearly, the most important of these activities is obtaining the Bishop's guidance and approval. The Bishop's guidance is usually expressed in the form of a Pastoral Plan, designating areas in which Christian witness is most important, and providing a basis for Cursillo's work in that diocese.

Next is the work of inviting persons (often called Candidates or Pilgrims) to become involved in Cursillo, planning the Three-Day weekends, announcing the weekend dates, and coordinating support for them from the larger Cursillo community (Palanca). Each person is put forward by a Sponsor who is to provide ongoing support before, during, and after the Weekend experience. The selection and training of Sponsors is also an important part of PreCursillo.

Finally, the Pre-Cursillo involves the organizational structure of the Secretariat and the Servant Community. The Secretariat is the body which coordinates the Cursillo Ministry in a diocese under the guidance of the Bishop. The Servant Community is a group which continues to study the Cursillo Method and its application in specific environments.

THE EPISCOPAL CURSILLO WEEKEND - INTRODUCING THE METHOD

The Episcopal Cursillo Weekend includes a series of talks and meditations, all intended to focus the participants on "what is fundamental for being a Christian." Here, the basics are covered and provide the participants with an understanding that they have a ministry of witness. They are given a chance to see how that ministry may be carried out. **It should always be remembered that the Weekend is not the reason for Cursillo and it should not be Cursillo's primary activity.** The Cursillo Weekend should be thought as only a means to introduce the Cursillo Method and generate energy for ongoing Christian action within the Episcopal Church. It is only step two of the three-step Cursillo Method.

Behind a given Cursillo Weekend, there is much preparation and support. Many people give of their time and resources to make a Weekend possible. Many persons offer their prayers (sometimes called "Palanca") in support of the participants and the team. The team itself, made up of laypersons and clergy, will have given many hours in preparing the talks and meditations. The entire Weekend is centered on the sacraments — particularly the Eucharist — because in these ways God nourishes and upholds His people. In addition, every Weekend may contain its own special activities that are planned by the team in a prayerful attitude to emphasize the wonder and joy of discipleship.

The Episcopal Cursillo Weekend format may follow the format of three days established originally. Or, in some areas, it may be offered in a newly developed two-day format. In either case, all Weekends contain fifteen talks, five meditations, and daily Eucharist.

Because they involve the personal reflection of the speaker, each talk is different each time. However, they all follow a list of themes so that the goals of the Weekend may be met. The fifteen talks can be summed up as follows:

1. **IDEAL** ~ An ideal is defined as that vision or purpose that gives life its goals and motivating force.
2. **GRACE** ~ This talk asks the question about the ideal of the Christian. The answer is the life of grace. The good news of grace is that God reaches out to us and accepts us. God also transforms us through this same power. Grace does not end with us, but must be passed along.

Based on the first two talks, the next few clarify how grace may be received and shared.

3. **LAITY** ~ The talk on the Laity — i.e., the Church — emphasizes not only the role of every Christian but also how the Church is a body bearing a message that must be lived and proclaimed.
4. **FAITH** ~ The Faith talk returns to the theme of grace as an indwelling power that is received and used through trust in God. It ends with the presentation of Palanca because the concept and actual

expression of Palanca demonstrates faith in action. Faith is the way in which we nourish our vital union with Christ, and in turn find an outlet in how we relate to others. Palanca is prayer. Palanca is apostolic.

The next four talks — Piety, Study, Sacraments, and Action — focus on some of the basics for keeping one's faith alive and vibrant. It is where our faith finds outward and inward expression.

5. **PIETY** ~ The Piety talk encourages Christians to draw closer to God and to draw from God's Spirit a concern for others.
6. **STUDY** ~ The Study talk grows out of a conviction that study will develop an active approach toward the world around us because we will have a deeper understanding of Christianity and how it applies to our world.
7. **SACRAMENTS** ~ This talk does not just focus on describing the Sacraments. More importantly, it addresses how the Sacraments are concrete ways in which God's grace is carried into our lives to empower us as individuals and as a body to carry out our mission. The Sacraments should be presented as means by which God supports our work in the world, drawing what flows from our piety and our study toward offering ourselves to others for the sake of Christ. The Sacraments support mission.
8. **ACTION** ~ Action is intended to raise a desire and offer possibilities for undertaking Christian witness in immediate environments. The person giving this talk should be a person excited about Christian witness and whose own witness grows out of a deep personal piety and thoughtful study.
9. **OBSTACLES TO GRACE** ~ This talk focuses on things that inhibit or stop spiritual growth and ways to deal with these obstacles. The key point is that obstacles to grace **MUST** be overcome if we are to be true to our ideal and our mission of witness to Christ.
The specific strategies of Cursillo starts with the tenth talk.
10. **LEADERS** ~ The Leader's Talk describes Christian leadership and how every Christian is a potential leader, for the sake of Christ's mission.
11. **ENVIRONMENTS** ~ Environments challenges Christians to study their surroundings and envision ways to make changes by bringing Christ into that environment so that He can transform it.
12. **CHRISTIAN LIFE** ~ With focus on the Christian life and permits the clergy Spiritual Advisor to summarize the message of the entire Weekend. The talk presents the Rule of Life concept in detail. In so doing, it asks the participants to be specific about what they are willing and ready to commit themselves to.
13. **CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY IN ACTION** ~ Christian Community in Action probes the concept of apostolic action. The presenter of this talk should offer concrete examples of how his or her community has acted to draw others to Christ.
14. **GROUP REUNION** ~ This talk includes a specific description of Group Reunion and an actual demonstration. The participants should actually group together with a grouping card — learning how this tool can be a way of support for Christians who are striving to live for Christ.
15. **ULTREYA** ~ Ultreya is introduced as a way to link Christians to one another. In baptism, we are made a team in which our lives are joined with the eternal life of God through the work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. We can go on and accomplish the mission of Christ only as we strive together in union with God and one another.

Having heard all the topics of the Weekend, participants are allowed to discuss and meditate. If the Cursillo Weekend meets its mark, the outcome will be the realization on the part of each one that:

- Christian witness is not an option, but a commission.
- Each of us has a part to play in that witness.
- Each of us needs to be linked with others to be effective in our witness.
- We may find that linkage in what is called the Fourth Day.

It is central to the Cursillo Method that the Episcopal Cursillo Weekends do not exist in and for themselves. Weekends exist in order to help Christians identify the need for Christian witness and to equip them to do so for the rest of their lives.

The contents of the Weekend may always be shared because the circumstances of the presentations, the individual reactions, and the combinations of people present make each Cursillo Weekend completely unique unto itself. The only exceptions to this are the personal disclosures between the participants that are to be considered confidential.

THE FOURTH DAY - THE REASON FOR CURSILLO

The Fourth Day is the real centerpiece of the Cursillo Ministry. It is the message of Christ being lived and shared by Christians following the Cursillo Method. It consists of three elements: Group Reunions, and Ultreyas, and spiritual direction. Cursillo exists to provide Christian apostles with these tools in order to strengthen their Christian life and witness. It is through the Fourth Day that the Cursillo Method is lived and it is the Fourth Day that makes Cursillo unique.

GROUP REUNION

To be effective, Christians also need a community of people with whom to share spiritual struggles and with whom to grow in apostolic action. “Grouping” is the key to the Cursillo Method. Here, group members meet regularly with a few people who share their desire to be apostles of the faith. They pray together, plan ways in which they can carry out their witness, and give an account to one another of the progress they have made or hope to make.

ULTREYA

This peculiar word is drawn from the Spanish culture in which Cursillo developed. Ultreya is not easily translated; it was a pilgrim’s call to his fellows to persevere despite hardship and difficulty. Thus, it is an important element of the Cursillo Method because of its emphasis on “staying the course.”

Ultreyas are a drawing together of the smaller Group Reunions within a parish or region for periodic sharing and encouragement. Ultreyas are held less frequently than the Group Reunions. Although the form is somewhat different, the dynamics are essentially the same. Another feature of an Ultreya is a “witness talk”, which is provided by a lay person, and is centered on how he or she is carrying out planned apostolic action. This talk is followed by responses from the community, and then a clergy person connects the specific witness with the Gospel message.

SPIRITUAL DIRECTION

To be effective disciples in their communities, it is important for Christians to have a rule of life that includes spiritual direction. Spiritual direction is understood as having a friend and guide in the spiritual life. Often, this will be a priest, but may well be any person – clerical or lay – who is experienced in the spiritual life and who cares about the spiritual development of others. The point of spiritual direction is the realization that we cannot and need not “go it alone” in our pilgrimage.

This element of the Cursillo Method is often put aside because a connection with a director is not made. Distances and time can become a barrier to proceeding, but fellow Cursillistas or parish priests can be resources to suggest advisors. Ongoing efforts to persist and connect is still strongly encouraged.

None of these Fourth Day activities are intended to become a replacement for regular parish participation. People who have not attended a Cursillo Weekend are always invited and encouraged to take part in these activities. Fourth Day activities are meant to increase and enhance parish participation.

THE HEART OF THE MINISTRY



The Fourth Day is where the focus of Cursillo is truly realized.



Group Reunions and Ultreyas are settings where participants study their every day lives in order to plan how to carry out Christian witness.



Fourth Day activities equip participants through study, prayer and mutual support to live lives of active discipleship and to grow as Christian leaders in their faith communities.



Cursillo brings the ministry of RELATIONSHIP, EVANGELISM, AND RECONCILIATION to the world through the work of the Fourth Day.

MORE ABOUT CURSILLO

Over time, the Episcopal Cursillo Ministry has grown and matured. Many early interpretations and activities of the Ministry have been clarified while the focus and purpose to serve within the life of the Church has been reinforced. But some misunderstandings and misconceptions about the purpose of Cursillo may still remain. "What is Cursillo?" is the title of this booklet. To give a complete answer, these misunderstandings should be addressed directly.

Misinformation:

Reality:

Cursillo holds itself apart from the Church.

- *Cursillo functions within each diocese under the authority of the Diocesan Bishop. The misuse of "insider" terms sometimes made Cursillo sound like it wanted to be a separate entity rather than a ministry of the Church. Different terms are used in different regions and none are required.*

The Cursillo Weekend is a place to address personal issues.

- *The Weekend is not a self-esteem workshop or a place for people to work out their issues. It is not a form of group therapy. Participants are expected to be in a stable period of their lives when they attend.*

Cursillo is a group of the spiritual elite or club or secret society.

- *Past efforts to preserve the uniqueness of the Weekend experience for each new participant led some to keep activities of the Weekend secret. **Secrets are not part of Cursillo!** In fact, a complete description of the Weekend has been included in this booklet.*

When Cursillo participants come home from a Weekend, they can be "pushy."

- *In the Weekend, people are encouraged to explore the environments in which they live and seek ways to bring Christ to that environment. They are often very enthusiastic about this new challenge. Unfortunately, this can sometimes be misunderstood as an attitude of spiritual superiority or overreach rather than as an invitation to be changed by Christ.*

The Cursillo Ministry is an Evangelistic program.

- *Cursillo is part of the Jesus Movement although its basic thrust is not to convert non-Christians directly. It is to awaken the Christian in the responsibility to be an evangelist and share the message of Christ. The Episcopal Cursillo Ministry addresses Christians – baptized members of the Episcopal Church. It does not attempt to explain the faith to those who are unconvinced. Its evangelistic purpose is to support motivated and practicing Christians who are thus more likely to be convincing witnesses to unbelievers.*

Cursillo is a parish renewal program.

- *Renewal of parish life is often an outcome of Cursillo, but it is not its primary focus.*

The Episcopal Cursillo Ministry is ecumenical.

- *Cursillo is designed to produce Christian witnesses who understand and are committed to the religious traditions in which they are rooted (in this case, the Episcopal Church). Various faith traditions present the essentials of the Christian faith in different ways. While Christian unity is an important value to all Christians, it is not one which the Cursillo Ministry has been designed to achieve. Other faith traditions may use various 4th Day movements to equip their own leadership. Episcopal Cursillo participates with these 4th Day movements in annual meetings to share how their traditions use and adapt the Cursillo method.*

Cursillo is solely a lay-led ministry.

- *Cursillo utilizes the experience and skills of both lay and clergy persons working together as a team to accomplish its goals.*

The Episcopal Cursillo Ministry is no longer active.

- *Episcopal Cursillo Weekends are continuing in diocese across the country and Cursillo communities gather regularly. The Ministry is still evolving and maturing to meet the needs of future generations.*

EXPLORE MORE ABOUT THE CURSILLO MINISTRY

The Episcopal Cursillo Ministry publishes a number of booklets devoted to various aspects of the Ministry. They can be downloaded for printing at no charge from its website: www.EpiscopalCursilloMinistry.org under the Publications tab. For more information or to be added to the mailing list, contact ECMoffice@episcopalcursillministry.org or call 303-823-1802.