

Episcopal Cursillo Ministry - Table Leaders Workshop

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Critical Importance of Table Leaders (TLs)

Table Leaders are titled differently in different ministries (Table Professors, Leaders, etc). Some ministries have two TLs. Sometimes they're "silent" or "secret" – we don't recommend this as it's disingenuous; secrets at Cursillo aren't encouraged.

- Tables - where candidate first feels comfortable, where weekend community of is first started
- Table discussions about the talks internalize the principles from the talks
 - After a talk, diverts attention from "how wonderful the witness/talk was" to "how do we apply what we heard to our lives in Christ?"
- TLs have the best opportunity to really show how the Cursillo method is really lived in the Fourth Day (thus TLs need to be living an authentic 4th day experience, small and large group accountability, etc.)
- TLs have the first opportunity for personal, even intimate time with candidates.
 - TLs can see needs, see signs of fatigue, needs for spiritual direction, to talk to individual team members, help LR simplify the schedule if needed
- TLs are with candidates consistently through the weekend at critical times. Lay Rectors should encourage all staff to be sensitive of these times, e.g., Palanca, Visitations, Sunday morning (sometimes rushed, busy, full of talks)

What Table leaders are not:

- Conversation Controllers/Directors
- Directors or Writers of THE BEST POSTER OR SKIT EVER

- Directors of the Choir of Angels who orchestrate when pilgrims/candidates "get the weekend" - God's time, not our time. **Joy is shared, not created.**
- Psychological or Spiritual Counselors to help table members with deep personal and spiritual problems
- Gatekeepers of the "SECRETS of the CURSILLO WEEKEND"

Table Leaders ARE

- Hosts and Hostesses with a sense of the spiritual practice of spiritual hospitality
Resource: [At Home in the World](#) (Margaret Guenther)
- Members of a new, (temporary) family in a specific God-given time, for a specific purpose (Note: not the Daddy or Mommy of the family).
- Encouragers - allowing natural leadership to emerge from the group.
- Facilitators of an atmosphere of care and trust. **We experience Jesus through each other.**
- People who empty themselves to pave a path for the Holy Spirit
- Holy Listeners with a Ministry of Presence. Other phrases: authentic presence, genuine presence, non-anxious presence, fully present, healing presence
 - Not just at tables - One-on-one discussions happen all through the weekend; many opportunities for holy listening, ministry of presence - at meals, during breaks, even smokers.
 - A real challenge in a weekend like Cursillo - so much is going on that gets in the way.
 - Listening with the heart –what does this mean to you?

What are our barriers to being accepting/relaxed?

Open up for discussion: what makes us anxious?

Other possibilities:

- Ego - "What if they don't like me?"
- Fear that the group won't "jell" "What if they don't like each other?"
- Control - "I'll lose control of the table"

- Fear of what's coming next in the weekend "what if they can't do a skit? At my Cursillo ours was the best."
- Insecurity - "I won't know the answer"
- Fear about extreme opinions
- Lack of trust in a person to find his/her own way
- Exaggerated sense of responsibility, e.g., "What if I don't represent Cursillo right?"
- Distraction - thinking about your talk, the next event

This is when we step back and trust the Cursillo process, the tried-and-true schedule and flow of the weekend (divinely inspired and time proven).

Practical Tips for Table Leaders – How It's Done

- It's not about you
- This is not your Cursillo so don't try to relive yours. Avoid talking about your first weekend as a candidate/pilgrim. Experience THIS weekend together.
- Pray, Love, Listen, Pray
 - pray for those at your table
 - love unconditionally, don't show favoritism
 - listen intently to each person
 - be attentive at all times to everyone at your table
 - pray for specific needs as you get to know people better, as the weekend goes along
- Consider having TLs gather at the beginning of each day to pray for wisdom, tact, tolerance, etc. Some possible prayers from Texas Gulf Vis de Cristo are a separate handout.
- Start your time at the table with a short prayer for the real presence of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Throughout the weekend, let the Holy Spirit guide you about other times for a short group prayer.
- Pay full attention to the speakers; take notes to encourage others to do the same and help you with discussion after the talk. (Note: everyone on the team should pay full attention to speakers.)

- Think of a few questions to elicit responses, after people have paused to think. (e.g., “What part of the talk spoke to you?”). Try to ask open-ended questions (starting with “how,” “why” or “what,” to elicit more than just a “yes” or “no” answer.
- Don’t be afraid of silence.
- Watch out for those who talk too much (don’t be one yourself) and those who don’t want to talk at all. Give the table group a couple of talk discussions to “settle in.” Be patient about group bonding.
- Be careful not to be offensive or divisive in any manner (e.g., politics, sexuality, sports teams, comments about cities you don’t care for, food preferences, etc.)
- Empathize with people speaking; see things from their point of view but don’t take on their problems as your own.
- Let them know that all discussions are confidential and don’t discuss problems, confidantialities with anyone else (except concerns with the LR or an SD if necessary).
- Encourage and make people feel valued because you are genuinely interested in them, their lives, their family, their jobs, their opinions.
- Get to know everyone; encourage and love on them
 - sit in different spots at the table so you are next to everyone at some point
 - sit next to your new friends at meals
 - seek out table group members at other times in the weekend, one-to-one
 - participate wholeheartedly in every activity (even those that are not your favorite)
 - stand next to your new friends while singing
 - use the breaks wisely talking to those at your table, getting to really know them, especially seeking out the shy ones who might be much more open to one-on-one discussions
 - keep a sense of humor!
- Seek Spiritual Advisor’s help when needed
- After the weekend, follow up with a card or note to each table member

Final Thoughts

From EDUSC's "Thoughts about Being a Table Leader:"

"Expect and assume the best of people. Use your own God-given common sense, along with the insight and understanding you will receive as an answer to your prayers. Above all, be grateful for the opportunity you have been given, to meet and know new people on their journeys with our Lord."

From the ECM Publication "Guidelines for Table Leaders"

"You have accepted a serious but extremely joyous and rewarding task as a table leader. Use the opportunity to grow, and to share yourself and allow Christ's love to shine through you to a handful of people to whom the Spirit will bind you in spiritual fellowship. It will be, for you and for each member of your table group, a richly rewarding experience!"

Remember

Cursillo may be the first place a person feels really listened to, free to "share his/her story," allowed to truly be him/herself and feel loved.

We're given a precious moment in time with people or one person, a time we won't get back. Honor the moment and Christ in the middle.