

# Living in the Fourth Day

RELATIONSHIP    EVANGELISM    RECONCILIATION

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## THE EPISCOPAL CURSILLO FOURTH DAY

### AN INTRODUCTION

The first Cursillo experience many people have comes during their Cursillo Weekend. For many it is a profoundly joyful time; but, by the last day, they are filled to the brim with rich and varied reactions to the spiritual message of the Weekend. Unsurprisingly, many new Cursillistas will only vaguely hear and grasp the importance of the concepts and tools delivered on that day. These tools, are intended to propel them into their Fourth Day, the beginning of the rest of their lives. Few, however, appreciate how significant Group Reunion, Ultreya, Spiritual Direction, and the whole notion of "Christian Community in Action" are — or, how much more important the aspects of the Fourth Day are than the Weekend itself. This is more than unfortunate.

Too many forget or do not hear the final messages of their experience and focus their attention on the introduction of Cursillo rather than the actual life of Cursillo. It is detrimental — both to the Cursillo Ministry, as a whole, and to the individual Cursillista in particular — for this vision of Cursillo to be forgotten. Bringing Christ to the world, using the methods of Cursillo, is what the Fourth Day is all about. The strategy offered by the Cursillo Method provides a structure for Christian life that can fit every environment. Without the Fourth Day, the Cursillo Weekend is just an isolated experience — not a true Ministry.

Achieving a full and proper understanding of the components of the Cursillo Method took time for the founders of Cursillo and remains a major focus of the Ministry. And, time has brought the realization that making the Fourth Day central brings a new sense of vigor and unity to many local Cursillo communities and to the church-wide expression of the Ministry.

Much remains to be done in the way of basic education and orientation within the Cursillo community itself. A better understanding of the place of the Fourth Day and the practical implications of returning it to its central position within each Cursillo still needs to be addressed more broadly.

***“The meaning of a dance is in the dancing of it. The meaning of the Christian life is in the living of it. There is little reason to talk about dance or receive instruction in dance unless at some point we ourselves dance, or our understanding of dance lets us enjoy the dance of others. Likewise, there is little reason to discuss the Christian life unless that discussion enhances our living of it, or our understanding of those who do.”***

From the Introduction to Bible & Ethics in the Christian Life; Revised & Expanded Edition by Bruce C. Birch & Larry L. Rasmussen (Augsburg Fortress 1989)

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## CURSILLO — A MESSAGE IN THREE PARTS

Cursillo consists of three interrelated parts: Pre-Cursillo, the Three-Day Weekend, and the Fourth Day. If one of the three is missing, Cursillo will not be effective. Cursillo exists as an instrument of the Church to do what the Christian community has always understood as its task. Cursillo does not exist to enlist members in its “cause”. It does not exist as a church within the Church. Rather, Cursillo releases the creative and God-given power of saints to become apostles! Saints are people who realize that they are gifted by God with: forgiveness of sins, newness of life, and eternal hope.

Saints are made by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. His teaching and way of life open new possibilities and new realities for ordinary men and women. Cursillo carries forward this work of Jesus and is intended to deepen our consciousness of the life of grace.

Apostles, on the other hand, are saints who have a burning desire to share the gifts of God with others through their work and living witness. Apostles realize that the call of God’s grace does not end with them, but must flow through them for the sake of others. Jesus called his followers not just to be disciples, but also to be missionaries spreading his teaching and work beyond their intimate circle.

Many people today are nominal Christians – Christians in name only. They may have a vague sense of the grace of God as a living, powerful reality in their own lives. They may also have a faint sense of “saintliness” and yet have no idea of what being an apostle might mean. Cursillo, with its strategy and Method, is at the disposal of the Church to help nominal Christians become what, on the authority of the Gospel, they should become. All the energy of Cursillo is directed toward the Fourth Day where the fundamentals of the Christian life are brought together and where saints who have become apostles can live out their vocation.

## THE FOURTH DAY MESSAGE ON THE WEEKEND

The Cursillo Method gives a new coherence to what the participants should already know. The purpose of the Weekend is to provide grounding to its participants in their faith. The Weekend must not present any new doctrines or any new disciplines. Instead, the Weekend must present a method which is based on sound doctrine and incorporates elements of discipline that although traditional are given a new vitality.

Each talk and meditation is intended to prepare the way for the Fourth Day Message given on the last day. The first talks move us to accept God’s grace, not just in a general way, but here and now in the essence of who we are. Then, the talks set out to show us how to accept this grace and live it for ourselves - through piety, study, and action.

All of these talks and accompanying activities also progress toward compelling us to want to share the grace of God with others. Finally, the presentations provide tools and examples for how this may be done. If the previous talks and activities have hit their mark, the participants will have come to a valid realization of the truth and presence of God’s grace in their lives. This, however, is not the sole purpose of the Episcopal Cursillo Weekend.

The vividness of God’s grace should create, in the heart of each Cursillista a sense of urgency to witness to this wondrous gift. Here the question “But what do I do?” is answered: “In your Fourth Day, you will be able to continue to grow in grace and, with a community of friends, find ways to share it!” In short, the Fourth Day message during the Weekend consolidates and capitalizes on the inner logic and thrust of the whole Weekend. The message is simply that the essence of Christianity is not just in being saved through grace but is in being lifelong servants of grace. If this message is not the first and foremost concern driving the Weekend, then something is dreadfully wrong, and something must be done to correct that wrong!

### **The Fourth Day is Cursillo shorthand for:**

- **Active Christian witness;**
- **Engagement for Christians — both individually, in small groups, or in community with each other — to convey the Good News of Jesus Christ to others;**
- **The Cursillo slogan, “Make a friend. Be a friend. Bring a friend to Christ.”**

**The Fourth Day is the unique contribution which Cursillo has to make to the Christian life.**

**Introducing Christians to the Fourth Day is the reason Weekends are held.**

## THE POINT OF THE FOURTH DAY

Helping Christians become effective apostles and grow as saints is the work of Cursillo. The point of the Fourth Day is to underscore and support this apostolic action. The emphasis of the Fourth Day message is not just in meeting together. Instead, the emphasis is on meeting in order to engage each other in a vital ministry, to share the grace of God with one another, to plan ways to share that grace, and to hold each other accountable for carrying out our plans!

What Cursillo contributes is a Method for being a committed Christian. This Method is based on linkage with other committed Christians through the Group Reunion, Ultreyas, and progressive growth in grace through Spiritual Direction. The Method, though simple, is intended to promote active witness — apostolic action.

## THE FOURTH DAY IN ACTION

### Group Reunion

The Group Reunion comes first. It reflects the practice of our Lord when he paired his disciples as he sent them out into the world. It claims Jesus' promise to be with us whenever two or three of us are gathered together in his name. [Matt. 18:20]. Grouping also reflects a need to share life with a circle of friends and to get support from friends in the struggle with the challenges of life.

The Group Reunion Card should be part of each group's life. The Card is to remind Cursillistas that they are accountable to God and to each other for their growth and witness. It provides a simple and natural checklist which can help focus the efforts of each person, a kind of personal inventory. The Card also engages Cursillistas with one another and permits trust and mutual support to develop. Those who have spent years within a group testify to its power.

The most vital and vulnerable moment in the life of the new Cursillista comes in the days immediately following the Weekend. If grouping begins here, it is likely to reinforce the Message of the Weekend and to result in a fruitful life in the Fourth Day. If the new Cursillista does not become quickly grounded in a group, that Message and impact may evaporate. Thus, it is vital for sponsors to incorporate their candidates into a Group Reunion immediately following the Weekend, if not before. Spiritual Advisors and Rectors should also take the initiative to write notes to the new Cursillistas following the Weekend to encourage them to become part of a Group. Such notes can drive home the Message which often is only barely heard and understood in the last day. The task and the responsibility of the sponsors, Spiritual Advisors, and Rectors, does not end with each Weekend. This puts the Fourth Day first!

### Ultreya

Ultreyas are intended primarily as opportunities for the Group Reunions to get together and share experiences, so that the groups do not become ingrown and stagnant.<sup>11</sup> The best Ultreya is one in which Cursillistas are inspired by each other's encouragement, and in which simple instances of christianizing environments are lifted up.

In many places, Ultreyas are problematic because they're not well understood. Some Cursillo leaders try to "pump up" enthusiasm for them by adding all sorts of extras to make them more attractive. Where Christians are fed by examples of apostolic action, and know they can deal with day-to-day realities, both the joys and frustrations of being true witnesses to Christ, there is no need to "pump up" Ultreyas. *Simplicity should be the rule in conducting Ultreyas.*

The ideal toward which the local Cursillo leadership should work is regularly-scheduled Ultreyas. In multiple parish locations, it could perhaps be staggered so that an Ultreya is available somewhere in every week of the month. Whatever schedule is adopted, they are coordinated through the Secretariat or Servant Community. In any case, the importance of the Ultreya is not its frequency, but in its adherence to the original Ultreya design.

### The Fourth Day Cursillo Method is:

- **A Rule of Life** in which individuals are encouraged and stimulated to continue to deepen their spiritual life by means of the sacraments, prayer, individual study, spiritual direction, and intentional action;
- **Group Reunions**, where committed individuals meet with others in small groups on a regular basis to review their spiritual progress (prayer, study, action), and to plan ways to bring their Lord to other people; and
- **Ultreyas** where Group Reunions get together with other Group Reunions to share ideas and apostolic successes and disappointments.

## **Spiritual Direction**

Spiritual Direction is an important part of the Fourth Day. The essence of Spiritual Direction is in the formation of a significant friendship, a friend in Christ, in which a growing Christian is paired with a person mature in spiritual wisdom and experience. Such a friendship serves to challenge and guide the growing Christian into a deeper relationship with the Lord.

Individual study of Scripture, theology, prayer, and spiritual discipline is highly desirable. However, a person's spiritual growth is often sidetracked or stalled. This is often not because the resources for growth are unavailable, but because the individual does not know where to find them or how to use them. We tend to become comfortable with the familiar and fail to venture into areas of spiritual life which seem difficult or intimidating.

Spiritual Direction is intended to provide a means for assisting the individual to grow beyond the comfortable and familiar and into the fullness of the life in grace. As a part of putting the Fourth Day first, Spiritual Advisors should give special attention to the purpose and process of Spiritual Direction in their talks on the Weekend. *Secretariats should also support programs for training Spiritual Directors, both lay and ordained.* People at all levels of the Cursillo Ministry should make every effort to find a Spiritual Director for themselves so they can testify to the new Cursillistas of the value of Spiritual Direction.

## **PUTTING THE CURSILLO FOURTH DAY FIRST**

It is important, indeed, to have souls encounter God, but it is even more important to motivate them to follow God. Cursillo may represent a number of things, but the Fourth Day remains the unifying concept and force for the Ministry. What is necessary is the all-important leadership decision of the local Ministry, the Secretariat and the Servant Community, under the leadership and guidance of the bishop of the diocese, to put the Fourth Day in its proper position. This decision must be repeatedly made despite temptations to lapse back into old habits. ***Without that decision, the Cursillo Ministry is likely to become nothing more than a fond memory of a delightful weekend.***

Putting the Fourth Day first has some practical implications:

- If we want to form Christian witnesses, then we will seek, find, and invite persons who have the qualities of maturity, curiosity, and commitment to make a Cursillo which will help them become fruitful witnesses. This puts the Pre-Cursillo "candidate selection", in a new light.
- If we want to show Christians how to carry out apostolic action, then we will re-examine and perhaps pare down or re-examine our Weekends so that they accomplish this task in a better way. This puts the Weekends – often what we referred to as Cursillo – also in a new light.
- If we want to offer Weekends that form apostolic ministries, then we will make the Fourth Day much more central to our thinking and our work. In some places, this has meant postponing other aspects of Cursillo planning until Fourth Day communities are organized and functioning. In all places, it means getting Cursillistas, especially Cursillo leaders, involved in Group Reunions, Ultreyas, and genuine piety (prayer, study and spiritual direction) that leads to action.

Putting the Fourth Day first stands as a warning against ignoring the Cursillo Method. There are always tendencies to want to improve Cursillo. In many places, the Fourth Day Message has been obscured by too many other messages and activities packed into the Weekends. Even where the Fourth Day is observed fully, many have altered the simple format of the Group Reunion and the Ultreya as ways to "recapture" the joys of the Weekends.

There is no greater vision for Christians than that of sharing the grace and love of God, and the power it brings with it, as active witnesses for Christ supporting each other in community. Thus, Cursillo leaders should realize that there is no more noble vocation than that of helping Christians to become the apostles they were meant to be. If the Fourth Day is the heart of the Cursillo Method and sum of its Message, then Cursillo leadership must be concerned to make it come alive. We cannot proclaim what we do not live. The demanding and challenging work of being apostolic witnesses deserves our best efforts. Cursillo takes this work to heart and seeks nothing more or less than the accomplishment of this apostolic ministry as active members of the Jesus Movement!