

Episcopal Cursillo Ministry

Guidelines for Table Leaders



Note: These guidelines are offered as a resource for Secretariats and Weekend Leaders to use as appropriate within their specific dioceses.

The Critical Importance of Tables and Table Leaders

Table leaders have an awesome responsibility and privilege at Cursillo Weekends. As table leaders, we have the chance to relate to candidates on an intimate level, to show unconditional love and understanding, and to witness the forming of a small Christian community that is Spirit-led, fresh, and spontaneous.

When friendship and trust are created in this atmosphere, powerful changes can happen in our hearts, minds, and spirits. We're able to see others sincerely and humbly seeking God's call. We're able to learn from the examples of others and be inspired to seek God more diligently ourselves.

Table members form a new (temporary) family for a specific, God-given purpose. Table leaders serve as conduits of spiritual hospitality, balancing their role as loving group members with the role of facilitators who guide focused, constructive discussion.

Table discussions help internalize the principles of the talks. Leaders can gently shift attention from "how wonderful the talk was" to "how do we apply this to our lives in Christ?" These discussions should be honored by the rest of the team, who should avoid interrupting unless truly necessary.

As table leaders, we have a unique opportunity to show how the Cursillo method is genuinely lived in the Fourth Day. It's important that table leaders are involved in authentic Fourth Day experiences. It may be our responsibility to help the Lay Rector know when to honor table group discussion time, signs of fatigue, needs for spiritual direction, and possibly a need to simplify the schedule in response to these needs.

Table leaders have the chance to experience a basis for future group reunions. We have the first opportunity to facilitate an atmosphere of care and trust. We experience Jesus through each other. We can help pave a path for the Holy Spirit.

Above all, as table leaders we should pray for the group before the Weekend, even if we don't know who its members will be. Pray for the attitudes, the atmosphere, the willingness of people to share and listen, and for the presence of the Holy Spirit in every thought and word, spoken and unspoken. Pray for the ability to listen to God "on the spot" and to be a Christian "under construction." Pray for the Holy Spirit to guide the group throughout the Weekend.

Practical Tips for Table Leaders

Authentic Presence and Leadership

- Be yourself.
- Be open and honest, particularly with feelings. It's OK to say, "I don't know."
- Participate wholeheartedly in every activity (even those that aren't your favorite).
- Consider sitting in different places or ask the group if they want to change seats.

Meaningful Group Discussion

- Encourage people to talk to each other, not to you; make eye contact with other table members as someone speaks.
- Use clarifying questions: "Are you saying that...?" or "Do you mean that...?"
- Don't be afraid of silence; it takes time to process new ideas and insights.
- Don't worry about closure on every discussion.
- Encourage note taking during talks. Take notes yourself to support discussion.
- If conversation drifts, prayerfully consider if it's helpful; then decide if you should gently redirect.

Safe, Respectful Environment

- Avoid talking about your past Cursillo experiences.
- Refrain from judgments. Look for common ground. Be positive.
- Avoid theological or doctrinal debates. When needed, invite a Spiritual Advisor.
- Remember that what is shared in group discussions is confidential.
- Love unconditionally; don't show favoritism.

Sensitivity and Inclusion

- Watch for signs that a shy member would like to say something.
- Use breaks to connect one-to-one, especially with quieter members.
- Listen carefully to each person.
- Consider starting a virtual group reunion with table members after the Weekend, helping people get connected to ongoing group reunions.

Prayerful Leadership

- Pray, Love, Listen, Pray.
- Pray for specific needs as you get to know people better throughout the Weekend.
- When unsure, take a deep breath and ask the Holy Spirit for guidance.

Handling Challenges

Trust that God is at work in each person's life. What seems like a problem may be an opportunity for growth in grace. Challenges are a natural part of the Cursillo process. Remember, you are not alone. God's Spirit is working in you and in those around you, transforming everyone. Don't share table challenges with the whole team or staff; honor the trust of your table family. Below are some examples of challenges people may present and ways to respond:

Dominates Talking in Discussions

- For the first two or three talks, let it be. The person may simply feel a need to lead. Avoid cutting someone off, as that could be discouraging. They may self-correct, or others may naturally balance the discussion.
- Evaluate whether the behavior is creating stress for the group.
- During a break, invite them to help draw others into the conversation.
- Be open to the whole group. Express the desire to hear from everyone.
- Use breaks to enlist their support in encouraging quieter members to participate.

Doesn't Participate in Discussions

- Get them involved in something that doesn't involve talking – e.g., artwork.
- Recognize that some people find it easier to give feedback than originate ideas.
- Don't stress over a person's style. Sometimes people who don't talk much are really processing things on a deep level.

Doesn't Want to Participate in Activities

- Encourage them to speak up with ideas.
- If their reluctance is extreme, let it go.
- Let the group start with ideas and pray that the discussion will generate interest.

Wanders around during discussions or other activities

- Gently follow, engage them in conversation, then invite them back to the table.
- Remind the group that sessions begin only when everyone is present.
- Ask them to help with something, such as gathering materials or getting a drink.
- If needed, consult the Lay Rector or Spiritual Adviser privately.

Theological arguments

- Intervene calmly and firmly: “We all have opinions to be considered” and remind everyone that there are a variety of theological understandings.
- If someone is distressed, suggest a conversation with a Spiritual Adviser.
- If the discussion becomes heated or disruptive, invite a Spiritual Adviser to join the table.

Clergy Table Members

- Participants may defer to clergy for theological answers. Most clergy will deal with this in their own way. Or redirect theological questions to the whole group.
- If it seems to be a problem, talk honestly to the clergy member and consider involving a Spiritual Advisor.
- It may be appropriate to clarify that the clergy member is there as a participant, and staff Spiritual Advisors there to advise.

Personalities

- Some friction resolves naturally over time.
- During a break, speak privately with anyone who seems distressed or disruptive. Express care and listen attentively—without rushing to solutions. If appropriate, suggest speaking with a Spiritual Adviser and offer prayer.
- If certain participants (e.g., clergy, spouses, professionals) feel intimidating, remember they are present as fellow pilgrims. Treat them as you would any participant, unless they indicate otherwise.

In Conclusion

- Pray, pray, pray, pray.
- Listen, listen, love, love.
- Trust the Holy Spirit to guide everyone involved.
- No matter how much love you give away during a Weekend, you always leave with more love than you brought with you! That’s how it is with God’s love.

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