

Canadian Anglican Cursillo

CURSILLO AND THE CLERGY



Cursillo seeks to serve the whole Church. It seeks to equip Christians to be the church wherever they are, and in whatever stream of tradition or theology they resonate. The Cursillo Weekend Event is a short course, concentrating on the experience of open relationship with God and others as much as on the presentation of a simple method for living the Gospel. The heart of Cursillo is a disciplined way of living out a vibrant Christian faith. On the weekend, people are helped to express their understanding and reaction to a sequence of talks, and they are shown the power and importance of ministry by people like themselves. They are to continue this experience after the weekend in small groups. These groups are not exclusive; they may include people who have not attended a weekend event themselves. They simply follow the three-fold pattern of Cursillo: Piety, Study and Action.

Cursillo emphasizes the ministry of the laity, but the role of the clergy is of great importance. Both laity and clergy have clearly defined roles, and mutual support and team-work is essential for the health of the Movement. The role of a priest, who seeks to be a healing and empowering force in the Church, is definite and profound. On the Cursillo Weekend, the priest teaches of doctrine and Christian living, and calls on the fullness of the Lord's priestly gifts when being a personal resource. In Cursillo, the sacramental life is central, and the priestly function within the community is fundamental.

To serve the church, Cursillo movements in each diocese have developed guidelines which aspire to put Cursillo at the service of the pastoral plan (the bishop's or diocesan pastoral priorities) for that diocese, and the pastoral plans of the particular parishes. In some dioceses, there is a principle that the priest (or pastoral team) of each parish decides whether Cursillo is part of the pastoral life of that parish, and the local Cursillo movement is governed by that decision. (Often this results in parish priests going before or with the first of their people to a Cursillo weekend.) Far from being an intrusion within a parish, Cursillo understands that it is "not generally necessary for salvation" and not necessarily part of the pastoral plan for each situation. The role of Cursillo within a parish's pastoral plan may differ from parish to parish. This conscious offering of ministry by the Cursillo method is at the service of the church. Canadian Anglican Cursillo urges all priests who have not attended a Cursillo Weekend to do so. Valuable insights will be gained both into what Cursillo means to those who have participated and into a deeper understanding of how the Movement can have a positive effect on others, both clergy and lay, in parish renewal.

If Cursillo is not in your diocese (there are only a few of these) contact your bishop, or call a member of Canadian Anglican Cursillo Secretariat. The usual way to get things going is to have a group of people including priests and the bishop go to a weekend in a neighbouring diocese. A recommended rule

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often adopted is that parish priests should make a weekend with or before the first lay people from that parish.

In many places, there is a rule that spouses both agree to attend a weekend. This rule reflects Cursillo's desire to serve Christian marriages, providing a Christian experience that the couple can grow with and celebrate with each other. Such a rule needs to be applied with sensitivity to those who practice their religion as individuals, and to other particular circumstances. Cursillo began as a way of allowing men (of Spain) to experience spiritual depth. Bringing men to a fuller spiritual awareness and helping them discover their vocations within the church is a very important part of what Cursillo does.

Cursillo does a particular job very well. It is not in itself a vanguard of other legitimate energies and changes in the church, although it benefits from them and embraces them as they become part of the normal experience of Christians. Beginning from what is normal to being a Christian; Cursillo simply seeks to add depth and understanding, and a way of growing deeper, and being part of the transformation of the world by individual Christians.

There are surprise elements to the weekend (they differ from diocese to diocese) which have no more significance than a Christmas or birthday surprise. They are not necessary to Cursillo, and certainly do not define it, but are cherished parts of the experience for those who have gone through them. Apart from these optional surprises, there are absolutely no secrets and no exclusivity in any aspect of Cursillo. In each diocese, parish, or other environment, Cursillo should be open and inclusive in the service of Christ.

The Cursillo movement is under the guidance of the bishop in each diocese. The lay director or president is appointed or elected in each movement along with spiritual directors and a number of others who take responsibility for the health of the movement in that place. The weekends are led by lay people along with spiritual directors chosen specifically for that weekend. It is a great joy to be part of a weekend team, and to be worked intensely by

the Lord in the very ministry to which we were ordained!

Clergy Advisors on the Cursillo Weekend

The Cursillo movement asks simply that priests fulfill their ministry: that they preach the Gospel, administer the sacraments, and build up and serve the community which in turn serves the world.

Lay and clerical organizers of the weekend (who have different titles in different movements) are invited to form a team and put on a weekend, and are responsible to the secretariat and the Bishop of the Diocese for the weekend.

A weekend depends a great deal on thorough and prayerful team training. During this time the talks take shape, method is reviewed, details are settled and, most important, Christian community is formed. It is into this expression of the church that we invite the candidates on the weekend. These are some guidelines to assist in this role during team training.

1. The lay director (rector/a) and the weekend spiritual director will arrange the dates and times for training. Attendance at all team training is vital.

2. The weekend spiritual director gives full support and encouragement to everyone on the team. All need blessing, reassurance and maybe advice. Authority is taken for doctrinal, moral and liturgical order. Responsibility for everything, however, is not implied, and it is inappropriate for the weekend spiritual director(s) to assume principal leadership of the team.

It is highly desirable to have clergy on the weekend who are active in the movement and are grouping. Like the pastoral guidelines for laity, clergy should not be asked who have or are going through a "crisis experience" of some kind. Spiritual advisors need to be clearly focused on the demands of the weekend and need to have energy available. The clergy need to have the respect of their fellow diocesan clergy and bishop, and are in good standing within the diocese. Cursillo is not about clerical renegades.

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Clergy need to remember that the lay director is the overall coordinator of the Cursillo weekend, and work under his or her leadership. The outlines of the clergy talks are to be followed faithfully. Failure to do so risks the loss of our license to have Cursillo. The clergy talks, like all the weekend talks, set forth the basics of the Christian faith in a non-confrontational way. One should avoid “put downs” or “cheap shots” at opponents. Christ builds up by the power of the Holy Spirit, not by the belittlement of the opposition, so that he wins by default. Clergy talks should be full of positive examples, not snide remarks or negative anecdotes e.g. pot shots at TV evangelists or other pastors.

3. When the team is reviewing talks, show restraint. Comments on style and manner can be left to others. Allow others to deal with the content as well. The weekend spiritual director should address doctrinal and pastoral issues. Ensure that what is essential in the outline is in the talk, and that the message is not being expressed misleadingly. To do this adequately, you must be familiar with all the talks. Let the speaker know that the talk is valuable and appreciated.

4. Prepare talks in advance in writing and present them to the team according to the schedule. These talks are designed to convey specific parts of a precise message, so you must adhere to the outlines. A written talk ensures the inclusion of essentials and the exclusion of extraneous material. It keeps the speaker within the required time frame, and gives the team a chance to hear precisely what you intend to say on the weekend. It is important that the weekend spiritual directors be as thorough and as prepared in this as everyone else.

Listen carefully to the comments the team members make. Clergy seldom have the benefit of this kind of honest analysis. It may be humbling and should be helpful. Revise talks as necessary.

5. Worship is an essential part of team preparation. In consultation with the lay directors (rector/a) arrange worship for each meeting. Involve other team members. From time to time, the Eucharist should be

celebrated. A priest should close each meeting with a blessing.

The worship services are to be familiar liturgy, i.e. BCP or BAS. Cursillo is not a time for experimental liturgies. If a healing Eucharist or the Stations of the Cross is used, it should be carefully explained. We must remember that the laity will be going back to their parishes.

6. Team training is a spiritual activity. It is a response to God's call, a celebration of God's grace, and a growth in service to God and His people. The blessings of unity and love should be evident in this manifestation of Christ's body, the Church. Guiding the team's spiritual formation should be a top priority. Lay people may find this responsibility both exciting and frightening. Quiet support from the weekend spiritual director helps build confidence, but the spiritual director should never take over this ministry.

It is extremely important to keep the attention of the talks and the team focused on the specific themes and approaches to the faith that together form the methodology of the weekend. Other ministries are not denied or ignored. They exist and are quietly performed in the course of normal ministry by the priest, but must not become a focus or specific charism (priestly or lay) or feature of a particular team's training or weekend.

During The Weekend

The weekend spiritual director is a key person on the weekend, normalizing it as an event of the church, representing the authority of the bishop, and making available the fall teaching and sacraments of Christ's church. One of the most important things done by the weekend spiritual directors is affirming the role of the laity in real leadership, the role of the sacraments, the pattern and content of the lay talks. The sacraments are introduced and explained before each occurs in the weekend. The content of the lay talks is referred to in the weekend spiritual director's talks.

The Cursillo weekend has a specific methodology. We are dedicated to bringing an enriched teaching and experience of faith into

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the best possible focus for continued growth within the normal variety of parishes and styles of ministry. To add things that could bring disappointment back home and controversy to the movement might spoil what we are trying to do by changing that focus.

Counseling is an important part of the weekend spiritual director's task. In giving spiritual counsel, it is wise to remember the stages of the weekend, and the content of upcoming talks. Let the dynamics of the weekend have their effect by preparing for what will come without giving it away prematurely. Spiritually, some people move a great distance during the weekend. They need time between events to think the previous one over, and to integrate the spiritual counsel with what follows.

People who are disturbed, or suffer obvious psychological problems need to be treated with sensitivity and care. They should not have been invited to a weekend, and these problems will not be solved there. Try to keep them on an "even keel". Do not allow them to disturb or dominate the whole weekend.

Availability of the weekend spiritual director(s) for counseling may be announced several times as the weekend progresses to different stages. They should be available twenty-four hours a day.

Cursillo is not just a weekend experience, but introduces an ongoing method for living the Christian life.

Spiritual directors should not begin a formal counseling process on the weekend that would need to be continued after the weekend is over. The candidates should be left with the urge to organize their spiritual lives within the normal context of their own parish and friendships in the church.

It should be recommended to each candidate that: (a) a long-term spiritual director is chosen, (b) the choice be prayerfully made, (c) it may be wise to choose a Cursillista (who has been through a weekend and knows the aims), and (d) one's own parish priest should be considered.

In all counseling the weekend spiritual director

is aware, of course, of not leading someone away from a particular kind of churchmanship or style of spiritual expression, but rather tries to enable them to more fully enter into the Christian life where they are. Cursillistas should return home eager to contribute to their parish even if the weekend spiritual director was from a far different parish setting! This is extremely important

The beauty of Cursillo is that the priest is freed from organizational matter, and particular style, and is used as a "doctor of the soul."

Clergy on the Cursillo Secretariat

Local Secretariats need clergy representation, i.e. the spiritual advisor, and hopefully an assistant designed to take over when the term of office has ended for the spiritual advisor. The clergy on Secretariat need to attend meetings on a regular basis and their input is vital.

Cursillo in The Parish

Each parish is different! And each parish priest is given the guidance and authority of the Holy Spirit in leading the spiritual life and development of people and community.

There will therefore be many different ways that Cursillo fits into the life of the parish. As a parish asks God to guide in the development of its pastoral plan, the experience, commitment and depth of Cursillistas will be part of God's calling to that parish. Cursillistas have a primary responsibility to mix into the parish environment, and to not be a group of separate and distinct Christians. There may be occasions to meet as Cursillistas, nonetheless, to plan strategy for enriching the parish and deepening the spiritual awareness of people in a realistic way.

Cursillistas need encouragement and example in forming groups, going to Ultreyas, seeking spiritual direction and following a rule of life. A good plan is to elect or appoint a lay person to do the legwork in reminding people about Cursillo events, co-coordinating grouping and proper delivery of the movement's journal, and candidate recruitment

Cursillistas will quite possibly be actively

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helping others to discover their own potential for Christian service. The clergy should be aware of this, and ready to assist and affirm the emergence of new ministries. Within the regular activities of the parish, there will be chances to use aspects of the Cursillo method to enrich the life of the parish (assessment and planning of piety, study, and action; lay witness; "table" responses, to group events, using the music, etc.) Cursillistas need encouragement to continue the effort to find their personal apostolate within parish, home or work environments.

They need to be encouraged not to retreat into an easier but unauthentic pattern limited to specific group activity.

Cursillo weekend events require priests to actively seek out those who might benefit. Weekends are for mature, mentally balanced Christians who are actual or potential leaders, and are natural influences of the environments they live in. They are not for everybody. The priest will want to identify the potential leaders of the parish and of other environments in the community, and encourage the Cursillistas in the parish to befriend them and invite them to join a group, or attend a weekend.

The Cursillistas of the parish will want to mount prayer for needs as they arise, for candidates on weekends, and for the parish and the community. The priest should be responsive to this, providing specific ways to include particular intentions in the Sunday prayers as requested by parishioners.

Most Cursillo activity, (aimed at increasing the personal involvement of Christians in the Christian life and personal outreach to others in the power and love of Christ) is simply Christian activity, and everyone in the parish can and should be invited to participate. This openness might well enrich parish life by bringing Cursillo strengths right into the heart of the parish. In this way, Cursillistas may be able to help others discover for themselves their own potential for service, the Cursillo method can be used to enrich the parish and

Cursillistas may remain in the mainstream of parish life.

As Cursillo leads people to seek spiritual direction, priests need to be able to respond directly, or recommend good long-term spiritual directors (people with knowledge of the spiritual life, with training, with patience and love).

Beyond The Parish

Openness should also characterize extra-parochial Cursillo events, such as Ultreyas, which are envisioned as vivid reminders of the support of the community in living the Cursillo method (the active Christian life lived in a particular way) together. Reunion groups also may involve any Christian, and can plan their witness for Christ within various environments. Some groups will come from work-places, others from the parish, and so on. Where outreach, visitation, or other duties happen in the evening and interfere with clergy attendance at Ultreyas, it is important that the leaders of the Ultreya support and strengthen through prayer those who take on the roles usually performed by clergy, i.e. spiritual direction and leading scripture discussion.

At the Ultreya, a priest is assigned to respond to the discussion to briefly ground the discussion in the scriptures, providing insight into how the discussion might be used by the Lord in the light of revelation. Cursillo priests should be fully immersed in the method, in spiritual direction, and should normally be grouping. It is a privilege to group with those who can share with us most deeply our failures and successes, and our calling together.

Any suggestion that being a Cursillista is better Christianity is contrary to the Gospel. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and Life. Cursillo simply offers one method to more deeply live in the Life, really know that Truth, and actually walk in that Way.