

I was delighted to be given this opportunity to open up, explore, and shine a light on all the dynamics of an Ultreya. What is Ultreya? **The Ultreya is members of friendship groups coming together, in order to form a larger community.** We are blessed in our Bridgeport diocese with three active Ultreya's: Bethel, Stamford and Stratford. Each Ultreya has a monthly meeting. And twice a year in June and December we have a Central Ultreya; a gathering of the three Ultreya's.

Each of our Ultreya's has it's own distinct character, but each follows the same format. The goal of each Ultreya is to be habitual but not mechanical; short but intense; simple, but with substance.

I have the pleasure of being a part of the team at the Stratford Ultreya. One of my roles as a Cursillo leader is to help other cursillistas discover and maintain friendship groups. Whether it's helping new cursillistas find a group or cursillista's who may be changing their lifestyle and looking for a new group. An Ultreya is a place where leaders can bring people together, giving them the opportunity through the reunion to become friends.

The reunion at the Ultreya is not the same as the Friendship Group Reunion. **The Ultreya does not take the place of a Friendship group.** It serves to unite existing Friendship groups and to help realize a friendship group among new Cursillistas. Leaders, who see friendships being formed in Ultreya's can suggest to those friends to begin to make a reunion outside of the Ultreya as a friendship group. In this way, they help new cursillistas to be part of a group that makes a weekly reunion.

Both the Ultreya and the Friendship Group Reunion ought to give impetus to the work of evangelization in the world. The Friendship group satisfies the basic need of the individual for a sense of growth and community, and the Ultreya satisfies the need for growth in community and being Church the world. **For the individual the Friendship Group Reunion is the most important aspect of the method, but for the community the Ultreya is.** Both are necessary to achieve the ongoing work of evangelizing the environments in the world.

Since the Postcursillo structures of the Friendship Group Reunion and Ultreya are supplementary to the ecclesial community, they must be denominational. The postcursillo is oriented to help the cursillista's share in the lives of their brothers and sisters in their own ecclesial community and in the world where they will carry out their specific mission as laity.

One of the images I get when I think of Ultreya is "journey". At our Stratford Ultreya we have a large walking stick that we often put in front of the podium to remind us that we are pilgrims on a journey, helping one another to move "onward". Our Ultreya's are a place for us to receive the nourishment we need for our spiritual and evangelical journey. The Ultreya is our depot, truly a place to feed and be fed.

Each Ultreya takes: planning, preparation, and most importantly prayer. We work as a team with as many as 9 or more servant leaders for each Ultreya. The Ultreya begins with hospitality. Greeting fellow Cursillista's who you know and making new Cursillista's feel welcomed. After greetings we open with a song. Music is an important element of our evening. It helps lift us and brings spirit and life into the room.

Our facilitator leads us in our opening prayer followed by Group Reunion. We break up into small groups of 3 or 4, preferably with those whom we either don't know or don't group with. This gives us the opportunity to meet new friends and learn new ideas. One of the responsibilities of the team during grouping is to be a good listener. The purpose is threefold. First to hear how the cursillista is sharing their evangelistic efforts and consider sharing as a witness speaker at a future Ultreya. The second, to ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to hear and be heard, and three to offer, if needed, avenues for their personal journey such as spiritual direction or a retreat.

Grouping is followed by the witness talk given by a member of the laity. The witness talk should reveal what attempts the speaker is making to bring about a transformation of an environment in order for that environment to be more Christian. This talk should awaken a desire among all the Cursillista's to renew their own efforts at evangelizing their environments. Great care should be taken to ensure that the witness talk does not become an instructional session. The talk should encourage by example, not by theory.

Ultreya witness talks should expose cursillistas to a great variety of witnesses so they may encounter a broad range of possibilities for Christian growth and action. The speaker offers concrete examples of how to live what is fundamental for being a Christian in family, neighborhood, work and with friends. It is sharing in a practical way that should inspire imitation.

A witness talk is delivered as a living experience of what the speaker is or believes. As in all Cursillo talks, a truth is presented and then a living experience from the life of the speaker is witnessed to. A recent example from the speaker's life should be given to demonstrate the validity of the "truth" in a concrete situation. By preparing beforehand through prayer and Palanca for discernment as to what to share, the witness will be natural, sincere and personal. Scripture can be used to relate the truth to life and to the experience itself so the community may penetrate more deeply into the Word of God.

The witness should be a personal sharing of one's "Growing union with Christ, so that Christ is better known, loved and served.

The speaker should keep the witness talk short, simple and enthusiastic. It should be so balanced that it is not and emotional high, a tale of an extraordinary event, a propaganda message for their own favorite cause or organization or an outpouring

of personal troubles that ends in a call for help. The person giving the witness talk should be one who is living the truth to which they are to witness. When a person talks about what they're living, it is almost always told well.

When the Ultreya leaders seek out those who are living life in grace instead of seeking orators, we get holy testimony and not oratory. "When I came to you, I did not come proclaiming God's testimony with any particular eloquence" 1Cor 2:1 Some of the best witness talks I heard were done by people who never witnessed before and told me that they were scared. My usual response is I tell them that it's not about them. It's about how God is working through them.

Those who live close to God will reflect Him. A person cannot share what that person does not have. It is important that those who share do so because of the testimony of the life they live and not because it is their turn to share, or that there wasn't anyone else to witness.

The Ultreya leaders should never select someone to be a witness speaker for the sake of getting that person re-involved with the Cursillo Movement. The Ultreya team members are encouraged to invite "fallen away" Cursillistas to the Ultreyas, but only as a participant. If, through the sharing that takes place during the Ultreya Group Reunion, the team member feels this "fallen away" cursillista is effecting change in their environment then this person can be asked to share that at a future Ultreya.

The Ultreya leaders responsible for assigning the witness speakers should be aware of the fact that there are various levels of witness talks. First there is the basic witness talk – usually given by the newer Cursillistas. This type of witness will usually focus on a reflection of where they were, where they are now, how they got there and the joy or sorrow experienced along the way. It's important to occasionally have these types of witnesses for two reasons: First it helps the newer cursillistas become an accepted part of the larger community and it helps the seasoned cursillistas to remember the journey that they have been on.

The Second type of witness is the typical witness – given by anyone who is striving to put into practice all three elements of holiness, formation and evangelization. This witness should provide distinct examples of each phase of apostolic growth. It should strive to show the relationship of each of these three phases. The evangelization phase may be focused more on individual attempts at transformation (friends, relatives, neighbors, etc.) The third type of witness would be an evangelization of environments witness – given by someone who has made a conscientious effort to transform a particular environment. This witness should explain the procedures used by the speaker to establish an Environmental Group Reunion within their environment.

Following the witness talk we have our echoes. Echoes are an opportunity for the community to share something about the talk that touched them and can help in their evangelization efforts. It's also a chance for the community, especially those who may not be ready to give a talk to give voice to how the spirit has moved them.

After the echo comes the summation given by either a priest, deacon or vowed religious. Laity no matter how much training they have received, are not to present these summations. The Spiritual Advisor should have heard the witness presentation prior to its being given at the Ultreya. From the information, the Spiritual Advisor should prepare a summation in light of the Gospel. This is the point where the Spiritual Advisor attempts to unite the evangelistic growth with the spiritual growth. The Spiritual Advisor should focus the comments to the contents of the witness talk. This summation should further encourage the participants to go forth and evangelize with a Gospel spirit.

In planning and conducting the Ultreya, we should always keep in mind what is essential in it. Its dynamic and active character should always be remembered. We come to Ultreya to unite with our brothers and sisters, and to share with them rather than to teach or to learn Catholic doctrine. We come as pilgrims on journey. Supporting, encouraging, and walking together side by side. Dedicated to a movement moving onward, with a method helping us to direct our whole life to the building up of God's kingdom.

De Colores.