

SCHOOL OF LEADERS

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INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in this mailing, the National Cursillo® Movement in the United States recently celebrated its 50th Anniversary.

To celebrate this special event of our Movement, it is appropriate for a reflection on what has helped our National Cursillo® Movement survive throughout half a century by revisiting our valuable Cursillo literature. The majority of Cursillo leaders, who have been loyal leaders of a diocesan community of service to the Cursillistas, i.e. to serve the Cursillo Community, are certainly convinced that the School of Leaders sustains the Movement since “the Cursillo Movement originated within a School, and it was through the constant and coordinated efforts of the leaders of the School that it acquired its form, as well as its drive toward growth and improvement” (FI #530). The Holy Spirit is obviously the living force that keeps our Movement alive and active thanks to our perennial palancas and prayerful sacrifices offered nationwide and worldwide by all Cursillistas.

THE PURPOSE AND ESSENCE OF THE SCHOOL

The Cursillo Movement can be established and can exist within a language or ethnic/cultural group in a diocese with the local bishop’s permission; however, it is not possible for them “to have an authentic and truly effective Cursillo Movement unless it is served by a group of leaders who exemplify everything the Movement is supposed to “be” (Leaders’ Manual, Ch. 6 & FI #540). Therefore, The Leaders’ Manual, in its introduction to Chapter 6, clearly and strongly asserts that “a diocese can begin a Cursillo Movement when it has a core group of Cursillo leaders who have chosen to serve within the Movement, as their apostolic vocation”. “It was the School that gave birth to the Cursillo Movement, nurtured it and made it strong enough to survive and branch out into a full-fledged movement of the Church. The School has always been and is to this day an Element that is essential to the continuity and development of the Movement.” (FI #531)

This statement underlines the Purpose of the Movement, and also of the School: “the leavening of environments with the Gospel, to be carried out by means of core groups of Christians who live and share what is fundamental for being Christian, on the basis of a total and ongoing conversion begun, renewed or strengthened by the Cursillo Weekend experience.” (FI #562) In order to attain its stated goal, which is also of the Movement, the School inspires and strengthens the core groups or communities generated by the Cursillos, then deepens the conversion of its leaders and prepares future leaders of the Movement by giving them a formation in holiness, doctrine, technique and the spirit of service. These transformed leaders, in turn, form the Christian backbone of their environments and influence the people around them.

THE DIMENSIONS OF THE SCHOOL

The Fundamental Ideas emphasize the three convergent dimensions of the School, that means, the School of Leaders is at the same time the School of Holiness, of Communion and of Formation.

All Cursillo leaders participating in the School continue to reinforce their ongoing conversion begun, renewed or strengthened by their Cursillo Weekend experiences, which leads them towards Holiness through Piety, Formation through Study and Evangelization through Action. Together they put into practice what Pope John Paul II calls “the prime and fundamental vocation” the vocation to holiness, and thus they become living witnesses of the dignity conferred on us by Christ. (Christifideles Laici (ChL) & FI #535) The leaders’ commitment to the Tripod helps them persevere in living what is fundamental for being Christian and “stirs up every baptized person to follow and imitate Jesus Christ in promoting the Beatitudes, proclaiming and living the Gospel. As the living witnesses of a holy life, they can effectively move other people to conversion.

They are Christian community, where “communication and communion among its leaders, encompassing all their values, goals and efforts, constitutes the first rule of life.” United in the atmosphere of a Group Reunion, the leaders of the School find this unity and communion an ideal climate for dialogue in which everyone should have something to teach and to learn, questions to ask and ideas to share. The atmosphere should be one of sincerity and trust, of authenticity and freedom, of equality (of rights and duties) and plurality (of vocations and viewpoints), of unity in diversity, and of humility (both personal and communal). (FI #542, 544) Through sincere friendship, the leaders of the School get to know one another better as they freely and comfortably share their thoughts and feelings so that they soon become united in one same mentality and one same purpose of the Church, the Kingdom of God. The leaders strive to be committed to Christ Jesus, their one same Teacher and Lord, and to the Gospel message, they are naturally committed to other people as well. This is the road mapped out by Christ Himself.

As the School of Formation, its task is to provide its leaders, leaders in the Church and in the Cursillo Movement, with a catechetical formation in spirituality, doctrine and human values in addition to the kerygmatic approach of the Cursillo Method. In his “Christifideles Laici”, Pope John Paul II states “everyone is called to grow continually in intimate union with Jesus Christ, in conformity to the Father’s will, in devotion to others in charity and justice”. He also said “The situation today points to an ever-increasing urgency for a doctrinal formation of the laity, not simply in a better understanding which is natural to faith dynamism but also in enabling them to give a reason for their hoping in view of the world and its grave and complex problems.... The cultivation of human values finds a place in the context of a totally integrated formation, bearing a particular significance for the missionary and apostolic activities of the laity.” For the lay person ought to be, through an intimate knowledge of the contemporary world, a member well integrated into his or her own society and its culture. (ChL #60 – FI #551, 552, 553)

Besides, the leaders of the School should study the social teachings of the Church as part of formation of their social conscience. This involves, on the one hand, the task of thinking about one's political and social responsibilities in terms of what is of paramount importance, the wellbeing and advancement of humanity, and, on the other hand, "a more decided Christian promotion of culture in response to the perennial yet always new questions that concern individuals and society today." (ChL #60) The purpose of the Cursillo Movement also emphasizes a careful and thorough preparation for the School of Leaders' apostolic mission so that each leader in the School can more deeply understand the kind of social outreach that characterizes the Movement.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE SCHOOL

Article #540 of the Fundamental Ideas of the Cursillo Movement clearly states, "As an operational structure of the Movement, the School is a community of Christians who, united in the atmosphere of a Group Reunion, seek every day to become more centered, more committed and more united, so as to accelerate in themselves, in the Movement, and in their environments the living out of what is fundamental for being Christian."

In this way, the leaders of the School should be carefully selected based on their personal aptitude, which includes psychological maturity, authenticity, integrity and capacity of amazement, i.e. ability to witness the mystery of each thing and each person, on their ability of making friends through their Group Reunions and Ultreyas. The School is of great importance to the Cursillo Community (the Ultreyas) in the same way as the Team of Leaders to the Cursillo Weekend. The Leaders' Manual advises that the members of the School of Leaders', because of their holiness and apostolic life style, are drawn from the Ultreyas. Moreover, "Christian leadership is a work of the Spirit, and requires the gift of discernment to locate it and place it at the service of the Church. Though all Cursillistas are called to be leaders in their own environments, only a small percentage of them are called to be leaders in the environment of the Cursillo Movement itself. Since they are an apostolate, those who accept their role in the School of Leaders must give all their spare time to it." (LM. Ch. 6)

In his book "Whom Shall I Send?", Fr. Frank S. Salmani suggested, "In order to discern God's call and answer that call properly, we need three things: Idealism, Self-Surrender and Charity. God wants only the best for us, so we owe it to God not to give Him a half-hearted effort. We have to open to His call, to listen to Him and not to come to Him with our agenda. The mentality of the Cursillo is not a matter of debate, but of decision: Is this what God wants me to do right now? We can only answer this if we are honest with ourselves and listen to God's agenda for us. All of this process is done in love. We do not have to like everything we hear and read, but we need to respect it and respect the decisions everyone must make for themselves. In the end, only we can decide for ourselves. No one can discern for us."

Saint Paul calls the Church a body, so we, too, can draw an analogy between the School of Leaders and a body. Similarly, all the leaders of the School must function properly in order to keep the School healthy. Fr. Salmani in the same book writes, "We, as leaders,

are like the cells of the body who must perform their proper functions in order to keep the Cursillo Movement and the School, in particular, healthy. Whenever the School runs itself like an organization, it inevitably gets ill. As Cursillo leaders, our concern cannot be where our rank is or how much grandstanding we can do. The question each disciple must ask is, “Am I performing my proper function within the Body of Christ?” If the answer is ‘yes’, then we will not have the conflict and division that exists in many groups. The jealousies will be eliminated, and we will rejoice at the good each leader of the body can do.

Fr. Salmani asks us what style of leadership best suits the Cursillo Movement, in particular, the School of Leaders? In general, he says the tendency (at least in theory) is to follow the consensual model because we are dealing with a room full of leaders. It means supporting one another and being there for each other; being a community of one mind, heart, spirit and mentality. The image Saint Paul uses of the body is an appropriate image for the consensual model because all the body parts must work together in order for the body to function. If one member of the body rebels or several members of the body do not offer support, the entire body breaks down. According to Fr. Salmani, in order for the School of Leaders and the whole Movement to function properly, all four styles of leadership are needed at different times: authoritarian style of management, consultative management, participatory style of leadership and consensual model. For example, doctrine and essentials are not up for debate or discussions (authoritarian style); in policy changes affecting the direction of the Movement, it is important to seek out input from others (consultative style); in order to carry out the various tasks of the Cursillo, the participatory model of leadership is necessary.

Fr. Salmani concludes that in any community there must be some hierarchy of leadership, but regardless of the status of the leader, the work of Christ must still get done. Everyone must do their part, just as every part of the body must function properly in order for the body to survive. As long we work for Christ and work together, there is nothing we cannot accomplish for Christ, His Church or the Cursillo Movement.

SOME MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This one sentence from Section #560 of the Fundamental Ideas of the Cursillo Movement has been mentioned very often solely to justify some Cursillo leaders’ own ideas in running the School the way they wish, “It is not possible for all the Schools to be alike”. Those leaders should be advised to study the Book “How To Program A School of Leaders” and the Leaders’ Manual, Chapter 6, which clearly states, “The School of Leaders can be divided into six essential parts or elements which need to be constant in the School of Leaders: Prayer, Leaders’ Group Reunion, Doctrinal Presentation, Technique Presentation, Work of the Sections and Section Reports and Announcements, which are included in a typical Schedule for the School of Leaders. Please consult the Leaders’ Manual, the Leader’s Prayer, and many other reading materials for better understanding.

Many Cursillo leaders are so much obsessed by the numbers that they feel reluctant to start the school of leaders with full confidence in God. They become discouraged and frustrated easily when the School of Leaders' decreases. They should reflect on what Mother Teresa once said, "God does not call us to success, but fidelity." Being true and faithful is far more important than succeeding or failing.

With the advances of technology in our modern world, people can have tele-conferences through satellites or internet. In one certain diocese, the School of Leaders is conducted electronically, i.e. through a system called PalTalk via the Internet. Some leaders are in the same room with an internet-accessible laptop, and some others may be at home or somewhere far away, in other states or even other countries, sitting in front of a desktop or laptop on the internet using the same system. They can talk, one by one, and hear one another without seeing. This initiative is welcome as a supplement, but can never replace the physical gathering of the School of Leaders. In all functions of our School of Leaders and our Cursillo Movement in general, physical presence and personal contacts are of ultimate importance for friendship, solidarity and unity to flourish within our Movement and among the leaders. People usually comment, "Out of sight, out of mind!" and even Aristotle believed you would never choose to live without friends though you had all other goods. Msgr. Sylvester L. Fedewa, in his presentation on "Koinonia" at our 17th National Cursillo® Encounter, quoted from Dr. John Cuddeback's book "Friendship: The Art of Happiness, "True friendship does not simply happen. Ongoing, intentional effort is needed. True friendship is an art or a habit, which must be developed through practice.... True friendship is the result of intentional striving." Msgr. Fedewa added that without true friendship among members of a group, the common sharing (koinonia) will not endure.

CONCLUSION

The Cursillo Movement has published the book entitled "How to Program a School of Leaders" to help the Cursillo Community in a diocese to form an authentic School of Leaders. Such valuable books as "Whom Shall I Send?" by Rev. Frank S. Salmani, "Christifideles Laici" by Pope John Paul II, "Evangeliu Nuntiandi" by Pope Paul VI, "The Salt of the Earth" (1996) by then Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, and many more teachings of the Church literature have been effectively used in Doctrinal Presentations in many Schools of Leaders throughout the country. And similarly, such books as "Fundamental Ideas" of the Cursillo Movement, "Lower Your Nets" by Juan Capó, "Leaders' Manual", "Structure of Ideas", "1st Conversations in Cala Figuera", and many more reading materials have been used in Technique Presentations.

Fr. Frank Salmani reminds us, "For Cursillo leaders, the School of Leaders is a vital and essential community not only for doing the work of the Movement, but also to provide support and encouragement for the leaders. It is important that the School of Leaders meets regularly in order to sustain the progressive conversion of its leaders. The School is a place of formation whereby we grow in our commitment to Christ and the mission of the Church. The School of Leaders should not be a drop-in center for Cursillistas. That is

why we have Ultreya. The School of Leaders forms and develops Cursillo leaders in the mentality of the Movement and offers a Christian community for support.”