

SPONSORING CANDIDATES FOR THE CURSILLO WEEKEND

Source: National Cursillo Center Mailing – August 2008

Sponsoring candidates is one of the main aspects of the Pre-Cursillo, and the most important factor that contributes to the success of the Cursillo Weekend, and evidently to the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church. However, due to the constraint of space in the National Mailing, this article serves simply as a summary of the highlights of the Sponsoring procedures in the Pre-Cursillo phase. Sponsors and Cursillo leaders must consult the related Cursillo literature (i.e. the Fundamental Ideas, the Leaders' Manual, the Structure of Ideas, Lower Your Nets, Whom Shall I Send?, ...) for useful details on the Strategy of the Pre-Cursillo, on the search for and preparation of candidates. The School of Leaders should make the Sponsoring Workshop available to the sponsors and the Cursillo Weekend team members as part of their selection and preparation of the candidates.

The Importance of the Pre-Cursillo

Our Fundamental Ideas (FI) assert that the three stages of our Cursillo Movement are so closely connected that they constitute an organic whole, and a failure in the functioning of any one of the three stages will have direct consequences on the other two, and therefore on the development of the Cursillo Movement as a whole" (FI # 201).

The Fundamental Ideas of the Cursillo Movement state that, in the Pre-Cursillo stage, our Movement initiates the evangelizing process that it must complete in order to accomplish its purpose. The Pre-Cursillo consists of these steps: (a) searching, selecting and preparing potential candidates for the Cursillo Weekend; (b) carefully preparing for the Cursillo Weekend by coordinating all the spiritual, personal and material elements involved; (c) making plans to accompany the new Cursillistas in the Post-Cursillo to help them get mature in their faith, deepen their Christian commitment through their Group Reunion and Ultreya, and take their apostolic place in the world. Eduardo Bonnín, our founding father, focused on the person, but not on the environment. He keeps reminding us of converting ourselves and others, and consequently, the environments will be automatically and naturally transformed.

Juan Capó Bosch used the following anecdote to illustrate the urgency of first "transforming the individual members and afterwards to place them where their talents are used wisely and, they can apply themselves effectively to the transformation of their world. All this is called "Christian Vertebra (Structuring) in the Environment". A boy, who was traveling with his father in a train compartment, kept asking his father questions about many things. He hoped he could make his father forget his failure in geography at the end of his last school term. Instead, his father was annoyed because he could not read his newspaper peacefully. Suddenly, he noticed a full-page advertisement featuring a map of the world. He tore it into small pieces of various sizes and challenged his son to put them together again with a promise of a monetary reward. The father believed he would then have at least half an hour to read his newspaper without interruption. Unfortunately, the boy successfully completed the puzzle in about 2 minutes. His father

was amazed and wondered how his son, who had failed in geography, could have done it so fast. The boy shared his secret: he put together the figure of a man in a tailor's ad on the other side of the map, instead. The boy said it was much easier to remake the man and in that way to remake the world.

Before Jesus leaves his disciples, He gives them this command: "Go and make disciples of all nations!" The Acts of the Apostles quoted Paul and Barnabas repeating the Lord's command to them then and to us now, "I have made you a light to the Gentiles, that you may be an instrument of salvation to the ends of the earth." (Acts 13:44-52). Father Frank S. Salmani in his book "Whom Shall I Send?" reminds us that Jesus commands his disciples to go out and not only spread the Good News, but to literally recruit others to continue to spread the message, to find other disciples, "students" of the Gospel who would continue the work of the first apostles. At the same time, Jesus does not ask everyone to embrace the same call. He calls all to accept the Gospel, but He calls certain people to be leaders to help others accept the call. It is not enough to just be followers. Some are called to lead others. This is an idea that developed very soon in the early Church, as evident in St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians. While all are called to accept the Gospel in their lives and be baptized, others are set apart to be teachers and leaders, to set the tone for others and help lead the way by means of witness of life and a dedication to doing the Lord's work.

The Cursillo Movement's Fundamental Ideas Book strongly recommends that the Pre-Cursillo should be developed as a function of what is first, last, and always the goal of the Cursillo Movement: *to make possible the living out, and the living out together what is fundamental for being Christian*. The Fundamental Ideas also clarifies that the Pre-Cursillo grows out of the Post-Cursillo, and the work of Pre-Cursillo is accomplished above all through the word and witness of those who have made a Cursillo.

Sponsoring Candidates

In addition to a prayerful and apostolic community as a witness to the authenticity of the Christian life, there is a great need for the personal influence and contact which the Cursillista has with those whom he wishes to invite to make a Cursillo. Such an invitation should be personal through a true friendship so that the relationship may last long in the best interests of our evangelizing endeavors as we are advised to make a friend, to be a friend and to bring that friend to Christ. The Leader's Manual advises the sponsors to "explain to the potential candidates the reason for the Cursillo Weekend in such a way that they will become enthusiastic about it. Since those who are interested in becoming a better person should attend the Cursillo, it is necessary that they see the Cursillo Movement as a means for attaining their desires. In this way, they will be Cursillistas by desire before attending. Therefore, recruiting candidates through the advertisements of the Cursillo Weekends on parish and diocesan newsletters or through any secular media are seriously discouraged.

According to the Fundamental Ideas, the candidates should be informed that "the Cursillo Weekend is not something theoretical but a lived experience that is oriented toward the

Church, toward community, toward real life (FI # 231a). In his book “Lower Your Nets”, Juan Capó Bosch focused mainly on the person: selecting and orienting the candidates for the Cursillo Weekend. Quite a few Cursillistas are convinced that the Pre-Cursillo is to simply get people to come, and leave it to the Holy Spirit to do the rest. Some consider the Cursillo as a cure-all and therefore, they wholeheartedly sign up their so-called “lukewarm” relatives and friends with “spiritual” problems. The Leaders’ Manual recommends that the Cursillo candidates should be capable of (1) being open to discern and to understand the Gospel message, (2) being committed themselves to the love of God, of themselves and of their neighbors, (3) discovering their talents and potentials with a view towards serving the community, (4) having clean or cleansable circumstances, (5) living the grace through the Holy Sacraments they receive, and (6) having an attitude of progressive conversion.

The Sponsoring Workshop gives us the following advice: Prudence and charity ask that we not bring to the Cursillo those who would not benefit from it, or those who have problems for which the Cursillo could provide no solutions. Such individuals who have psychological or emotional problems; those who are of abnormal situations due to illness or vice; those whose moral lives are so disoriented that they are incapable of understanding the message or of living the Cursillo; those who, due to circumstances, cannot receive the Sacraments, especially the Sacrament of the Eucharist, because their life is contrary to the life of grace and the Cursillo is centered in the Eucharist where one experiences the life of Grace; and evidently those with a negative or pessimistic attitude.

The suitable candidate, besides being a baptized Catholic, must have a “certain personality”, i.e. capable of making his/her own decisions from his/her own motives, of moving others with his/her opinions, of giving impetus to others by his/her actions, of acting freely and lovingly, and in other words, of becoming salt, light and leaven through Christian core groups’ support and encouragement. The Fundamental Ideas Book states “it is indispensable to give the candidates an adequate preparation so that they can get the most from the Cursillo experience; such a preparation will also facilitate their entry or re-entry into a group, a nucleus, or a community, during the time of the Post-Cursillo” (FI # 230).

Responsibilities of the Sponsors

Candidates’ selection for the Cursillo Weekend is very important and necessary, and so certainly is candidate preparation. The Leaders’ Manual also states there is no better preparation and attraction for the candidates than a personal and authentic witness of our Fourth Day, “See how they love one another.” Such preparation should be done by means of a sincere friendship established through personal contact. Therefore, sponsors, preferably the whole Friendship Group, rather than individuals, are encouraged to provide their candidates with the necessary information about the Purpose of our Cursillo Movement, such as the booklet “Cursillo Movement: What Is It?”. Sponsors are responsible to tell their prospective candidates for the Cursillo what they are expected to do after their Weekend: Group Reunion and Ultreya, which will help them, persevere in

their conversion process and motivate them to live what is fundamental to being Christian through examples.

The sponsors' responsibilities should not stop as soon as their invited candidates enter the Cursillo Weekend, i.e. after the Pre-Cursillo stage, but they must definitely continue throughout the Fourth Day of both the sponsors and their new cursillistas, in prayers and in actions. The new Cursillistas need as much personal contact after the Cursillo Weekend as they received before and during the Cursillo Weekend. Probably even more! We must make a conscientious effort to insure that we do all that can be done to insert them into a friendship group reunion.

The sponsors themselves should help the new Cursillistas form or find a convenient Friendship Group, or join an existing one, preferably the sponsors' Friendship Group, and regularly accompany them to Ultreyas. We are all instructed that "we do not find Total Security by attending Group Reunion and Ultreya, we find Total Security by coming to understand that God loves us, unconditionally. i.e. there is nothing that can separate us from the Love of God found in Christ Jesus etc..., and Total Security in this context does not mean that life is now free of worries and problems. It simply means that in finding friendship with Christ, we come to understand how God loves us. It is the Group Reunion and Ultreya that give us support and help us to continue the process of conversion in which we deepen our friendship with Christ, becoming more and more convinced of God's love which is where we find Total Security" (Rollo "Total Security" – Cursillo Manual 2006).

In the Gospel of St. John, Philip said to Jesus, "Master, show us the Father, and that will be enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you for so long a time and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'" (John 14: 8-9). And in another occasion, St. John repeated what Jesus said to his disciples, "I give you a new commandment: love one another" (John 15: 17).

Jesus' disciples lived with him and saw him every day, but they still insisted they wanted to see God the Father. We ourselves saw neither Jesus nor the Father! How can our faith survive so far? Truly, faith is a valuable gift from God that we must dearly treasure. The candidates for the Cursillo Weekend we are approaching may ask us to show Jesus to them. What can we tell them? Jesus says He is in the Father and the Father is in Him. Is each one of us ready to say: "I am in Jesus and Jesus is in me" when people want to see Jesus? Honestly, most of us dare not yet! It is a real challenge to us!

The Responsibilities of the Secretariat Members and School of Leaders

The Fundamental Ideas of the Cursillo Movement strongly affirm that "The Secretariat will be in a position to set up a Cursillo Weekend only when there is a sufficient number of persons – preferably, groups of persons who, possessing the qualities outlined above, offer a well-founded hope that by working with other people of good will, they will be able to Christianize their environments" (FI # 229).

With the above advice, some diocesan Cursillo leaders have started to realize the necessity of finding time to evaluate the progress of their service to the Movement, namely the Cursillistas in their evangelizing mission in their 'Fourth Day' or Post-Cursillo. These leaders are commended for their brave efforts to modify, adjust, or change their direction in the best interests of their local Cursillo Movement. There is always room for improvement in order to effectively serve the Cursillistas who strive to live what is fundamental for being Christian in their environments. This commendable practice, by analogy, is like that of James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were 'mending their nets' on the shore to be ready for the next catch when they were called by Jesus to follow Him (Mc. 1:19).

The leaders may help their Cursillo Community revive and deepen its knowledge of the purpose, mentality, essence, and Foundational Charism of our Cursillo Movement through various workshops administered either by national, regional service teams or by its own diocesan Secretariat members and School of Leaders. There should be a requirement also for the sponsors to attend a Sponsoring Workshop given by the Diocesan Secretariat and School of Leaders in addition to their being Cursillistas in good standing, i.e. actively participating in a Friendship Group and frequently attending Ultreyas.

Some people, unfortunately, still consider the Cursillo Weekend as the most important activity in our Movement and, therefore, the Weekend becomes indispensable. Others even believe the Cursillo Movement will be "dead" in a diocese if there are no Three-Day Cursillo Weekends put on every year. Certainly, it is very difficult for anyone to talk about the Pre-Cursillo stage of our Movement to the majority of Cursillistas who still have the Three-Day Cursillo mentality. This situation reminds us of a passage in the Gospel in which St. Mark related to us: "Jesus told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, so that they would not crush him. He had cured many and as a result, those who had diseases were pressing upon him to touch him" (Mk 3:9-10). Likewise, our Three-Day Cursillo Weekend has been so much overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and passion of both the Cursillo leaders as team members and the candidates that the Weekend casts a foggy shadow over the Pre-Cursillo and Post-Cursillo stages in our Cursillo Movement! If the Cursillo leaders gave excessive attention, time, energy and enthusiasm to the Three-Day Cursillo Weekend, the whole Movement would probably be crushed very soon. This incident befittingly cautions the diocesan Cursillo leadership against misusing the Cursillo Weekend by following the crowd to lead our Movement in the wrong direction.

In conclusion, Jesus' command "Go and make disciples of all nations" must be the natural outcome of our Cursillo Weekend if it is administered properly and effectively by a team knowledgeable of the essence, the mentality, the purpose and the methods of Cursillos de Cristiandad. Dostoevski says that the worst enemies of a movement are those who become its promoters without understanding its mentality.

Ultreya!