



The Cursillo® Movement

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EVANGELIZATION THROUGH FRIENDSHIP

Source: Presented by Jackie DeMesme-Gray at the National Cursillo Encounter held at Chapman University in Orange, CA - August 1, 2014.

De Colores, my name is Jackie DeMesme-Gray and I lived my Cursillo Weekend in April 1997 in the Archdiocese of Washington DC. I greet you as friend on a mutual journey to our Heavenly Father.

I am blessed and humbled to stand before you today to present the rollo, Evangelization Through Friendship.

As we gather together at this important forum, I hope you feel that you are among friends because our Cursillo Movement is the work of the Holy Spirit, built on friendship. As cursillistas, it is through friendship that we are called to evangelize - to bring others to Christ.

Eduardo Bonnin, at the first Conversations at Cala Figuera in 1994, called Cursillo a “homage to friendship.” In the book, “Eduardo Bonnin, An Apprentice Christian,” he named, friendship, as his favorite activity.

How many of us would view *friendship* in the same manner as our founder, Eduardo?

Thank you, Miguel, for enlightening us on the importance of “friendship” in Cursillo and, Bishop Elizondo, on our call to not only follow Christ, but to bring others to Christ.

St. John Paul II, at the Fourth World Youth Day, said, “*To be Christian means to be missionaries, to be apostles. It is not enough to discover Christ - you must bring Him to others!*”

So we come together at this 24th National Encounter to explore our apostolic call to ‘evangelize through friendship’ in our quest to re-discover, accept and live out the Charism of our Cursillo Movement.

A person once went to a wise storyteller in his town to discover the best way to tell others Jesus’ story.

“*I want to know how to tell others about Jesus who don’t know Him,*” said the young man.

The wise storyteller’s response surprised the young man, “*You must first spend time with Jesus and get to know Him, as friend, for one must become the Good News before sharing the Good News with others. Have you done that?*”

“*No,*” said the flustered young man, “*I’ve been too busy reaching out to convince others about Jesus’ story.*”

“Then go, spend time with Jesus,” said the wise storyteller, *“Come back, and then we will talk about telling others Jesus’ story.”*

Several days later, the young man returned. *“Now can you tell me the first step in telling others about Jesus?”*

“You’ve done it,” said the storyteller. *“Knowing God is the first step to telling others Jesus’ story. The more of Him you know, the more of His light you will reflect - and naturally attract others.”*

The storyteller continued, *“The second step in telling Jesus’ story is through personal contact — listening to others’ stories to know and place your friend in the context of Christ.”* When you’ve listened to others long enough, as friend, they’ll ask you about your story.”

People don’t care how much you know, until they know how much you care. “And as you spend time listening to their story,” he reminded the young man, *“don’t forget to continue reflecting upon Jesus’ story to deepen your friendship with Christ and in Christ with others.”*

“And the final step?” the young man asked.

“The storyteller answered, “When you are able to connect their story and needs with His story and provisions through your authentic witness and prayer. “

“This process takes companions on a journey, one heart at a time” said the wise storyteller.

“While some call this discipleship,” he continued, *“I call it **friendship**”*

I love this story for it reminds us, in Cursillo, that evangelization is about the *Person, Christ and Friendship*; it shows us that we must *Know, Place, Enlighten and Accompany* a person to *make a friend, be a friend and bring that friend to Christ.*

Our *Leaders Manual* states, *“Cursillos in Christianity consists of proclaiming the best news of the best reality: that God, in Jesus Christ, loves us; communicated by the best means; which is friendship; and directed towards the best of each one; which is the person; his capacity of conviction, decision, and constancy.”*

How do we Evangelize Through Friendship?

First, let's begin with definitions.

According to the Dictionary, "*evangelization*" means "to preach the gospel, to convert to Christianity" and "*friendship*" means "a relationship of mutual affection and good will between two or more people."

However, when we speak of "EVANGELIZATION" in the context of the Cursillo, we do not only mean "preaching" or "spreading" the Good News, but more importantly, "*Becoming the Good News;*" as Eduardo would say, "to succeed in making the person 'BECOME' the GOOD

NEWS... that joyful Good News that Christ is alive in and among His people today, just as He was 2000 years ago.”

This, in essence, was the vision and mission of Cursillo from the beginning... *of making the person faraway from God become the Good News.*

Let us remember that making the person become the Good News begins with you and me - first, friendship between us and Christ, and then us with others. We must first be living witnesses of the Gospel; that is, Christ-like in our thoughts, words and actions in each of our environments, in the normality of our lives, to attract others to Christ.

St. Francis says this in a similar way, "*let's go out and evangelize,*" and "*if it's necessary, we'll talk.*"

Now, when we relate evangelization and friendship to the methodology of the Foundational Charism, and the purpose of this talk, we must add our "*environments*" for it is within our environments in Cursillo that we are called to evangelize.

Thus, we can now complete the dictionary definition by saying - becoming the Good News to initiate a conversion of a person to Christianity within our environments - through friendship.

However, to fully understand this relationship, we must know what is meant by "environment" in Cursillo's terminology.

In Cursillo, our "environment" means the "Square Meter" that surrounds us "24 hours of each day of our entire life."

That is, any place during our 24 hours each day where we have interrelationships with others.

We live in and change environments several times daily where interrelationships are made possible: our homes, workplaces, parishes, social gatherings and other locations that occupy our daily lives.

Pope Francis said, "*As a Church, all of us need unity in Christ so that only He reigns in our hearts.... Now, more than ever, we need your presence in your various environments to be light and joy for so many brothers and sisters who ignore God as Father who loves them and with great tenderness.*"

Over 20 years ago, my brother converted to the Muslim faith. This was very upsetting for my family, a family comprised of cradle Catholics. As a result, his Muslim faith became a point of contention among family members with each side insisting that their faith was right.

However, after four of us lived our Cursillo weekend, and through our study, and living, the mentality and Charism of Cursillo, we learned to evangelize our brother differently: no longer *debating* the differences between our two faiths but *actualizing* Christ to become the Good News so that His light might *radiate* through us and a friendship in Christ might *evolve* between us - *as friends making Christ their friend.*

As Eduardo Bonnin said, “*When the focus is towards the person, the personal relationship with Christ and with our brothers and sisters will become more important than just morals, rites, and structures. Those who discover this for themselves - will find happiness.*”

The Cursillo Movement was born to communicate to men that God loves them, particularly to the far away.

It was designed and prayed upon not to evangelize the world, but to evangelize the person through the charisma of friendship and personal contact.

One may think, “*Evangelizing through friendship is easier than engaging in a debate!*”

Yes, but this approach assumes that we are:

willing to talk about, live out and witness to - the joy of our Catholic faith that *God loves us* in each of our environments; and,

willing to be in Christian friendship, through personal contact, with the ‘far away’ both ‘inside and outside’ our religious traditions.

Eduardo Bonnin, in *An Apprentice Christian*, goes on to say that, “*We are called to make the tenderness of God apparent.*”

My sisters and brothers, with today’s culture of violence, hatred and hostility, we need the tenderness of God apparent in our lives for we live in a world that groans for spiritual renewal.

A world where our present day society defines ‘friend’ by social networks and overwhelms us with high tech forms, such as telephones, television, video games, music, internet, e-mail, and message texting.

We must remain vigilant because these items can become obstacles to our engaging in personal contact which is critical in developing true Christian friendships.

So in today’s world, we must make the tenderness of God apparent in each of our environments through our daily living to bring others, particularly the far away, to Christ through friendship.

Who are the Far Away and How Do We Engage Them through Friendship?

I’m glad you asked that question!

The far away, as defined in “*The Study of the Charism,*” are those who:
do not have faith or do not know if they have faith;
do not know God loves them because no one told them or they did not believe;
do not participate in parish activities or live the sacraments;
are uninformed or misinformed; and,
are not reached in the language and style appropriate for them.
We each have friends, acquaintances and family who are far away.

We **live** beside them, **work** beside them, and actually **sit** beside them at our churches within our parishes.

We must reach out and plant the seeds of Christian friendship so that they may bear fruit. *In John 15:16, it reads “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last.”*

We must love them as God loves them; just as they are, and not as we wish they would be. And as we plant the seeds of friendship, we must remember to water them along the way.

While some seeds will grow to fruition and bear much fruit, others may not. We must plant the seeds of friendship anyway for someone is sitting in the shade of a fruit tree today because you planted a tree.

So how do we get started, you ask? Well, I have great news for you!

Eduardo Bonnin, in Structure of Ideas, provides us a system to both plant and grow our seeds of friendship - *to make a friend, be a friend and bring that friend to Christ* — in a technique known as the four movements of apostolic action: *To Know, To Place, To Enlighten, and To Accompany our friends.*

We must remember that we are called to *make a friend, be a friend, and bring that friend to Christ*, and not necessarily to a Cursillo weekend.

Perhaps if I make a slight change to this phrase to say, “*Be a friend, Be a friend of Jesus, and Make friends for Jesus,*” I can better convey our call to use ‘friendship’ as a means to evangelize for purposes of this rollo?

Let’s look at each of the four movements of apostolic action:

The first is To Know.

How can I help you if I don’t know you?

The first Rollo Eduardo Bonnin developed is *Study of the Environment*. This rollo provides a method to bring others to Christ. It teaches us that its not so much about studying your environment; but, about studying the environment and circumstances of the person.

In 2008, when our Mother went home to our Heavenly Father and her 5th Day, I found myself studying my environment of my five siblings as we prepared her Funeral Mass. I watched as our Muslim brother sat silently listening to our Christian plans.

I was compelled to reach out to him, to plant the seeds of Christian friendship, and asked God for the words to say.

That day, my brother and I prayed together and, with loving hearts, he shared his faith journey with me. For the first time, I listened to his story about his conversion to the Muslim faith.

My sisters and brothers, it is only when we come to know the person that we can *win* their heart, *open* their mind and *engage* their will.

The second movement is To Place.

By placing we mean helping the person to know how to journey to Christ. It is only when we know the person, can we place the person.

There are three elements to consider in placing our friend:

Guide our friend to look towards Christ in every circumstance of their life to feel His presence in their life;

Help our friend to live life enthusiastically and to strive towards a life of grace to attract others to Christ; and,

Remind our friend to put all of their gifts in the service of Christ.

It takes time to know and place the person for a friendship of trust must be built upon fertile ground for seeds of friendship to grow.

As we continued planning our Mother's funeral, I sought every opportunity to engage my brother and to plant the seeds of friendship in building a friendship of trust. I listened as he continued to share his story to better know him, as a brother, and to begin the journey to place him, as a friend, in the context of Christ.

The third movement is To Enlighten.

By enlightening we must be cautious not to tell the person what they need to do without knowing the circumstances; of how they think, what they want, or how they act.

We are the messengers and the Holy Spirit will give our friend understanding in God's time, and not ours.

As I began to relay my story, I focused my sharing on Christ's presence in my daily life - how He touched me and helped me grow as a person and a Christian - and not on our differences.

For the first time in 20 years, my brother joined us at a Catholic Mass. He stood reverently on the Altar with his Catholic siblings - as we each presented the Prayers of the Faithful during our Mother's funeral Mass.

That day, I learned something about a God much bigger than the limits of our traditions.

I learned that we don't earn the right to tell our stories without first listening to the stories of others;

I learned, that when we share our stories, we must share them in truth and with Christian love to see where our stories cross paths; and,

I learned, that our Catholic faith which teaches that *God loves us* is truly worth having when we share it with others, especially the far away.

My sisters and brothers, we are not called to evangelize by going door-to-door or debating whose faith is right, we are called to reach out to others, including the far away, giving testimony of friendship, within our environments so that others might encounter Christ.

The fourth movement of apostolic action, is To Accompany.

To accompany others, whom we now call our friends, is not only important, it is essential. Just as the Holy Spirit is our divinely appointed companion who accompanies us through life, so too must we be ‘companions on the journey’ as we accompany our friends on their journey.

And if these friends go to Cursillo, we must accompany them in their on-going conversion experience beyond the Weekend.

Saint John Paul II said at the III World Ultreya in Rome in 2000, “*You have learned to look with new eyes at persons, nature, daily events and life as a whole. Many men and women of our time await from you the light of faith which would also make them rediscover the colors of existence and the joy of feeling loved by God.*” (ACH 8/3/00)

Today, with new eyes, my brother and I continue our journey sharing God in our lives. No longer do I view him as a *far away*, but as a loving friend, and potential brethren in the faith.

God changes hearts, not us. I remain thankful as I watch God do His work in my brother, my friend.

Now let's now take a closer look at Christian friendships:

First, our beautiful Cursillo Movement is based on Christian friendship.

It is a witness of Christ offering His friendship to us and we offering the friendship of Christ to others.

In 1996, my friend, Ann, was a living witness to Christian friendship for me. After my joining a new church community, she extended her hand and heart to me in friendship.

With an apostolic sprit, she guided me along my spiritual journey and inspired me to become a better Christian. She planted seeds of friendship like inviting me to be a lector and joining her at Cursillo events.

Through her authentic witness, she helped me grow from having a private and reserved connection with Christ to flower into having an open and joyful relationship with Christ. I can now openly share my love of God and faith with all I meet.

Ann sponsored me to live a Cursillo weekend where I blossomed into the servant leader that I am today. We continue to walk as companions on the journey, in Christian friendship, and to share our lives of piety, study and action through group reunion.

Like Ann, we each are called to be Philip in John 1:46, where he invites Nathaniel to “*Come and see.*” Jesus loved them as they were, but called them, *like me*, through friendship to be more! He empowered them, and us, to do the same.

We must be Philip and tell others that God loves them and wants to touch their hearts. Just bring them to Jesus, and He will do the rest.

So, my brothers and sisters, evangelization of our environments in Cursillo is not about “leavening” the structures - for Cursillo is rooted in the desire to transform HISTORY — but by leavening the *interpersonal friendships* within any given circumstance and environment.

Eduardo Bonnin felt that people make and shape history and by transforming the person through friendship, history will be transformed from the inside out thereby transforming environments and all of life’s circumstances.

By our planting and watering seeds of friendship within our environments, we can create the vertebrae and the leavening needed to move the Precursillo of today, to the Postcursillo of tomorrow, when the world will be restored to Christ and the Kingdom of God among us. Our Leaders’ Manual states, “*The Cursillo Movement, through the experience of the founders, discovered that friendship can be put at the service of Christ and the Church while at the same time meeting the needs of individuals to be part of a community.*”

The Cursillo leader makes use of friendship to make his friends, friends with Christ.

The linkage of Christian friends to maximize their potential to live the life of grace is made possible through Group Reunion and Ultreya.

The Secretariat is a group of friends that live the Cursillo method in order to remain true to the Charism of Cursillo; and the School of Leaders is the reunion of leaders, that illuminates and encourages our restlessness with the best means possible: friendship.

Thus, in Cursillo, we are called to create a “*world of friends*” within our ordinary lives and environments to transform the world.

Let’s look briefly at *Pre-Cursillo, Cursillo Weekend and Post-Cursillo* because every aspect of these three phases is about friendship with self, Christ and others and thus allows us to “*make friends, be friends and bring our friends to Christ.*”

Friendship in the Precursillo:

Precursillo is about developing a relationship that will grow into friendship with time. It is by way of personal contact that we *make a friend*.

Christian friendship is not about seeing the person as a number or another application but rather as a person with dignity and respect in the image and likeness of God.

If Christian friendship exists in the Precursillo, it will carry over to the Postcursillo and the Sponsor will know: how his friend thinks, what he wants, and how he acts *which correspond* to his mind, his heart, and his will.

Friendship in the Cursillo - 3 Days, 3 Encounters and 3 Friendships:

The Cursillo Weekend continues the process of *making a friend, being a friend and bringing our friend to Christ.*

Friendship: Encounter with Self

It is here that we come to know ourselves as we are, with potential and with limitations, and we are able to befriend ourselves as we learn to accept ourselves as friends of Jesus Christ.

Friendship: Encounter with Christ

It is here when light streams in. Grace enters the soul. Love massages and causes the heart to swell. A new world opens up before the eyes. This is when the friendship encounter with Christ begins!

Friendship: Encounter with Others

It is here when a friendship encounter happens quite easily between the team and our new brothers and sisters. However, for this friendship to take place, the team must allow the candidates to come into their lives by sharing themselves with the candidates.

My sisters and brothers, friendship does not end during the Cursillo weekend; rather it is intensified through conversion throughout our fourth day. God creates these people we call friends. And it is God who will grow our friendship following the conversion process.

Friendship in the PostCursillo:

Postcursillo is designed to facilitate the nurturing of those three essential encounters with Christ that took place on the Cursillo, so that they grow and develop into true Christian FRIENDSHIP - friendship of the individual with one self, with Christ and with our brothers and sisters.

In the Cursillo Method, the key to this process of friendship building is the last encounter - *friendship with others*. And more especially, the friendship with those who are INTIMATELY involved in our conversion process - those in our Permanent Group Reunion and ULTREYA.

Friendship Group Reunion

The Group Reunion is a continuation of one's living and sharing the love of God and love of neighbor through friendship. The Group Reunion facilitates the continuation of the three encounters - friendships - that the Cursillo brought about: friendship with ourselves, Christ and others.

Ultreya

Ultreya is where each one shares what one has lived. It is where building community takes place; developing and nurturing friendships are strengthened; and encountering pure joy of being with friends are held.

However, we cannot limit our living and sharing of love and Christian friendship to our School of Leaders, Group Reunion, and Ultreyas.

Though these are important to our living the method, and growing as Cursillo Leaders, God still needs us to plant and water the seeds of friendship within our environments to bring the world to Christ.

So, in closing, let us go out in the world and embrace our Charism of Friendship. Let us imitate the evangelizing style of our our Patron St. Paul who, after his conversion, held a deep love and burning passion for the unbelievers, the far away. He said:

The closer we are to Jesus, the more we will recognize Him:

If we listen, we can hear Him in the quiet of our hearts, speaking words of love and affirmation.

If we look, we will see Him in our family and friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ, and the far away around us.

I will now leave you with a quote from our friend Eduardo Bonnin: “We do not pretend to have any recipes to change the history of the past, but we do have the necessary CONVICTION, DESIRE, AND PERSISTENCE, to shape the History of today and tomorrow, into a HISTORY OF FRIENDSHIP, a history of LOVE, and thus give truth to the greatest commandment of all, “To love the Lord your God, with your whole heart, your whole mind and your whole soul, and your neighbor as yourself.”

We have the power to make the world anew through friendship!

Let us go out and plant seeds of friendship. Let us water our seeds with Christian love so that they may bear much fruit for the Kingdom of God.

De Colores and Ultreya!