



Group Reunion and Ultreya

Source: Presented by Holly and John Wentworth at the 27th National Cursillo Encounter held at Trinity University in the Archdiocese of San Antonio – July 29, 2017.

Good afternoon. My name is Holly Wentworth. My husband, John, and I have been married for 47 years. As John would say, we have been dating for 51 years. We have 2 adult daughters: one single and one married who is the mother of our 3 teenage grandchildren. John and I lived our Cursillo weekends in New Hampshire in the spring of 2005.

We all know that there are three phases of the Cursillo Movement; Pre-Cursillo, The 3-Day Weekend and Post-Cursillo. As a review, the essence of the Cursillo movement is as follows: **Christ** is the center of all that we are and do; **The Person** is loved unconditionally by God; **The Method** is the best means which is friendship. We develop an understanding of the essence of Cursillo when we experience the **encounters with Christ, with our self, and with others** as we live our Cursillo weekend.

My talk today will focus on two aspects of the Post-Cursillo phase of the Movement: Group Reunion and Ultreya. First, I will begin with the Group Reunion. The other names that may be used to refer to Group Reunion are Permanent Group Reunion or Friendship Group Reunion. Eduardo Bonín, Cursillos' founder, is quoted as saying: "We have the 3-Day Cursillo so that there will be Group Reunions". By this statement we should understand that the Group Reunion is one of the most important parts of the movement.

God has placed each one of us here to communicate the Good News that Christ loves us. The method of the 3-Day Cursillo conveys this message and prepares us by facilitating a life in Christ right where we are in our daily life. We learn that we can accomplish the communication of living a life in Christ by the best means which is that of **Friendship**. Christ offers us the opportunity of a relationship: a friendship with Him and we are invited to relate to one another in friendship.

The method of the Group Reunion is presented on the 3-Day Cursillo Weekend during the Total Security Rollo on Sunday. We learn that the Group Reunion is the **place**, the **instrument** and the **means** by which we live and shape the truth of our Catholic and Apostolic Christianity. Our efforts are perfected by sharing and planning with our small group of friends. Our group of 3 to 6 friends meet to grow in friendship and grace. In our Group Reunions, we are building on what we learned at our decurias, that is our tables on the weekend. Through our regular Group Reunions, we become better friends and better Christians by our lived experiences as we journey together in a mutual and ever-growing conversion.

Each member of the Group Reunion retains their personality, shares their opinions and is an active member. With the small size, the group can experience the living together more effectively. To become a group, each person freely chooses to be a part of the group. It is important that the group meet regularly. The value of the group must be taken seriously and with sincerity. It is essential

that there be trust in respecting each person's privacy and confidentiality regarding our group sharing.

I am a part of two Group Reunions. The first group is one that I have been a part of since I lived my weekend in 2005. Several members of the group lived their Cursillo weekend with me. We have been in this Group Reunion together ever since. My second group formed after I sponsored a friend for a women's weekend. Following her weekend, we attended an Ultreya together. At the Ultreya, we learned that there were several women looking to form a new Group Reunion due to moves and job schedule changes. The two of us joined together with these women to form a new Group Reunion. Interestingly, one of the other women joining us had been at my table when I was team member for a woman's weekend several years before. The fit was natural and felt right for us so we remained with these women in a new reunion group. In the friendship that is shared in each of these two group reunions, we have found a closeness, an understanding, respect and joy in sharing with each other.

John is in two group reunions as well. His first group began grouping in 2005 immediately following his Cursillo weekend. John's second Group Reunion came about after he sponsored a friend for the men's weekend. Initially, this second group was comprised of John, his friend and two other men from the friend's Cursillo weekend. Over the past couple of years, this group has grown to a total of six after John sponsored two more men for Cursillo weekends.

The method of the Group Reunion is simple and the order of the Group Reunion is outlined in the new Pilgrim's Guide beginning on page 129. The beginning prayer is the Holy Spirit prayer, then an Our Father, Hail Mary and Glory Be. After praying, there is a review the Service Sheet for our Piety, Study and Action. Next is the Moment closest to Christ, Apostolic successes and/or failures, and our Plans. The group Reunion ends in prayer with an Our Father for anyone not present, a prayer of Thanksgiving and finishes with a Hail Mary.

The review of the of the service sheet reminds us of our individual commitment to God. For **Piety**, we look at where we are and measure ourselves as to where we want to be. At Group Reunion, it is only necessary to share if we are fulfilling our commitment regarding our Piety. It is not necessary to share what the commitment is--that is between you and God. For **Study**, we share with the group what we are learning. This helps us to be better and o be more Christian. For our **Action**, we share about the power of love with our self, with Christ and with others. Our **closest moment** is a time when we feel a sense of the love of God in our daily life. It is this moment that is shared with the group.

We will let you know that there are challenges trying to stay true to authentic Group Reunions. As friends, we have to self-monitor if we find ourselves straying. Sometimes we need to ask that a conversation be tabled until after the Group Reunion is over. It is important to be honest about any distraction and /or add on that come creeping in.

To keep the Group Reunion as an authentic Cursillo Reunion Group, it is necessary to keep to the Order of the Reunion. The group needs to resist adapting the order or modifying parts. While the intent may be very good and worthwhile, any changes in structure will result in something other than a Cursillo Group Reunion. The Cursillo Group Reunion is for sharing what is lived by the

love of God and love of neighbor. Our groups help us to be church and help us to be more Christian. We are all called by our baptism to bring about a conversion of ourselves and others as we evangelize and communicate the **GOOD NEWS that God loves each of us**.

Now, I would like to share some examples of what our groups have done to support each other in friendship outside of the Group Reunion.

The meals for our New Hampshire Cursillo weekends are all prepared by Cursillistas. A combination of our group reunions take responsibility to prepare two different meals for each NH Cursillo weekend. While we are preparing the meals, we pray for the Weekend, the Team, and the Candidates.

Here is another example. From our area, several small groups went on a camping weekend that included Christian concerts at the location. One couple in the group had to leave to attend a family funeral and another party was away from the camping area for the day. A heavy rain came through the campsites soaking everything in the tents of these friends. When the sun came out, those of us at the camp site strung lines up to dry the contents of the tents. The friends returned to the camp ground having dry tents, bedding and clothes for that night. On this same weekend, there were quite a few Cursillistas camping. All of us gathered and had an unplanned Ultreya with small group sharing by a campfire.

My husband, John, is unable to attend this Encounter due to a recent unplanned surgery that prevents him from being able to fly right now. Throughout the pre-op and post-op time, our Reunion Groups have been there in friendship and support. There were days when we had long drives for doctor appointments out of state as well as long days of testing. Members of our Group Reunions came by our house to care for our dog to let her out and to check on her food and water. This was especially helpful when we were delayed by the addition of tests, longer appointment times, and unexpected traffic delays.

These same friends assisted us by filling in to cover some of our church ministries. They prayed and made offers of sacrifice for John's healing and recovery. Earlier this month, I was in attendance at the US Bishops Convocation in Florida as one of four representatives for the Manchester Diocese. John was supposed to be a representative as well. Since he had to remain at home recovering, our adult daughters came to stay with him. In addition, several members from our Group Reunion stopped by to visit and to help with our dog. The friends came even though our daughters were there and had everything under control. What a witness to our daughters and others about friendship, support and the power of prayer.

Just as our Group Reunion friends have been there for us, we have been there for them in the joy filled times and in the challenging times. We have travelled together on pilgrimages and attended Catholic conferences together. We have provided transportation, meals and emotional support by just being there for our friends. We have walked together in times of need, through losses of a family member and times of illness. We share fellowship and live out our love of neighbor together: holding one another accountable and holding each other up when necessary. We are trying to live out God's plan for us. In our environments, we witness to those that we encounter as we strive to live a life of grace.

At this point, John was going to speak. Since God has other plans for John today, I will continue and fill in for him to speak about Ultreya.

Each time we recite the Apostles Creed at Holy Mass, we state that we believe in the communion of saints. Do we take the time to think about what it means? In the Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), paragraph 946, it tells us that the "**communion of saints is the church.**" And if we go to the CCC again to define the church, in paragraph 752, we find, "**the word church designates the liturgical assembly, but also the local community, or the whole universal community of believers.**" These three meanings are inseparable.

So, the very definition of church, and of the communion of saints, includes the idea that individual Christians are expected to be part of small or local communities, which in turn are part of larger communities. In the Cursillo Movement, we call these small communities **Group Reunions**, and the larger, **Ultreya**.

From the time of the first Cursillo weekend in Cala Figuera in 1944, to the time of the first numbered Cursillo in 1949 in San Honorato, Cursillistas were quite naturally able to meet and share, because the numbers were not yet large. The group reunion was formalized in 1949, (John's birth-year) when many more Cursillos were held to ensure union with Christ and with brothers (and eventually sisters).

It was then observed that the small group, while essential to the method, did not allow for the coming together of the larger community of Cursillo. A plan was devised to establish weekly collective reunions open to all Cursillistas. The purpose was simply to encourage one another, and to journey together in a joyous atmosphere, knowing they had shared the same weekend experience. At this time the reunion of the groups, the Ultreya was introduced.

We all know that "**Ultreya**" was the greeting used to encourage one another on the way to Santiago de Compostela (The Way of St. James). It was used as a term of encouragement, and a promise to meet again. (Francisco Forteza, History of the Cursillo movement)

Ultreya invites us to go beyond ourselves to meet others, and to build a community; it means being open to God's gift (the presence and the mystery); it is a call to keep going with our heads high, which is a sign of dignity and a full life; it is a call to not give up on the road of our lives no matter what the difficulties, and to spread the joy of Christ to others.

Come on! Ultreya! March Forward! These are the words of Saint Pope John Paul II to the Cursillistas at the World Ultreya in Rome in 2009. *Ultreya! Come on, it's not far now!* This is the message we share when we meet at our Ultreyas.

- To encourage each other in faith,
- To share lives in friendship,
- To live out Christianity within a community through a reunion, and
- To support each other in following the path of everyday life (i.e. normality)

The Ultreya affords the person the opportunity to meet and make friends, those friends who become key in their fourth day journey to revitalize, and to renew. The whole community shares

what each one lives.... the best of everyone. The Ultreya is the place where those who have started the conversion process in a Cursillo can establish those essential and life-giving friendships with others who share their same sense of life. (Eduardo Bonnín, Evangelization through Conversion)

It is the weekly contact with our brothers and sisters who live along the lines that the Cursillo movement has laid out for them. The following list describes what Ultreya is:

- It is the place where one lives, or where one should live what was said at Cursillo.
- It is a meeting place--a hub of Christian life.
- It is a place to get together with our friends who live what is fundamental to being Christian; or if they are not living it out, would like to.
- It is essential to the Cursillo Movement that the Ultreya remains primarily a kind of meeting place where individuals can make new acquaintances, to make and be friends, and to develop friendships of the type that will drive, strengthen, direct and sustain the conversion process and all its unsuspected blessings.
- By the vital and personal experience of the love of God, made present and witnessed to in the lives of others. The constant reminder that God loves you, but also a favorite saying of Eduardo Bonnín — “*We must be happy, but never satisfied*”.
- By discovering one's own vocation and response to the needs of one's personal environment through the witness and support of others--the moveable square meter that I carry with me in my normality.
- By helping others to be integrated in the sanctifying circumstance of a Group Reunion.
- By the efforts of leaders to know, to place, to illuminate and to accompany their friends (Structure of Ideas)

This is the vision and mission of the Cursillo from the beginning - *to find the best possible method of bringing about the conversion* - to move the person from where they are to where they could be; from human to fully human; from alive to fully alive in recognition, acknowledgement, and acceptance of their true identity and dignity as beloved children of God.

The purpose of the Ultreya lies in promoting what the Founder calls the social focus of Cursillo. *We must try to know as many people as well as we can.* Let me say that again. *We must try to know as many people as well as we can.* It supports the Cursillo pillars of the *person and friendship*.

At each Ultreya, each person must be valued. We must give each person the value he or she has, and to do that we must know them better.

- When we go to the Ultreya as real (authentic) people to encounter real people--that's when the journey with others begins. **We simply want Christ in the other to shine--that's all.**
- We must go to Ultreya with this on our minds: **What good things can I get from others, and what can I give to others? What is my very best?**
- At the Ultreya one lives and shares the same climate as found on the weekend.
- The leaders contribute to this favorable climate because they have embraced the Cursillo method of joy and friendship.

Eduardo Bonnín has referred to the leaders at an Ultreya as the spokes inside an umbrella--they are there but cannot be seen.

- The climate is also supported by God's grace and the prayers of many.
- The climate mirrors the degree of our conviction--that what we are living is true and that what we discovered in Cursillo is the truth.
- The Ultreya is characterized by contact among people--just as they are--their true selves--this is the only way to sincerely share our lives and become friends.
- Friendship: "It is in the witnessing environment of the Ultreya, however, where those who have started their conversion process can meet and develop true friendships with other like-minded people on their journey." (Eduardo Bonnín, Evangelization through Conversion)

The mission of the Ultreya is to make Christianity the backbone of society--to be as the heart is to the person. The person is never separated from the circumstances of his or her life. Therefore, when Cursillo speaks of the environment it wants to change; it does not mean the structure, or organizations, the climate or culture of any particular circumstance of life, but the circumstance itself and people within it.

“By cultivating and nurturing true interpersonal relationships, and warmest of these is Friendship, within all of life's circumstances or environments, we create the vertebrae and the leavening, that is needed to move the Post-Cursillo of today to the Post-Cursillo of tomorrow, when all things shall be restored to Christ and the Kingdom of God that is already with us will be revealed through friendship and love in all its glory.” (Eduardo Bonnín, Evangelization through Conversion)

Let's think back to when we lived our Cursillo weekend. On Thursday night during the Introduction rollo, we were asked to portray three things; enthusiasm, dedication, and charity (Love). As we portray these three things, the “**doing**” during those three days was converted into “**being**” (“living”) experience of our piety, study and action. We shared morning prayers and offerings, Mass, meals, rollos and shared at our tables. We visited the Blessed Sacrament together, prayed night prayers and the Rosary. It was the personal contact with each other, which converted that doing into a living and sharing.

Now, let's analyze and compare our daily living with the Cursillo weekend. What is the difference? In reality, there is a difference between the environments of our weekend and those of our post-Cursillo. On the weekend, we were cloistered in little piece of heaven, while in the post-Cursillo the things of the world surround us; it's very different. Nevertheless, our living and sharing in post-Cursillo cannot be different to the sharing of the Cursillo weekend. Our sharing and living should not change as we move from one phase/ place to another.

If our Cursillo weekend is transformed into a perennial Cursillo (into everlasting-for life), then we will continuously strive to actualize Christ in our life. Being a Christian and our Christian actions go hand in hand; the action is a consequence of being. It is similar to St Paul on his way to Damascus - we allow ourselves to be taken down by the Lord, and we ask Him, “what should I do, Lord?” Because like in the Cursillo, everything we do in life is: **Through Christ** - in our work, our family our social life...in our movable square meter. **With Christ** - because He Himself told us that without Him we cannot do anything. “I am with you always, until the end of the world.” **In Christ** - It is He who lives in us as we who make Him transparent in all our actions.

This is our apostolate--this is all our life. This is how we take Christ into our small world (into our environments). It is living in Grace that God's plan becomes a reality and the actualization of

the Gospel in our own existence. This is what we share and partake of in the Ultreya. The Ultreya is sharing and communicating our common faith. It is living the same normality that was lived on the Cursillo weekend, nothing more and nothing less. **Christianity in Action!!**

The following is a witness about Cursillo North of the Notches in NH:

As I mentioned earlier, John and I lived our Cursillo weekends in the spring 2005. Immediately, we joined Group Reunions, and began attending Ultreya the same month. Both have been a very important part of our faith journey ever since.

As new Cursillistas, we experienced an explosion of Cursillo in our parish. Our Pastor lived his Cursillo in 2004, and became a very strong proponent of Cursillo. Many of our fellow parishioners attended Cursillo over the next several years, so we always attended the closings. At that time, there were two men's weekends and two women's weekends each year in NH. That's just the way it was. We became accustomed to expecting these weekends.

It was not until we began attending Regional and National Encounters that we learned that not all Diocesan Movements were as blessed as we in NH are. Also, we came to know that parts of New Hampshire were not very active, especially above the notches in the White Mountains of our state.

In the fall of 2013, the NH Secretariat, with the support of Fr. Marc, our Diocesan Spiritual Advisor for Cursillo, decided to start holding weekends in northern NH in Gorham.

In past years, many Cursillo weekends were held in Bethlehem, NH (north of Franconia Notch), but they ceased about twenty years ago. A handful of men and women from the north had attended Cursillo weekends in the southern part of NH over the past several years. At the time, there was one active Ultreya which met in the small village of Franconia. The attendance was steady, but small in numbers. Fr. Marc, a native of the north country, wanted much more. He wanted to revitalize this area of our State.

There are many reasons why a Cursillo community fails; leadership becomes burned out or move or die, numbers in the fourth day community dwindle, supportive Pastors and Priests retire or are re-assigned. And then of course there can be failure in one or more of the three stages of Cursillo.

Earlier in 2013 the Region I Service Team had presented a Cursillo de Cursillos (CDC) weekend in New Hampshire. Many leaders of NH Cursillo heard about the essence, the purpose, the mentality and the method of Cursillo. Those bullet points were still fresh in our minds. **“Don't keep the major focus on the weekend. When do you hold a weekend? When you have a functioning Postcursillo. It's not how many applications . . . it's how many friends. Don't overvalue the weekend, and undervalue the Precursillo and Postcursillo. And, watch those deviations.**

From Fundamental Ideas of Cursillo (FICM, 201), “The three stages - Precursillo, Cursillo, and Postcursillo are quite well defined and distinct from one another; however, they are so closely connected that they constitute an organic whole. Hence, each of the three stages must attain its specific objectives if the Cursillo Movement is to accomplish its purpose. A failure in the

functioning of any one of these three stages will have direct consequences on the other two, and therefore on the development of the Cursillo Movement as a whole.” **Don't overvalue the Cursillo Weekend.**

The NH Secretariat agreed that they would need to focus on the development of all three stages of Cursillo in the north, not only the 3-Day weekends. They knew that without a vibrant Fourth Day community, they could not and should not hold any weekends. Period. As the NH Lay Director, John stood strong in slowing Fr. Marc down and shared with him the following quotes from his CDC notes.

First, **“It would be a shame to bring someone to Cursillo, and at its conclusion, to not be able to provide the means to live out what he or she had heard throughout the weekend”.**

Next, to quote Eduardo Bonnín, *“Presenting the loftiness of an infinite ideal without offering at the same time the concrete means to make it a reality in life will always mean sowing utopias in order to consequently harvest inevitable disappointments. Every fulfillment that is worth living requires, together with the loftiness of the ideal, the concrete means to make its dimension attainable.”*

And so, NH Cursillo went to work. It was agreed from the outset that it was essential that we locate the existing Cursillistas, to invite them to once again become active. Also, we wanted to reach those who did not know about Cursillo. To accomplish this, information sessions were held for the community to plan for the three phases of Cursillo (Precursillo, 3-Day Weekend and Postcursillo).

NH Cursillo held Ultreyas in multiple locations in the northern part of NH to inform the Cursillistas in the community of the upcoming fall weekends. Members of the Secretariat; the Rectors, Rectoras and assistants; leaders of the Franconia Ultreya; and willing Cursillistas from southern NH attended the Ultreyas. Active Cursillistas stayed after to answer questions and hand out Cursillo materials. It should be mentioned that the pastors from the two large parishes in northern NH were very supportive of Cursillo.

The first Ultreya was held in Gorham on June 1, 2014 hoping for a few interested people. Over 30 came that night, a blend of existing Cursillistas hoping to become active again, and parishioners wanting to know more about this Cursillo thing. This was to be a teaching Ultreya. We took ten to fifteen minutes at the beginning of the evening to explain Cursillo (and the Ultreya) to those unfamiliar with Cursillo. We then held the Ultreya, explaining as we went along.

The Ultreya leaders and supporters for these evenings were members of the Secretariat, the forming fall teams, and two very good friends from southern New Hampshire, our small group mates. We **are** one big family, aren't we? There were several LONG drives home late in the evenings, always watching for those northern New Hampshire moose.

One Cursillista from Lancaster, along with his two older sons (also Cursillistas) serve as the music ministry in one of the northern parishes, and they provided the music for these Ultreyas. All three would serve on the men's team in the fall; one as Music Minister, and two as Rollistas.

On that first evening, when we broke into small groups of four, John was joined by a woman who had lived her Cursillo weekend decades earlier in New Hampshire, and whose mother had been a Secretariat member. She had served on teams in the past, and would also serve on that first fall women's team. Thank you, Jesus.

Four teaching Ultreyas were held throughout the north country, over a period of about ten weeks. The "Road Shows" as we called them, had an average attendance of 30 each time. There was a mixture of existing Cursillistas and newcomers. Signup sheets were used to record names and contact information.

Some of the existing Cursillistas came more than once, thrilled to be grouping on any level for the first time in years. We asked them to consider signing up to help with the behind-the-scenes work of the weekends, such as helping in the kitchen, and with Palanca. They did, in good numbers.

It was stressed that the Ultreyas and the weekends would be ongoing, not simply a one-time affair. The Secretariat was blessed that the Pastors in those two large parishes supported these weekends and Ultreyas, and they continue to do so. Our friends, the leaders of the Franconia Ultreya, both served as assistants for the fall weekends. The teams were comprised of a majority of Cursillistas from below the notches, with a few from the north on each team. Interestingly, John does not remember any "no's" when asking men to serve on the weekend.

We recall Fr. Kyle Stanton, the Spiritual Advisor for these first fall weekends, saying at the first team meetings that he considered the north country's poverty to be the biggest challenge we faced. He was not referring to the financial or even the spiritual, but to the lack of active Cursillistas, the fourth day community. We have not forgotten his words. He also emphasized that the poverty would also present opportunity for the Cursillo community to grow.

The application process went well. Some of those existing Cursillistas brought a friend or two to Christ and to Cursillo, and some of the northern team members sponsored candidates. The Pastors from the two parishes also recommended several names, including two newly ordained Deacons. In all, we had three Deacons as candidates on the men's weekend, which was a special blessing for all involved.

The kitchen and meals also presented interesting challenges. At the Sarto Center in southern NH, we have a designated kitchen coordinator, as well as seasoned meals teams. Not so in Gorham.

As part of my Palanca, I stepped forward, and offered to coordinate the meals for both weekends. I was able to recruit enough volunteer help for the meals and Palanca duties. Among the helpers, we had good friends from our parish, and a friend who simply wanted to help me out cooking. Again, it worked.

The weekends both went very well. As a good friend and small group brother of John's often reminds us, as long as we remember who is driving the bus, and we leave the weekend in His hands, the work will be done. Fourteen (14) Men and twenty-seven (27) women attended those first weekends as candidates in October and November 2014.

At the women's weekend closing in November, there were in excess of 100 Cursillistas in the Church Hall in Gorham, some from the south, but the majority from the North. John remembers looking over at Fr. Kyle at one point, thinking about his statement at that first team meetings, and how poverty brought about opportunity. John was reminded of one additional bullet point from his Cursillo de Cursillos notes. **“Don't ever lose your capacity to be amazed.”**

We have now held weekends in the north country for the past three years, and in excess of 100 Cursillistas have lived their weekends in Gorham. It has also been a special joy to see Cursillistas who had lived their Cursillos in the 1990's finally have an opportunity to serve on teams for the first time, and they serve well.

We are pleased to report that there are now three Ultreyas ongoing in the north country since the fall of 2014 and their attendance continues to grow. As the fourth day (the Postcursillo) community has become stronger, teams of other Cursillistas have come together to help in the role of Ultreya coordinators. The northern NH communities are blessed with the support and personal witness of their clergy who are Cursillistas as well.

Has it been a smooth ride? Of course not. Have there been obstacles and challenges? Of course! And we know there will be more. Has the Charism of Cursillo been spread in northern NH? YES!

Has it been worth the effort building up the Postcursillo which generates the Precursillo and in turn Precursillo generates the 3-Day Cursillo Weekend? Absolutely!!