



Secretariat and School of Leaders: Reaching a Unity of Purpose and Understanding

Presented by John Ciliberti, Region VI English Coordinator at the 28th National Cursillo Encounter held at Seattle University in the Archdiocese of Seattle – August 18, 2018.

Introduction

In Cursillo, we have come to understand that achieving a “unity of purpose and understanding” of the Foundational Charism is not only necessary, but essential. However, to fully grasp the meaning of this “unity of purpose and understanding”, we need to explore the ‘how and the why’ of the Foundational Charism.

The two operational structures of the Movement, the School of Leaders and the Secretariat are indivisible, each one is dependent on the other and neither can function properly without the other. “Already at the birth of Cursillo it was foreseen that the growth of the Movement and its development would require some structures to preserve the essence of Cursillo; these structures are the Secretariats”. (Eduardo Bonnín, Secretariat Rollo)

Let us begin by briefly reviewing the intent or purpose of the Secretariat and School of Leaders and then we can review some specific features of the Foundational Charism that can facilitate a “unity of purpose and understanding” within these structures, the Secretariat and the School.

The Secretariat

The Diocesan Secretariat is a “Service Unit” for the Movement. Therefore, the Secretariat is not about “control”, but about “service”; it is not established to be served by all, but to serve those who serve most and best. In this sense, a Secretariat cannot be thought of except as a “summit Group Reunion,” composed of clergy and laypeople – men and women – and which takes the Cursillos as an authentic and apostolic plan, to be programmed and carried through with the idea of the greatest efficacy of souls in mind. (Structure of Ideas)

The Secretariat can be described as that group of leaders – priests and lay persons who, presented by the Cursillo community (the School), commissioned by the hierarchy (Bishop) in order to orientate, animate, and serve the Cursillo Movement, so that it might be all and only that which it ought to be. (Fundamental Ideas)

The Diocesan Secretariat is a group of leaders who are responsible for the proper functioning of the School of Leaders and the Movement. It ensures that the School fulfills what it is commissioned to in each of its essential phases of the Movement; the Precursillo, Cursillo, and Postcursillo. It ensures the unity in the message and the freedom of the Cursillistas. (Leaders’ Manual)

The Founder's Vision - The Secretariat exists in order to:

- simplify,
- facilitate and,
- make possible the living of everything that is fundamentally Christian, and
- to be the guardians of the purity of the Cursillo Charism.

As such, the members of the Secretariat are the *servants of the servants*; their role is to be one of simple service to the Movement. Unfortunately, all too often, it becomes a place of prestige, power, and control instead of the place where committed leaders act together to find ways to guide the Movement, themselves being leaven as the Cursillistas are leaven in the world.

The Secretariat and the School of Leaders never come together simply to do something, but always first and foremost to be something together:

- to be Christian, because Christ and His grace is what leads the way to the Father (eternity),
- to be friends, because friendship is foundational in Cursillo,
- to be servants, because as leaders we have decided to serve Christ and His Church through the gift of Cursillo,
- to be authentic, because to be the true person God created brings real meaning to our life,
- to be apostles, because in baptism we were sent to communicate the Good News of God's love to others.

As Cursillo leaders, as Secretariat members, we must keep the flame of the vision of the Founder burning brightly in order to illuminate the path that leads to Christ. A typical Secretariat is made-up of eight roles: A Lay Director, Spiritual Advisor, School of Leaders Chair, Precursillo Chair, 3-Day Cursillo Chair, Postcursillo Chair, Treasurer and Secretary. (Leaders Manual)

The School of Leaders

The term School of Leaders is one that seems to cause confusion. What does the term "School" mean in the Cursillo mentality? The second word that causes equal misunderstanding; is "Leader".

The word 'School' tends to bring up visions of students sitting at their desks, listening to a person, or persons, teaching something to them. In the context of Cursillo, nothing could be further from the truth. It is not and never has been a 'School' where someone, such as a veteran Cursillista, shares their acquired knowledge. In the context of Cursillo, we are referring to a "School of Thought", where people who are already knowledgeable to a lesser or greater degree, have come together to share some ideas and philosophies. Together they explore and deepen their understanding and gain wisdom and insight from one another. Together the participants come to a "unity of purpose and understanding" of Cursillo.

Belonging to the School of Leaders does not make one a leader, and similarly, all the leaders are not necessarily in School. In fact, some of the best leaders may never attend and their reasons for not doing so are their own. If this is the case, we should never make a person feel guilty because we feel they should be attending the School of Leaders. The important thing is that everyone should feel free to enthusiastically make their contribution wherever the Lord calls them and only the person and God can know where that is.

Every Movement needs a core group of leaders who have dedicated themselves to deepening their understanding of the Cursillo Movement. These are people who want to get to the bottom of the mentality, purpose, and method because they want to understand the WHY of things. Well-schooled leaders act as leaven within the Movement. They do not teach by preaching but rather by being living witnesses to the very essence of the Charism.

The School of Leaders is a “*group of friends*” that individually and collectively have faith in Christ. They have placed Him in the axis of their person to let Him lead their lives and they identify with the Cursillo Movement and live Cursillo with a heavy dose of constancy in their personal life.

And collectively, these leaders want the love of God to reach as many people as possible, so naturally, they want to be part of Christianity in action. Therefore, they want to learn more about the Cursillo method and collaborate with each other to achieve its purpose, i.e. that the joyful news that God loves us may reach all people.

From the very beginning, the School of Leaders has been a place where ideas are shared and discussed. The School is first and foremost the place where the leaders learn to deepen their own understanding of living what is fundamental to being Christian and then find ways for the practical application in the Movement as a whole. It is here that the Cursillistas are infused with the vision of the Founder and it is here that they come to understand their own role as leaders.

The School of Leaders is first and foremost, a School of Listening, not teaching. It is all done by a group of friends. Because we are friends, our service to others flows from that friendship and then whenever the leaders in the School have to put something into action, such as a meeting, workshop, encounter, weekend, etc. it is no longer a service, but an act of love from that Group of Friends.

Now let us review some of the specific features of the Foundational Charism. But before we do, there are a couple of questions for us to consider. Do you believe in the Foundational Charism of Cursillo? Do you study it, reflect on it, internalize it and allow it to become a way of life? Let us listen to the following words from our Founder and act on them so we can build a solid foundation for the Cursillo Movement in every diocese.

Understanding the “Charismatic Dimension” of the Cursillo Movement

It is essential for the Secretariats and Schools of Leaders to understand the “charismatic dimension” of the Cursillo Movement by recognizing that in its foundations there is a special gift of the Spirit and not only a purely human initiative. Therefore, participating in the Cursillo Movement because it is inspired by the Spirit, means to live inspired by the Spirit, welcoming, understanding and living the Foundational Charism of Cursillo.

It is necessary to know the Charism, what it is and its specific features. Above all it is necessary to live it: owning the Charism, allowing it to shape our mentality, and drive our actions.

The word charism means gift or present. Charism is a grace that the Holy Spirit gives to those He wants, but not for the recipient who receives the gift, but for the benefit of the entire community and the Church. The Charism, like a seed, germinates everything essential to the Movement: the “why” (Mentality); the “what it is” (Essence), the “what for” (Purpose) and the “how” (Method).

One Movement, One Founder

Bishop Joseph Cordes, President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity interviewed Eduardo Bonnín in Mallorca and established that Eduardo is the Founder of Cursillos in Christianity. You can read about this interview in the document, “Signs of Hope” which is posted on the National Cursillo Website. In September 2006, Eduardo Bonnín had a private audience with Pope Benedict XVI and he too believed Eduardo is the Founder of Cursillo.

If we have a Foundational Charism it is because it is related to the Founder. In 1998, Pope John Paul II and then Cardinal Ratzinger, later Pope Benedict, both addressed the subject about movements in general saying that the people who participate in the movement trace their spiritual lineage to living out the insights, vision, and spirituality of their founder. When we attempt to discredit the founder, we are disrupting the nature of the Charism. Cursillo is a Lay Movement in the Church and Eduardo Bonnín is the Founder.

An Ecclesial Movement of Lay Initiative¹

Without a doubt, the Second Vatican Council, as well as Christifideles Laici, has been instrumental in providing the driving force for “awakening” the lay faithful of Christ. The apostolate of the Good News of the Gospel is for everyone. It is not only a role of the hierarchy, but of everyone. We are all represented by the 72 missionaries referred to by St. Luke because the “Go Forth” of the Gospel is directed and extends to all!

As Cardinal Rylko Stanislaw who served as President of the Pontifical Council for the Laity once said, “It is not easy being a layperson in today’s world” and “to be a layperson in our times requires courage”, nevertheless, it is the time of the laity, because “the laity are irreplaceable in the task of evangelization.” The new evangelization will be done primarily by lay people or it will not be done at all!

Having said this, it is important for the Secretariat and School to arrive at a unity of purpose and understanding that Cursillos in Christianity is a Lay Movement. It is from this lay apostolate, that in the 1940’s, the essence, purpose and the basis of its method originated after a thorough study of the environment.

The idea was made known to the “ordained” and they blessed Cursillo with both hands. Eduardo Bonnín emphasized that Cursillo is an ecclesial movement of lay initiative in which priests contribute in their primary role. He went on to say, Cursillo can only persevere and grow with a perfect and intimate union between laity and priests.

“The Cursillo Movement is a movement in the Church, not for the Church, but rather for the world, in the same way that the Church herself is. As part of the Church, it needs priests and lay people in it who, in addition to a constant dialogue, must be faithful to and not distance themselves from the Foundational Charism.” (Signs of Hope, An Interview with Eduardo Bonnín conducted by Bishop Josef Cordes, President of the Pontifical Council, 1997)

¹ Study of the Charism, Chapter 7

The Essence² and Divine Purpose of Cursillo

It is important for the Secretariat and School to arrive at a unity of purpose and understanding that the **essence** of the Charism of Cursillo is Jesus Christ, the Person and the Method of Friendship.

a. *Jesus Christ*

It is imperative that our Secretariats and Schools get to know our Founder's thinking, that is, to know his writings, to read his ideas published in books and familiarize ourselves with a message that somehow, even today, indicate 'why' the Cursillos are what they are: "a reality not yet realized". Eduardo's thoughts, his index cards, writings, books and phrases should serve to make the Cursillos an accomplished reality.

Eduardo Bonnín often said he was an "Apprentice Christian", who dedicated his life to the proclamation of God's love, always valuing people through friendship. Eduardo devoted his entire life to Cursillo. Therefore, we can say that the basis of his thinking and the development of the Cursillos' mentality, essence, purpose and method is in this "new" novelty, which we can call Eduardo's tripod: *Christ, the person and friendship*. These are the three basic principles that guided his entire life.

The Christ we proclaim today is identical to the one we have been proclaiming since the first Cursillo in 1944. And this Christ is none other than the Christ of the Gospel and the Church; that is, the *living, normal and near Christ* that we have always tried to embody, live and proclaim with conviction and enthusiasm at our Cursillo weekends.

Eduardo lived and exemplified a Christ who is alive, normal, and near.

Christ is alive because he is the Resurrection and every person can be resurrected when they accept him. To the extent we consider Christ our purpose and orientation, all of life, ours and the life of others gradually begins to make sense.

Christ is normal because he accompanies us in the normality of our life. He is present in the ordinary things of everyday life, in the family, workplace, leisure, our environments, etc. We can turn to Him in our most difficult times, but also in our times of joy.

Christ is near because He became one of us and has come to participate in our human condition. He is with us wherever we are and is near to others when we are not near to them. Being near means that Christ is in me, in you, in everyone. It is faith and grace that makes us conscious of his presence.

b. *The Person*

In Cursillo the person is the focus of our concern. We see the person as a *being* for love. Many people feel alienated from the Gospel because we, Christians, have not managed to convey to them — through friendship — that the love they are seeking is within their reach, within themselves and in their brothers and sisters.

The concept of "person" is undoubtedly one of the essential constituents of Cursillos' foundational thinking. The person is the reflection, the expression, and the splendor of God's

² Eduardo Bonnín Aguiló 100 Years: Biography & Mentality

specific plan for the human being. Being a person is a reality always open to becoming more of a person and a better person.

A person is one who knows he is capable of loving and worthy of being loved. The concept that Cursillo proposes is focused on helping the person discover their personal worth by examining who they are and their capacity to love and be loved and not because of their power, their knowledge, or their possessions.

Cursillo acts as ferment in a person, stimulating their life. It expands and widens their vision and establishes and affirms their conviction. It motivates and stimulates their decision and makes perseverance pleasant, attractive and achievable. The Cursillo Movement has enabled millions of men and women in the five continents to discover the value of being a person and the importance to cease being a mere individual.

“He who truly seeks his best self, seeks God, and he who truly seeks God, finds himself.”
(Eduardo Bonnín)

c. *The Method of Friendship*

Friendship is the genuinely human and evangelical form of communication among people. It is God’s way of relating with people and it is the best way possible for a person to relate both with God and with others.

Man (in a generic sense), in his steady advancement, has managed to discover and invent many things, but none of these things have been able to surpass the happiness brought to a person through the joy of friendship.

It is obvious that Cursillo did not invent friendship; it existed many centuries before the start of Cursillo. But it is also true that the essence and purpose of Cursillo can only be understood and experienced in a climate of true friendship. Some people try to learn friendship by studying, but it can only be understood by loving.

Our Movement, by the grace of God and the prayers of many, attempts to connect, communicate, and create friendship among Christians who strive to live their faith in spirit and in truth.

Friendship is basic in Cursillo. It is so basic and so essential that each stage of Cursillo facilitate encounters that generate friendship, that generate a desire to be friends or to become better friends. The only way we can communicate the alive, normal and near Christ is through friendship with others. Cursillo is about being a friend by being a true person.

The 3-Day Cursillo is a witness to Christ and an offer of friendship; however, this method of friendship is not exclusive to the 3-Days of Cursillo since it originates in the Precursillo, is intensified in the Cursillo and confirmed in the Postcursillo.

It is important for the Secretariat and School to arrive at a unity of purpose and understanding that the **purpose** of Cursillo is to make possible the living and sharing of what is fundamental to being

Christian. This means that the intent of Cursillo is to bring the Good News of God's love to every person, especially to those who are far away from Christ and his Church, since the experience of the love of God is the basic element in living what is fundamental to being Christian.

Every person is offered the opportunity to live what is fundamental in their ordinary life, in their environment, sharing this life with others through friendship and therefore, transforming their environments through friendship and a personal witness of the Good News of God's love.

The Cursillo Movement proposes a new way of life for the person that arises from the encounter with self, with Christ, and with others and continues in the living of what is fundamental to being Christian.

The Method of Cursillo in Light of the Charism³

The method makes attaining the purpose of Cursillo possible. The method is divided into three stages, Precursillo, 3-Day Cursillo and Postcursillo, which form a perfect unity. In order for the Movement to be authentic and achieve its purpose, the method must be applied as a whole, and be consistent with the specific purpose of each stage. Friendship is basic in Cursillo; therefore, it is important that each stage facilitate encounters that generate friendship, that generate a desire to be friends or to be better friends.

When it comes to the real purpose of the Movement, it is apparent that none of the stages of the method can be disassociated from the other. The unity and integrity of the stages is essential for the purpose of the Cursillo Movement since it is what enables the person to experience what is fundamental to being Christian in his concrete reality and then, to leaven his environment with the Gospel.

1. The Precursillo

The Precursillo phase is vital for the evangelizing effectiveness of the method. It is an essential phase which encourages and prepares the person through an offer of friendship for an encounter with self, Christ, and others in the Cursillo Weekend experience so that the person might live a new life according to this triple encounter which continues in the Postcursillo.

2. The 3-Day Cursillo

The 3-Day Cursillo Weekend is a specific and concrete form of kerygmatic evangelizing activity, described as "jubilant communication of being Christian," in which the living and sharing of what is fundamental to being Christian is encouraged, a profound personal experience that can determine a new orientation of the life of the person.

3. The Postcursillo

The Postcursillo is an essential phase to enable each person to live constantly what they have experienced during the Cursillo Weekend (what is fundamental to being Christian), by means of a process of a conscious, growing and shared conversion. By being Christian and Church in the world, the person transforms and renews this world from within according to God's plan.

³ Articles of Operation, November 2017

Other Specific Features of the Charism of Cursillo

a. *The method of Cursillo is a Kerygmatic proclamation.*

The method is based on the joyful proclamation of what is fundamental to being Christian, made by witnesses in a natural way and preferentially addressed to those who are far away (distant) from God. Here are the essential characteristics of Kerygma:

- The Kerygma is the proclamation of God's love manifested in Jesus Christ,
- The Kerygma is centered in Christ,
- The Kerygma is a joyful proclamation of the Good News,
- The Kerygma is made by the witness of life of people who have encountered Christ,
- The Kerygma aims at conversion, a desire for change that gives meaning to life.

Kerygma becomes effective through:

- Prayer and Palanca - which are characteristic elements in the method of Cursillo.
- Personal Witness – the way to communicate the message of Cursillo is to witness since the witness of life is the essential first step for further action.
- Friendship – Cursillo is about making friends to make them friends of Christ.

b. *Grace*

The gift of God in Christ that is offered to each person fully so that they may live in communion with Him. “We become fully alive as persons as we live the life of grace” (St. Irenaeus).

c. *The Triple Encounter*

What has begun in the Precursillo is meant to be intensified in the 3-Day Cursillo and deepened throughout our 4th Day, the rest of our lives.

- An Encounter with Self – the encounter with self is the first step towards personal fulfillment and key to any other encounter.
- An Encounter with Christ – this encounter is the core of Christian life. Cursillo is not so much about talking about Christ, but about living Christ. Our ideal is to achieve what St. Paul tells us in Galatians 2:20: “It is no longer I who lives, but Christ who lives in me”. That is why Cursillo lives and exists through Him, with Him and in Him.
- An Encounter with Others – this encounter is a natural consequence since Christian life is life shared and relational.

d. *The Person of Cursillo*

The preferential, but not exclusive person of Cursillo is the “distant” or the “faraway” (physically far away from the Church or by Christian criteria) because basically whether people are integrated in the life of the Church or not, what we have in common is, we have the same aspirations, the same restlessness and the same things that we fear.

e. *Leavening of Environments with the Gospel*

Environment is the person and his or her circumstances. This is a person-centered definition. The whole understanding of how we approach things in Cursillo is not about changing structures but changing the person. In Cursillo, we change the person through the Gospel and as the person or persons change, as we link them together, then those friendships naturally end

up being contagious and the Kingdom of God becomes a more visible reality. Therefore, the world is changed one friendship, one relationship at a time.

In Closing

In order to reach a “unity of purpose and understanding” of the Foundational Charism in our Secretariats . . . Schools of Leaders and in the Movement as a whole . . . we will need to study and familiarize ourselves with Eduardo’s life, his writings, his books, the Foundational Charism and the history of Cursillo. This will help us to know the Foundational Charism, what it is and its specific features. And above all, it will be necessary for us to live and share the Charism and allow it to shape our mentality and drive our being and our actions.

So, here is a way to make the Foundational Charism a lived reality in us, in our Diocesan Movement, in our Schools of Leaders, in our Group Reunions and Ultreyas. Simply stated, in our moveable square meter at this exact moment!

First, explore and deepen your understanding of the Foundational Charism through a Cursillo de Cursillos and by reading and studying the Cursillo literature, especially: The Study of the Charism, Eduardo Bonnín: An Apprentice Christian, Cursillo History and Memory, Structure of Ideas, My Spiritual Testament, Revised Translation of 1st Conversations at Cala Figuera, Eduardo Bonnín: 100 Years –Biography and Mentality.

Second, deepen your prayer life and your relationship with Christ which can lead you to a discovery of the joy of living and sharing the Foundational Charism with others through love and friendship.

Third, be faithful to the Gospel, attentive to the person and aware of the reality that surrounds you.

Simply stated: To live Cursillo is to live the Gospel!

Let us recognize the one Founder, let us treasure the Charism and let us read the signs of the times in light of the Charism!

De Colores!