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A STRATEGY FOR REDEVELOPING AND REVITALIZING HOUSTON
PRESBYTERIAN CURSILLO

A MINISTRY FOCUS PAPER
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY
FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE
DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

BY

KRISTIN M. HUFFMAN
NOVEMBER 2010

ABSTRACT

A Strategy for Redeveloping and Revitalizing Houston Presbyterian Cursillo

Kristin M. Huffman
Doctor of Ministry
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
2010

Since 1997, Houston Presbyterian Cursillo (HPC) has been a beautiful and effective tool that God has used to help transform many people's lives. However, in the past few years, HPC has begun to show signs of decline and waning interest. The goal of this ministry focus paper is to explore and enhance the effectiveness of Houston Presbyterian Cursillo in order to increase the lasting transformation of participants as evidenced by personal spiritual growth and missional servanthood. My hope is to help HPC begin the process of redevelopment and revitalization.

This paper contains three major sections. The first section tells the story of Cursillo from its origins and describes the current context of HPC. It examines the structure of HPC in the three phases of the movement: Pre-Cursillo, the Weekend, and the Fourth Day, and discusses the strengths and weaknesses of HPC, drawing significant insight from the results of a survey of HPC administered for this project.

The second section studies the biblical and theological foundations of Cursillo: personal spiritual transformation and the call to be part of bringing about God's Kingdom on earth, showing that the movement is grounded in the mission and purposes of God, applicable to every time and culture.

Finally, in an effort to see more definitive change in participants of Cursillo and in the movement itself, the third section suggests a strategy and process for incorporating changes in the ministry of the HPC.

Houston Presbyterian Cursillo has a unique and valuable ministry that must not be lost. It is hoped that the changes offered in this paper will help HPC continue helping people learn how to live as transformed followers of Jesus and be part of changing the world for Christ.

Content Reader: Stephen D. Bryant, D.D.

Words: 313

To my husband, Mike, for showering me with love and encouragement, and to my children, Mark, Becky, and Lizz, for filling my life with joy

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INTRODUCTION

C. S. Lewis created a world of mystery and wonder in the tales of Narnia, a place separated from the real world, where good battled evil, where Jesus was personified by the magnificent lion, Aslan, and where boys and girls were invited to live life a new way. In the 2008 Disney/Walden Media movie about Narnia entitled *Prince Caspian*, the main characters, Lucy, Peter, Susan, and Edmund, were transported back to Narnia where they had reigned as kings and queens thirteen hundred years before. At the end of the film, after an exciting adventure and a victory over evil, the children prepare to return home. Going home is tolerable to the youngest, Lucy, only because she is already anticipating her next visit to Narnia, where Aslan and more exciting adventures are sure to greet them. Aslan shocks her when he tells the older two children they will never return to Narnia, saying that they had learned enough to live their lives in their real world. The truth is that God encounters his people in real and dramatic ways, filling them with his power and purpose, in order to send them to live in their real worlds.

Living in the real world, the place of sin, brokenness, and rebellion, along with beauty, purpose, and joy, is a challenge to everyone. The first words of M. Scott Peck's best-selling book, *The Road Less Traveled*, are "Life is difficult."¹ Created by God as the home for his creation and the place in which he would work out his purpose, this world has become a place of frustration, desperation, and independence from God. Yet, God has

¹ M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York: Touchstone, 1978), 15.

spoken into every culture and time, bringing shards of light into the darkness. God has used people, both as individuals and as a gathered body, to accomplish his plan for the redemption of the world. The Holy Spirit has breathed life into the creation in movements of grace in every time and place. He has not given up on the world yet.

One of these movements of grace is Cursillo. Out of a culture of darkness and despair in Spain in the mid-twentieth century, a beacon of light and hope emerged. Seeing that the culture and society were dead to Christ and that the Church was compromised by its ties to the dictatorship, a few young men were inspired to begin to train others to be Christ-like leaders. They had a dream of transforming their culture to one that honored and served Christ. These young men, led by Eduardo Bonnin, developed a method of training, discipling, and encouraging others to lead lives of devotion to Christ and to work to evangelize and change their environments for Christ. The Cursillo movement has grown and spread throughout the world. Adaptations reflecting different theologies and practices have enabled the movement to reach more and more people.

In the sixty years since the first official Cursillo was held in Mallorca, Spain, God has used Cursillo as a vehicle to perform miracles in countless souls, to bring renewal to churches and to inspire new faith in many parts of the world. The best of Cursillo has brought life and light and accomplished its purpose of training leaders to evangelize the world by changing their environments for Christ. In the words of Pope John Paul II to members of Cursillos de Cristianidad in July 2000, “Your presence here, so varied and festive, shows that the tiny seed planted in Spain more than 50 years ago has become a great tree laden with fruits of the Spirit.”²

² Pope John Paul II, *The Pope Speaks* 46, no. 1 (January-February 2001): 12.

Alongside the beautiful and powerful effects of Cursillo, a number of negative elements exist and have raised concerns. Some communities are experiencing lagging interest among people, both those joining and those continuing their involvement in the movement. Others exhibit failure to fulfill the vision with their lack of leadership and influence in their environments. Most communities in the West are not able to engage many young adults, and some are not reaching people of different ethnic or socio-economic groups. In its worst expressions, Cursillo, populated with normal, sinful human beings, has the potential of becoming ingrown, self-focused, manipulative, exclusive, and even harmful. The movement has unfortunately been the motivator for separation from the church, splits within churches, and even fractured relationships within families.

The observation of these negative elements of Cursillo has prompted examination of the movement by Cursillo leaders. The Houston Presbyterian Cursillo Council is seeking help in understanding the current state of the movement and possible ways to reform and renew Cursillo in the Houston community. Their desire is to see Cursillo continue to have a transformative influence on individual people, their churches, and the culture within their reach. The movement in Houston has recently started to decrease in numbers of attendees and has never been effective in reaching young adults. The lack of follow-up by participants in fellowship, ministry, and leadership in Kingdom transformation reflects a departure from the original vision of Cursillo. The Council strongly believes that changes can be made to refocus the movement so that it will be an effective tool for building God's Kingdom. This ministry focus paper is an effort to engage in the study requested by the Council and to propose changes in an effort to redevelop and revitalize Houston Presbyterian Cursillo.

Structure of the Paper

The paper will begin in chapter 1 with a review the Cursillo movement from its roots in Spain to the reality of Cursillo in the USA in 2009, examining the history, purpose, and current context of today. It will trace the expansion of the movement through adaptations based on theology and style. The focus will sharpen with a discussion of the establishment and development of the Presbyterian expressions of Cursillo and will look closely at Houston Presbyterian Cursillo (HPC), one chapter of the National Council of Presbyterian Fourth Day Movements. Finally, chapter 1 will consider today's culture and how Cursillo might address it.

Chapters 2 and 3 will examine the current purpose and structure of HPC and the strengths and weaknesses found therein. Chapter 2 will look at the operation of the pre-weekend activities, the actual weekend, and the follow-up after the weekend. Chapter 3 will review the strengths and weaknesses of the movement, using my personal observations, a survey of the HPC community, reflections by the Permanent Study Group (PSG) representing the Council, and opinions of Cursillistas. This study will illuminate the ways that HPC is neglecting or ignoring the original purposes of Cursillo and the need for change.

The second part will review the biblical and theological themes that undergird Cursillo: the spiritual transformation of people and the call on God's people to change the world for Christ. Chapter 4 will focus on the first part of the purpose of Cursillo, the spiritual transformation of people by God's grace, which is not possible without the power of the Holy Spirit. The first part of the chapter describes the work of the Holy Spirit in the entire process of a person's coming to Christ and in the daily following of

Jesus. To describe the process of transformation, the chapter will use the structure of the five clergy talks concerning God's grace in all aspects of transformation. Chapter 5 will explore the biblical and theological foundations for being sent by God to be part of God's Kingdom work. God's people, individually and collectively, are called to participate in bringing the world to God and to bring help, hope, and light into a dark world. Equipping through the Holy Spirit's gifts, power, and strength, we are propelled out into our environments to change them for Christ.

The final part of the paper will propose a strategy for redeveloping and revitalizing Houston Presbyterian Cursillo. Chapter 6 will synthesize the information gathered from the research and observations of the first five chapters, discussions with individual Cursillistas and parts of the HPC Council, and my own personal observations, and propose changes that need to be made in all phases of the movement. The changes will reflect a commitment to reaching out to the world, with special focus on the younger generation. Chapter 7 will create a process for effecting the changes that need to occur so that HPC will live out the vision and purpose God has given them.

My Experience of Cursillo and the Motivation for This Paper

In a brief explanation, I offer my involvement with the Cursillo movement. I attended a Walk to Emmaus in September 1992 in San Antonio, Texas.³ I was a widow with two young children, an associate pastor at a large church in San Antonio, and in dire need of spiritual renewal. As a pastor, I had been asked to sign application forms and write personal notes for several congregants wanting to attend such weekends, but had

³ Walk to Emmaus is the Methodist expression of Cursillo. Its history and development will be given in chapter 1 of this paper.

never had any personal experience with the movement. I started my weekend with skepticism but, within the first day of the weekend, had moved to relaxation, acceptance, and, finally, to deep renewal. I sensed the presence of the Holy Spirit and the love of God in tangible and transforming ways. I recognized that this movement was a tool that God was using to bring life into dry bones of individuals, the church, and society.

In the next four years, I served as a spiritual advisor for five Walks, learning the method, theology, and character of the movement. At a training event for one of the weekends during a sharing time, a woman shared that Walk to Emmaus had changed her life and she could not wait to return to be on a staff and be immersed in that feeling again. As I listened to the other women, I became concerned that many of them believed that the Walk to Emmaus was their church, their hope, and their family. Little mention was made of God's power and love and sovereignty, the churches they attended, or their work out in the world.

After moving to Houston in 1997, I became involved in HPC. I have served on the local Council as well as the National Council, and I have been on the staff of eleven Weekends. I have watched the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives and have experienced God's immense blessing in my own life in new and powerful ways. Serving on these Weekends and being involved in the Cursillo community has been a great privilege. I have also observed, along with the wonderful benefits of Cursillo, the dangers of the movement in HPC just as I did in San Antonio. Many Cursillistas have placed the focus of their worship, community, and service on Cursillo, rather than on God, the Church, and service to the world.

Presbyterian Cursillo is a little like Narnia. People who attend a Cursillo Weekend feel as if they have been transported to a marvelous place of grace, joy, and peace. They sense the presence of the Holy Spirit and come to know the love and forgiveness of Jesus in a new and often dramatic way. Many times, they do not want to go home and live in their real worlds of trouble, heartache, fear, and distraction. However, God does not send people to Narnia for Narnia's sake. He sends them there for an encounter with him—a time of teaching, training, and transformation—making them ready to live life in the real world for him. With God's grace and power, Cursillo might be this place of both transformation and sending.

PART ONE
HISTORY AND CONTEXT

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORY OF CURSILLO

Throughout salvation history, God has confronted the culture of the day with the gifts and energy of his people, bringing light and hope into the darkness of society. Saints, martyrs, prophets, and leaders, lay and clergy alike, have all sought to bring people to new life in relationship with God, a life reflected in godly worship, fellowship, discipleship, and service. The gathered body of Christ, the Church, has been of paramount importance in bringing the world to worship God. Through the Church, countless generations of people have become ardent followers of Christ and have made a huge impact for the Kingdom on the culture of their own day. Sometimes, however, the church has become corrupted by sin and human frailty and lost its ability to be Christ to the world. God has then raised leaders to challenge these religious structures and reform them in order to reach the culture around them for Christ. Into almost every time, culture, and situation, God has breathed new life into the world and the church through creative, and sometimes controversial, renewal movements, both inside and outside the church. He continues to use ordinary people in extraordinary ways to accomplish his plans. Through a group of laymen in Spain, God brought forth Cursillo, a powerful tool that has brought life and light to individuals and to many parts of the world.

Catholic Cursillo: Spain to the World

The first half of the twentieth century brought change and turmoil worldwide. The country of Spain, in its own time of trouble and adjustment, gave birth to a renewal movement, which came to be known as Cursillos de Cristianidad. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) had left the country war-torn and weary, with a government led by Francisco Franco, the dictator who ruled Spain from 1939 until his death in 1975. The government under Franco was authoritarian, conservative, and traditional. In a description of post-Civil War Spain, the author of *Transition in Spain* said, “The forces which had supported him [Franco] now demanded payment for their support. The nobles claimed their lands, the church desired complete spiritual power, the army aspired to domination of the state....”⁴ This reciprocity between the government and the church resulted in the strict censorship of religion, education, and entertainment. Although a fascist country, Spain remained neutral during the turbulent years of World War II as it tried to recover from its own internal conflicts. The established religion was Roman Catholicism, expressed in a formal, impersonal hierarchy, with little evidence of devotion to Christ or exhibition of faith and action. Since the Catholic Church supported Franco’s regime and enjoyed privileges from the government in return, the traditional and biblical principles of Catholicism did not influence social policy, but in fact, were ignored.⁵ The Church and the society had lost their way.

⁴ Victor Alba, *Transitions in Spain, From Franco to Democracy*, trans. Barbara Lotto (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books, 1978), 171.

⁵ William J. Callahan, *The Catholic Church in Spain, 1875-1998* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 381-411.

In the 1940s, in this culture of restriction, domination, and intolerance, a number of Roman Catholic men in Mallorca, Spain, began exploring ways to encourage and train the young men of their city to grow in their faith in Jesus Christ and to become leaders in Christianizing the environments in which they lived. As these men reflected on the state of their country, the way their society reflected little or no influence from the Church, and the movement of the culture away from God and Christian beliefs and values, they were moved to action. “Their solution was a simple strategy: Christianize those people responsible for creating or influencing the structures in society; give a Christian backbone to the world.”⁶ In 1941, they began offering a series of short courses (the Spanish word for courses is *cursillos*) to prepare young men for a pilgrimage to Santiago to Compostela, one of the main centers of Christian pilgrimage. Their journey was repeatedly postponed due to the instability of the country, but these faithful men were not deterred from their mission. They continued to train and encourage young men through these weeklong events. Eduardo Bonnin (May 4, 1917-February 6, 2008), who attended a Cursillo in 1943, was the major influence in the growth of this renewal movement on this small Spanish island.⁷ He and his cohorts were committed to bringing Christ into the center of their seemingly godless society. They shared Christ, prayed, and trained young men to be change agents in the culture in which they lived. By 1948 when the actual

⁶ Reverend Hugh R. Grace. “Cursillo, The Empowerment of Christians,” <http://www.nycursillo.org/cursillo40th.html> (accessed March 9, 2009).

⁷ An obituary article in the *National Catholic Register* 84, no. 8 (February 24, 2008): 6, quoting the national secretariat site, stated, “Numerous laymen and some priests, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, discovered very clearly the fact that laymen, too, in virtue of the sacraments of baptism and confirmation, perform an active role in evangelization.” “...many of our lives would not have the light of the Gospel if you had not been there.”

pilgrimage took place, thousands of pilgrims had participated in these Cursillos. The first official Cursillos de Cristianidad weekend was held in Mallorca in 1949.

In the late 1940s, the Catholic Church in Spain began to notice and to pay attention to this new, increasingly influential movement. In 1947, the Roman Church sent Bishop Juan Hervas, then bishop of Mallorca, to investigate this movement of young men. Seeing the positive effects of these Cursillos, Hervas assigned two priests from Rome to assist the movement and, as a result of his efforts, became known as the Bishop Founder of the Cursillo Movement. Later, the Spanish bishops, under Franco's control, removed Hervas and made an effort to suppress the Cursillo movement. Hervas' successor as Bishop of Mallorca was not a supporter of Cursillo, and the movement there suffered. However, outside of Mallorca, the movement continued to spread throughout Spain and into the world as people experienced the transforming power of Jesus in their lives in a new way and began to reach out to their communities in the name of Christ. In 1953, a Spanish priest traveled to Colombia and held the first Cursillo outside Spain.

Catholic Cursillo Spreads to the World

Following a number of Cursillos in South America, the movement spread to North America in 1957. The first American Weekend took place in Waco, Texas, on May 25, 1957, sponsored by a group of Spanish air cadets who were training there. This Cursillo and others that soon followed were completely in Spanish and only open to Roman Catholics. Cursillo had spread throughout Texas and into Arizona by 1959, and the movement became formalized with the first national convention of spiritual directors taking place that same year. In 1960, the first magazine for Cursillo, *Ultreya Magazine*, was published, broadening the influence of Cursillo to other parts of the country. The

first English-speaking Cursillo, held in San Angelo, Texas, in 1961, sparked the rapid expansion of the English version to California, Indiana, Michigan, and New Mexico. The popularity and effectiveness of this movement was evident in its presence in almost all 160 Roman Catholic Dioceses in the United States by 1981.⁸ The movement spread rapidly, with Weekends taking place on five continents within the next five years. By 2004, there were over five million people who had attended Catholic Cursillo in over sixty countries.⁹

As the years passed, God's work through Cursillo and its positive effects on Catholic churches and communities gained the attention and affirmation of the Vatican. In 1966, at the First World Gathering in Rome, Pope Paul VI encouraged and affirmed Cursillo as an important part of the ministry of the Catholic Church. In 1969, he affirmed the naming of St. Paul as the official patron saint and protector of the Cursillo movement.¹⁰ Pope Paul VI spoke at the first national Italian Ultreya in Rome in 1980, saying, "You have discovered anew the explosive truth of the evangelical message: God, Father of all, comes to us as we encounter him in Jesus Christ to reunite us through the grace of the Spirit in one family which is the Church."¹¹ In 2000, Pope John Paul II, in an address to members of Cursillos de Cristianidad, said,

The theme of this world Ultreya—"Evangelizing the Milieus of the Third Millennium: A 'Challenge' for the Cursillos de Cristianidad"—demonstrates your

⁸ Michael Clark, "Cursillo," http://sites.silaspartners.com/partner/Article_Display_Page/0,,PTID5339%7CCHID28%CCIID142419,00.html (accessed February 9, 2009).

⁹ Cursillo: French Speaking Cursillo in Canada, "Historical Overview," <http://www.cursillos.ca/en/histoire.htm> (accessed February 9, 2009).

¹⁰ Catholic Archdiocese of Canada, Cursillos in Christianity, "Papal Approval," <http://www.cursillotoronto.com/papal.html> (accessed March 17, 2009).

¹¹ Catholic Archdiocese of Canada, "Papal Approval."

effort to re-propose the experience of Christ to the men and women of the 21st Century with new means and enthusiasm. This has become even more urgent, since “whole countries and nations, where religions and the Christian life were formerly flourishing and capable of fostering a viable and working community of faith, are now put to a hard test...as a result of the constant spread of indifference to religion, of secularism and atheism” (*Christifideles Laici*, no. 34).¹²

God continues to use Catholic Cursillo to transform his people and send them into society to be light in the darkness. The National Cursillo Executive Director, Victor Lugo, stated in a telephone interview that approximately five hundred Catholic Cursillos are held in the United States each year, in six different languages (English, Spanish, Korean, Portuguese, Vietnamese, and Filipino).¹³ There are approximately one and a half million Cursillistas in the US and an estimated eight to ten million in over sixty countries worldwide. According to the National Catholic Cursillo website, “Cursillos in Christianity is a movement that, through a method of its own tries to, and through God’s grace manages to: enable the essential realities of the Christian to come to life in the uniqueness, originality, and creativity of each person.”¹⁴ Cursillo’s teaching is intentionally focused on helping participants become empowered to be leaders in their own environments. “Catholics who experience the Cursillo Movement know it is more than just three days of religious instruction. It is an effort to change the spiritual environment, to bring Jesus into the world.”¹⁵

¹² Pope John Paul II, *The Pope Speaks*, 15.

¹³ Victor Lugo, National Catholic Cursillo Executive Director, telephone interview, March 18, 2009.

¹⁴ National Cursillo Center, “The Cursillo Movement: What is it?” <http://www.natl-cursillo.org/whatis.html> (accessed February 9, 2009).

¹⁵ Clark, “Cursillo.”

The Cursillo Movement and the Protestants

As more and more people exhibited deep transformation in their lives and service to God, Catholic Cursillo attracted men and later women of all denominations.

Protestants, who were invited to participate by their Catholic friends, wanted to create similar movements in their own traditions. They, too, saw the urgent need to bring life and renewal to people and churches, and to train leaders to bring transformation to their spheres of influence. In most cases, the different branches of Cursillo were formed in collaboration with the Catholics, with negotiations made for the use of the method and the name Cursillo. In other cases, when the method and focus veered from the Catholic method, the new groups were forced to adopt a different name for their movement.

Episcopal Cursillo

During the course of the expansion of Cursillos de Cristianidad in the late 1960s, a number of Episcopalians attended Cursillo weekends. The first official, three-day weekend in the Episcopal Church was held in 1970, with help from Roman Catholic sponsors in the Diocese of Iowa. Other weekends quickly followed in various locations.

Episcopal Cursillo (also known as a Short Course in Christian Life) is organized under the National Episcopal Cursillo Committee, formed in Atlanta in 1979, under the authority of the presiding and diocesan bishops. Since this movement espouses the goals and method of the Catholic Cursillo, it is permitted to use the name Cursillo. Its goal is "... to bring the world to Christ by empowering adult Christian leaders through the use of

a specific method, which equips and encourages Christians to live out their Baptismal Covenant to serve Christ.”¹⁶

Tres Dias

During the 1960s, other Protestant groups also attended Catholic Cursillos and began to form their own movements. The first ecumenical group to form was Tres Dias, a movement that is open to all Christians regardless of their denomination or affiliation. Tres Dias held its first weekend in November 1972 in New York, following a lengthy and heroic effort by a layperson named David McManigal from the Reformed Church of America. McManigal attended a Catholic Cursillo in 1971, and, sensing the need for a similar weekend for Protestants, repeatedly approached the leaders of the Catholic Cursillo to help him start a similar movement. He was rejected because he chose to be ecumenical, which was a departure from the Catholic model. McManigal was finally allowed to use the materials from Cursillo, but not allowed to use the Cursillo name.

The Tres Dias community grew, spreading first into New England, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania. The National Tres Dias organization was formed in 1980, and the movement is still active with approximately seventy communities in the United States. The movement is also international, having groups in fourteen countries. The vision of Tres Dias is “to identify, train and equip Christian leaders who will spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ in their environments, who will grow in their spiritual life, and, who will demonstrate their love toward one another. Also, to encourage these leaders to assist their churches in carrying out the mission of their churches both locally and throughout

¹⁶ National Episcopal Cursillo, *What Is Cursillo?* (Conway, SC: National Episcopal Cursillo, 2003), 1.

the world for the glory of God the Father.”¹⁷

Walk to Emmaus

As the Cursillo movement continued to gain momentum, the Methodists also began to explore how to offer Cursillo in their denomination. During the 1970s, several Methodists attended either Catholic or Lutheran Cursillos and sought to adapt the Cursillo model to a Protestant audience. The first offering of this adaptation was held in August 1977, quickly followed by the first “official” Upper Room Cursillo sponsored by the Upper Room of the General Board of Discipleship (Nashville, Tennessee). Later that year, the National Secretariat of the Catholic Cursillos wrote to the Upper Room, requesting that they stop using both the name Cursillo and Cursillo materials, which were under copyright. In 1981, the Methodists changed the name to Upper Room Walk to Emmaus, which it retains today.¹⁸

In an effort to reflect Methodist theology and practice and to engage people of all denominations, the Upper Room adapted the talk outlines, the liturgy, and the terminology, using Scripture as the foundation of the Weekend. Their stated purpose is “...the renewal of the Church as the body of the risen Christ in the world through the renewal of church members as faithful and committed disciples of Jesus Christ. Emmaus expands participants’ spiritual lives, deepens their discipleship, and rekindles their gifts as Christian leaders in their churches and communities.”¹⁹

¹⁷ Tres Dias, “Vision of Tres Dias,” <http://www.tresdias.org/f/w.htm> (accessed March 22, 2009).

¹⁸ Robert Wood, *The Early History of the Walk to Emmaus* (Nashville: Upper Room Books, 2001), 43-44.

¹⁹ On-Line Resource Articles, “Emmaus, Cursillo, Chrysalis, Tres Dias, Etc.” http://cnview.com/on_line_resources/walk_to_emmaus.htm (accessed March 24, 2009).

Today, Upper Room Walk to Emmaus has 394 communities in 38 countries with over one million pilgrims attending. Chrysalis, their version of Emmaus for teens and college age young people, has groups in 199 communities in twelve countries. There are thousands of reunion groups of people who meet weekly to learn better how to follow Jesus.

Via de Cristo and Great Banquet

Two smaller movements, both ecumenical, developed due to the efforts of Lutherans and Presbyterians. A group of Lutheran laypeople and clergy attended Catholic Cursillos in the early 1970s and began to seek the establishment of a Lutheran form of Cursillo. The first Lutheran-sponsored weekends, called Via de Cristo (Way of Christ), were held in 1972 in Florida and Iowa. Via de Cristo follows the Cursillo ideals by seeking, "...to inspire, challenge and equip local church members for Christian action in their homes, churches and communities."²⁰ Via de Cristo has held weekends in twenty-five states and several foreign countries. Some Lutherans opted to continue as Lutheran Cursillo, fulfilling the Catholic requirement to not be ecumenical.

The Great Banquet is a smaller branch of Cursillo, mostly focused in the midwestern part of the United States. The First Presbyterian Church in Madisonville, Kentucky, started this group in 1982, following a decade of participation in the local Walk to Emmaus. The group used the Methodist model but focused their weekend on personal discipleship in Christ, a slight departure from the more expanded goal of Walk to Emmaus, which was renewal of the Church. The Great Banquet invites anyone to

²⁰ Via de Cristo, "Who," <http://www.viadecristo.org/who.htm> (accessed March 22, 2009).

attend and has communities in nine states. According to their website, “The focus of the Great Banquet is to know Jesus as Lord and Savior and to make Him known. The objective of the Great Banquet is to continue the 3-day weekend by serving Christ in local churches, homes, and workplaces. To live a life of grace and to respond to higher levels of Christian discipleship becomes the purpose of the Great Banquet.”²¹

Related Developments

In the sixty-plus years of Cursillo, in addition to the denominational and ecumenical movements, other related ministries have developed. Kairos Prison Ministry, offering a Cursillo-type weekend in correctional facilities, began in Florida in the mid-1970s as an expansion of Catholic Cursillo. The National Cursillo office recognized that the prison Cursillos presented unique opportunities and challenges. They recommended that the movement be ecumenical, that it be adapted to the needs of the prison and prisoners, and that it be organized under one central authority. Kairos Prison Ministry International, Inc., is the organization that was formed out of the Florida beginnings. The first Kairos was held in 1979, and the ministry continues in over thirty-three states in the USA and internationally in five countries. The Kairos method is focused on inviting prisoners to enter a personal relationship with Jesus and to live their lives for him, both in the prison and in the future on the outside. Studies have shown the effectiveness of Kairos in the lower recidivism rates of inmates who had experienced Kairos.²²

Other adult movements are LIFE, Vocare, REC, Heart of America Camino,

²¹ Lampstand Ministries, “Great Banquet,” <http://www.lampstand.net> (accessed February 9, 2009).

²² Kairos Prison Ministry International, Inc. “Kairos History,” <http://www.kairosprisonministry.org> (accessed February 9, 2009).

Handicapped Encounter Christ, Cum Christo, and Koinonia. Youth offerings include Chrysalis (Emmaus), Happening (Episcopal), Celebration (Presbyterian), and Kairos for youth, among others. A description of all these renewal movements can be found at a “frequently asked questions” website.²³

Presbyterian Fourth Day Movements

A relative latecomer to the Cursillo Movement is the group known as Presbyterian Fourth Day Movements. The National Council of Presbyterian Fourth Day Movements includes two different and yet closely related groups within the Presbyterian fold, the Presbyterian Cursillo and the Presbyterian Pilgrimage. Over the years, Presbyterians gained experience and knowledge from other Cursillo movements. In the early 1980s, Presbyterian Cursillo started in Charleston, South Carolina, and the Presbytery of the Peaks in Virginia, with the help of contacts in Episcopal Cursillo and Walk to Emmaus. The Charleston-Atlantic Presbytery (of the PCUSA denomination) negotiated an official licensing agreement with the Catholic Cursillo’s National Secretariat of the Cursillo Movement. One of the terms of the agreement was that, to use the name Cursillo, the movement had to be limited to members of the Presbyterian Church. As the movement has grown, almost half of the Presbyterian communities, feeling led to be ecumenical in nature, have chosen to be called Presbyterian Pilgrimage. In most other aspects of the movement, they are very similar to Presbyterian Cursillo and remain connected with Presbyterian Cursillo through membership in the National Council of Presbyterian Fourth

²³ “Cursillo Frequently Asked Questions: with Answers.” http://arcturus.geoffandcarole.co.uk/cursillo/faq/c_faq.html#A2 (accessed April 13, 2009).

Day Movements. Since 1990, this Presbyterian group has grown to twenty-seven communities in thirteen states with an estimated twelve thousand people.

In 1990, Fred Keith, one of the Presbyterian pastors involved in starting the Presbyterian movement, wrote his DMin Dissertation on the Presbyterian Cursillo Movement. “A Critique of the Cursillo Movement and a Manual for a Presbyterian Cursillo Program” was an effort to bring together elements of other Cursillo movements under a Reformed/Presbyterian umbrella.²⁴ The manual continues to be used by most Presbyterian Cursillo communities today. Fred Keith says in the manual,

The purpose of Cursillo is to effect a specific, identifiable, and qualitative response in the participants. That response is the return to their environments, and there serve to re-form those environments after the Kingdom of God. It is a call to conscious and deliberate living of the Christian faith, seeking to make every relationship, every situation, every experience for the manifestation of God’s Kingdom according to the example of Jesus Christ.²⁵

Believing that Christ is to be the main influence and center of society, Presbyterian Cursillo seeks to train Christian leaders in their call to enter into society as change-agents for Christ. All the Presbyterian Fourth Day groups face the challenge of being relevant and effective in the culture of today.

Houston Presbyterian Cursillo (HPC), one of the twenty-seven member groups of the National Presbyterian Fourth Day Movements, was the product of the prayers and the efforts of a few faithful Presbyterians who had a vision to bring Presbyterian Cursillo to Houston. From a very small start in 1995, the number of Houston Presbyterians attending various Cursillos steadily increased, resulting in a vibrant group eager to start their own

²⁴ Fred L. Keith, “A Critique of the Cursillo Movement and A Manual for a Presbyterian Cursillo Program” (Doctoral diss., Columbia Theological Seminary, 1990).

²⁵ Fred L. Keith, *The Manual of the Presbyterian Cursillo*, rev. ed. (Houston: Houston Presbyterian Cursillo Council, 1997), 5. (1988 edition revised by Houston Presbyterian Council).

community. The first Weekend took place in February 1997, and, since then, HPC has sponsored fifty-six weekends, with approximately 2205 people attending. HPC has helped launch four other communities: North Texas, Colorado, Arkansas, and Louisiana.

Cursillo amid the World Today

Although the cultural landscape has changed dramatically since Cursillo began, the need for Christ in people's hearts and in society remains. The culture of 2010 is a strange one, with the lines being drawn in new and unsettling ways, but, just like the culture the first Cursillo addressed, the world today is starving to know Christ and be transformed by him. People are still people: created in God's image and mired deeply in sin, desperately searching for something or someone to fill the place of hopelessness and darkness that lies within them. Cursillo has an incredible opportunity to be a vehicle of light and hope in a day when the church has lost its influence and attraction.

Postmodernism

The Cursillo expressions of today have the same call and opportunity to speak into society as the original founders, although a decade into the twenty-first century, the world has changed dramatically since the inception of Cursillo. Part of the change from the second half of the last century is from what was known as modernism to postmodernism. Describing the recent past, Leonard Sweet said, "'Modern' is but another name for a period in the West dominated by ordering life according to rational, scientific means, the relegation of religion to private choice, and the emergence of capitalism."²⁶

²⁶ Leonard Sweet, *AquaChurch* (Loveland, CO: Group Publishing, 1999), 23.

Reason, rational, scientific, black and white, abstract, and individualism are other words that describe the modernism of yesterday.

Replacing modernism is what is now called postmodernism, a grouping of changes in thinking, behavior, attitudes, and structures. Focusing on the North American culture, Eddie Gibbs, in the book *ChurchNext*, said, “Society at large is in the midst of a cultural shift of seismic proportions, which affects every area of society.”²⁷ No longer governed by the modern emphasis on rational thinking and order, society today exhibits signs of chaos and lack of focus. The world today is unpredictable, chaotic, and ambiguous. According to Wade Clark Roof, “We live in a ‘culture of choice and spiritual exploration,’ which has demographic consequences both in and out of religious arenas.”²⁸ The foundations of social structures, including the church, are cracking under new questions, attitudes, and an indifference to order.

The Church

The effects of postmodernism are seen in religious life and the Church, particularly among young adults. A keen interest in spiritual matters has grown as modern structures have collapsed and people have stopped allowing the traditional Church to dictate how to think about God. People are highly invested in seeking God on their own and exploring theological and spiritual meaning for their lives. For many, the Church has become archaic, irrelevant, controlling, and a place of inauthenticity and suspicion. Exhibiting a pervasive lack of commitment, people are not attending or joining

²⁷ Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 19.

²⁸ Wade Clark Roof, *Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 53.

churches as often, and denominational loyalty is on the decline. Those who are churched move between churches, always keeping their options open. George Barna, leader of the market research group, The Barna Group, reports on the behavior and religious beliefs of Americans in many categories. In one article from his website, dated September 11, 2006, he said, “The research shows that, compared to older adults, twentysomethings have significantly lower levels of church attendance, time spent alone studying and reading the Bible, volunteering to help churches, donations to churches, Sunday school and small group involvement, and use of Christian media (including television, radio and magazines).”²⁹ The church attraction model, effective twenty to thirty years ago, is not bringing in desired numbers, and programs and ministries in traditional churches are decreasing in popularity. Other characteristics of postmodernism lacking in most traditional churches include the search for relationships, the desire to share life and stories, and non-judgmental spirituality.

The church is experiencing the effects of these postmodern shifts in thinking and attitude and addressing them in varying ways. Reggie McNeal, in chapter 1 of *The Present Future*, says, “The current church culture in North America is on life support.” He reports that churches are addressing the problems in the different ways, some actively responding and others ignoring the changing culture of today.³⁰ In the book, *Death of the Church*, Regele and Schulz describe the situation this way, “We find ourselves not knowing how to be the church, because we don’t quite know how we are supposed to live

²⁹ The Barna Update, “Most Twentysomethings Put Christianity on the Shelf Following Spiritually Active Teenage Years,” <http://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/16-teensnext-gen/147-most-twentysomethings-put-christianity-on-the-shelf-following-spiritually-active-teen-years> (accessed March 30, 2009).

³⁰ Reggie McNeal, *The Present Future* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 1, 8-10.

in the world.”³¹ The culture of the church reflects the tension between those that want to continue doing what they have always done and those who are ready to move into a new way of thinking with energy and passion. Churches of all types, conservative and liberal, huge and tiny, attractional and liturgical, are having soul-searching conversations about how to go forward as Christ’s body on this earth. Many churches are experiencing a renewed sense of mission and a reclaiming of the vision of bringing Christ to the world, but other churches are resisting the changes necessary to be successful in today’s culture. The world has changed and will continue to change, and the church must listen to what God is saying in the midst of this upheaval and learn to be the church in new ways. Chuck Smith, in his book *The End of the World as We Know It*, gives this promise, “God’s changeless Word enters into every time and culture with compelling relevance and the hope of salvation.”³²

The Presbyterian Church (USA)

As the larger church in this country is being faced with how to do church in a new culture, so the particular denomination, the Presbyterian Church (USA), is dealing with the same issues. The PC (USA) is a large, traditional, centuries-old mainline denomination struggling to survive in today’s culture. The PC (USA) has 2,209,546 active members in 10,820 churches in the United States and Puerto Rico.³³ Statistics show that the PC (USA), along with other mainline denominations such as the United

³¹ Mike Regele and Mark Schulz, *Death of the Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 195.

³² Chuck Smith Jr., *The End of the World As We Know It* (Colorado Springs, CO: Waterbrook Press, 2001), 26.

³³ Presbyterian Church (USA), “Who Are We?” <http://www.pcusa.org> (accessed March 30, 2009).

Methodist Church, and the Episcopal Church, has been shrinking at a steady and now alarming rate since the 1960s. A more detailed look at the PC (USA) indicates that there has been a decline in membership at a rate of thirty thousand a year since the 1960s. During the past three years, membership has shown an even greater decline although, apparently, churches in the South and Southwest (including Texas) are retaining members better than the national average. Across the denomination, people are leaving PC (USA) churches for a variety of personal reasons, theological divisions, disagreements over vision and purpose, lack of relevance, disinterest and death of life-time loyalists to the denomination, and the inability to relate to the younger generation. Individual congregations and Presbyteries, the 173 governing bodies that provide care and oversight of the churches and pastors in their areas, reflect the same problems the larger church faces across the United States. Although God continues to move in his people and there are signs of faithful ministry across the country, the denomination suffers from both the external pressures of the culture on the churches and from internal strife over social issues, interpretation of Scripture, methodologies, and mission. Deep fissures are causing churches and pastors to split off from the PC (USA) and have led to both a lack of focus on ministry today and an uncertain future.

Houston Presbyterian Cursillo

Houston Presbyterian Cursillo, a ministry born out of the larger church, the Presbyterian Church, and the Presbyterian Fourth Day Movements, serves the area in and around Houston, Texas. Just as the church is working to learn to relate to the culture of today, HPC is trying to figure out how to touch the lives of people in its own environment. Houston, with a population of approximately 5.7 million in the metroplex

area, is a multicultural, multiethnic city, with active industry, worldwide connections, and wealthy neighborhoods, alongside pockets of deep poverty and abysmal levels of living. With NASA, the Texas Medical Center, four major sports teams, universities, colleges, and medical schools, Houston carries a reputation of innovation and progress. Houston also has a large problem with gangs, drugs, violence, and human trafficking, and the constant challenge of making a positive difference in the lives of people. Young people of all walks of life are drawn to Houston, looking for a place to live, work, explore, and express themselves. Singles, both gay and straight, are an increasing part of Houston's demographic scene, and people from many different ethnic groups are flocking to the city. Houston is an urban melting pot, with all the opportunities and challenges that represents. The culture of Houston Presbyterian Cursillo reflects a narrow slice of both Houston and the PC (USA). Over two thousand people have attended a Houston Presbyterian Cursillo Weekend in the past twelve years, representing different PC (USA) churches and varied parts of the Houston area. Rather than representing the varied environment of Houston, most HPC members are from the boomer generation and live in parts of Houston which are white, educated, and middle to upper-middle class. They tend to function oblivious to the diverse, postmodern, culturally different reality that exists in the rest of Houston and throughout the United States. The PC (USA) churches represented tend to be more theologically conservative and traditional in practice. These Cursillista-producing churches are caught between wanting to be relevant to the culture today, especially to the young people who are clearly absent from their midst and not wanting to change the status quo. HPC has found a beautiful way to transmit God's love and grace to people but is also caught in this same struggle. The decline in attendance,

waning influence, and lack of young people have caused concern within the leadership. This new and confusing culture offers HPC, as well as the Church, a unique opportunity to consider new ways of participating in what God continues to do in the world to bring light into the darkness.

Conclusion

The world, this country, and Houston, Texas, are filled with people who are starving for Christ. The small group of Christians in Mallorca, Spain, started Cursillo to address a culture not centered on Christ and a Church that was not bringing Christ's light into the darkness of the world. The Cursillo movement has been and has the potential to be a vehicle God will use to raise up leaders to transform people and society. Cursillo is uniquely positioned to influence the church, strengthening her through the inspiration and transformation of Cursillistas.

As the larger church debates how to engage the culture, this small group of Presbyterian Cursillistas in HPC is having lively conversations on how to address the postmodern world. Both traditional Presbyterian churches and HPC are facing, and at times resisting, an opportunity to be a voice for God in an uncertain time. This ministry focus paper is an effort to address the redevelopment and revitalization of Houston Presbyterian Cursillo so that God will use this tool to bring light to his world. As a starting point for the discussion, the next chapter will examine in detail each of the three parts of Houston Presbyterian Cursillo: the Pre-Cursillo, the Weekend, and the Fourth Day.

CHAPTER 2

HOUSTON PRESBYTERIAN CURSILLO TODAY

The Cursillo Movement has grown and developed since the 1940s as it has moved through different theological persuasions, denominational personalities, and the participation of a vast number of people and communities worldwide. Much of the movement remains close to the original design from the founders in Spain, but the many adjustments and developments implemented by succeeding generations of Cursillistas have produced some changes in style, structure, and content. The Presbyterian version of the movement, including that used in HPC, is based on the Spanish original version, but includes adaptations to keep it within Reformed theology and Presbyterian polity and practice. This chapter will draw a picture of how Cursillo is being lived out in Houston Presbyterian Cursillo. In order to gain a broader perspective of HPC, I conducted an email survey³⁴ of the Houston community from November 15 through December 18, 2009. Many of the responses are included in my analysis of the movement.

A Common Story

The regular churchgoer came home from a Cursillo Weekend a changed person. Her best friend had talked her into going, and she went a little reluctantly, not knowing anything about what she was getting into. All her friend had told her was that she would

³⁴ Cursillo Survey by the Rev. Kristin Huffman included in Appendix A. Survey results are available through the Houston Presbyterian Council, attention Bart Henson. Sample results are found in Appendix B.

love it and, needing a jolt of Jesus, she went. She did in fact love the Weekend; she sensed that she had truly seen the face of Jesus and been bathed in an outpouring of His grace and love. She opened the door of her heart and poured out her confession to God in the presence another person and felt forgiven for the first time in her life. She listened, worshipped, wept, laughed, and prayed with a whole community of people. She felt like a new person.

The first week back at home was good; she was tired but still glowed from the Weekend. In the middle of the week, she went to a reunion of Cursillo people (called Cursillistas) and again basked in the love and fellowship of God and other believers. She eagerly anticipated Sunday, when she could go to church to worship and share all she had learned and experienced. However, as soon as she walked in the door of the church, she felt her euphoria begin to seep away. She found the sermon boring and the music tedious. People were not warm and welcoming. She did not sense the presence of the Holy Spirit; she felt alone and wondered if she had only imagined the grace and love of Jesus she had experienced on the weekend. Over the next weeks, she began to lose her excitement for Jesus. She tried to pray and study but got busy and forgot to do it. She quit going to the church because it did not meet her needs anymore. In desperation, she signed up to staff the next Cursillo, thinking she could find “it” again. To her delight, when she returned to Cursillo, she reentered the womb of love and grace and was rejuvenated enough to go back to her life with enthusiasm for Jesus. Soon, however, she was only happy when she was with her Cursillo friends or at a reunion event. She was unable to reach out to anyone outside the group, and she had no motivation to get involved in any ministry to the world.

Even Cursillo events lost their appeal after a while, and she was left feeling like the whole thing had been a dream.

This fictional woman could be any number of people who have attended a Cursillo. The experience described is one that, unfortunately, is lived out over and over again in the Houston Presbyterian Cursillo community. Someone who has had a wonderful time on a Cursillo Weekend comes home to tell friends that they have to go. Not wanting to give away the wonderful surprises that await them on the weekend, the prospective participants receive little or no preparation. These new graduates of a Cursillo weekend are enthusiastic about the experience but uninformed or unaware about the vision and purpose of Cursillo and, consequently, do not give their recruits a sense of the major reasons for attending.

The Weekend itself is a wonderful, positive experience for most participants, indicated by the 90.% of people in the survey, who said that overall effectiveness of the Weekend was either somewhat or very effective.³⁵ The activities and experiences are varied enough that almost everyone can find something they enjoy or appreciate. Most of the problems come after the Weekend when people return home. In studying the effect of Cursillo on participants, it is clear that translating the mountaintop experience of the Weekend into an everyday, ordinary life of following and serving Jesus in the world has proven to be difficult for many. The bridge that needs to be made to life outside Cursillo is not accomplished, and many people do not ever make the leap. Some get immersed into a life and existence in Cursillo, changing all their friends, becoming a clique, trying to recreate the feelings they experienced on their Weekend. Others simply go back to

³⁵ Survey, question 10.

“normal” and wistfully think of their Weekend with fondness. Some truly do “get” the message and grow in their lives of faith and service. There are a number of people who continue to show signs of transformation and have entered into ministry and service to the Kingdom. Many Cursillistas at my own church, MDPC, are living transformed lives and are committed to changing their world for Jesus. They are involved both inside the church and in their communities. These who are living the vision bring hope and purpose to the HPC council that living the vision is a possibility. However, the success stories are not the norm; there are many more Cursillistas who have completely disappeared or retreated to their regular pattern of minimal involvement. It is my hope that examining the structure of HPC and honestly addressing its strengths and weaknesses will help Houston Presbyterian Cursillo be more effective and produce more fruit for the kingdom. This chapter and the next will set the stage for a careful look in chapters 4 and 5 at the theological themes of the two-pronged purpose of Cursillo and how HPC must reconnect with this purpose to be revitalized for the future of the movement.

Three Parts

The Cursillo movement consists of three parts or phases, forming a natural progression. The central focus of Cursillo is the Weekend experience and, for many, all there is to Cursillo. However, all three parts are necessary for the movement to make the impact on the Kingdom for which it was designed. According to an article included in the section “About Cursillo” on the National Episcopal Cursillo website, “Cursillo is patterned on Jesus’ own example. He searched out and called a small group of potential leaders (Pre-Cursillo); he trained them by word and example and inspired them with a

vision (three-day weekend); he linked them together and sent them out into the world to bring the world to him (Fourth Day).”³⁶

The first part is the Pre-Cursillo, the phase before a Cursillo Weekend takes place. The second part is the three-day Weekend event. The third part is the Fourth Day, which includes everything that takes place post-Weekend, or the rest of life after a Cursillo Weekend experience. Each of the three parts plays a key role in the overall movement; when any piece is missing, the whole suffers. The Pre-Cursillo sets the stage by setting an inviting atmosphere and in preparing for all that follows.

Pre-Cursillo

The purpose of Cursillo is the transformation of people who will change their environments for Christ, and each of the three parts of the movement must reflect a commitment to this purpose. The Pre-Cursillo is to be carried out thoughtfully, prayerfully, and with a commitment to the fulfillment of the vision. The Pre-Cursillo sets the stage, plants the soil, and prepares the staff, the participants, and the Fourth Day Community for the transforming power of the Holy Spirit to do the work of God in all of their lives. The many components of the Pre-Cursillo are designed to under gird the rest of the lifetime process of following and serving Jesus. Prayer, communicating about Cursillo, targeting and preparing participants, sponsorship, building the staff, and the practical preparations are the most important components of the Pre-Cursillo.

³⁶“What is Cursillo?” www.acswebnetworks.com/episcopalcurso/article106390.htm (accessed February 25, 2010).

Prayer

The Cursillo movement is bathed in prayer throughout all its phases. One of the foundational convictions of Cursillo is that the Holy Spirit is in charge of the entire movement and is constantly at work in all aspects of Cursillo. This belief leads to deep and persistent prayer.

In the Pre-Cursillo phase, the supervising council and individual Cursillistas pray about every aspect of the upcoming Weekends: dates, locations, moderator selection, and the participants – their recruitment and application process and care for them along the way. All of the names of the participants for an upcoming Weekend are sent by email to entire community about one month ahead of the Weekend. The Council prays for the people who are staffing the Weekend, writing the talks and meditations, sharing their testimonies, and taking care of the millions of details before a Weekend.

Communicating about Cursillo

Before a Cursillo ever takes place, there must be communication to the larger community about the ministry of Cursillo, its purpose, and how people and churches can enter into the movement. This communication is available on the Internet, in churches, at large denominational gatherings, and from individual Cursillistas.

Keeping close communications with the churches is key for the spread of Cursillo. Keith says, “Since Cursillo is a movement of the Church, it allows no separation between itself and that Church. Cursillo is not the Church, but the Church is present at Cursillo.”³⁷ Cursillo did not and still does not intend to be the Church, but rather to

³⁷ Keith, “A Critique of the Cursillo Movement,” chapter 3, page 18.

bolster and support the church, equipping the laity to be Kingdom people. HPC has made many efforts to communicate with the Presbytery of New Covenant and the churches it includes. Of the 106 churches in the presbytery, either laity or clergy or both from fifty of the member churches have participated in the movement. Newsletters are sent to all previous participants, and announcements are made in worship services. A team of people is available to make a presentation of Cursillo to any church when requested.

Recruiting Participants

One of the most significant aspects of the Pre-Cursillo is identifying the people who will come to a Weekend to experience the renewal and training for a life of following and serving Christ. Anyone who has been on a Weekend is a potential recruiter for Cursillo; as Cursillistas live their lives in a way that exudes the love and hope and peace of Christ, people are attracted to them and ask what makes them different. However, since most people find this ideal difficult to live, Cursillistas have to make an effort to bring people to participation in Cursillo. The best way to attract participants is for Cursillistas to personally select and invite people in their circle of acquaintances. The invitation should come as a natural consequence of living and walking with others in life and faith. Not everyone is suited to go on a Cursillo, and each Cursillista must take prayerful care in the recruitment process. Since the goal is to help people become transformed by Christ and send them out as people to be a force for changing the world for Jesus, people who have this potential are those who should be recruited.

The Council has the Pre-Cursillo responsibility of reviewing each application with an eye to readiness, maturity, and openness to the Cursillo purpose. A key part of the

recruitment is sponsorship, the assignment of a Cursillista to each participant for support, encouragement, and community before, during, and after the Weekend.

Sponsorship

When a person applies to be a participant on a Weekend, he or she is asked to name a “sponsor.” Although most people have no idea what this means, they write down the name of the person who told them about Cursillo or who invited them. The HPC registrar then contacts the named person to see if he or she will serve as the participant’s sponsor. Sponsorship has been a vital part of Cursillo from its beginnings in the Catholic Church. According to the National Cursillo Center’s *Sponsor’s Booklet*, “The purpose of sponsoring is to prepare a person or persons who can bring about a change in the environments.”³⁸ Sponsors are to identify those people who have the gifts and abilities to bring about change, to bring Jesus into the world they live in, “so sponsoring is not a haphazard circumstance. It should be a deliberate act to bring Jesus Christ into the world.”³⁹ The sponsor should know the applicant well, being aware enough of what is going on in his or her life to be able to discern whether or not this person would be a good candidate for Cursillo and for the ministry to follow. A sponsor must consider an applicant’s walk with Jesus, current emotional state, life place, leadership involvement, and his or her mission to the world. If the two-fold purpose of Cursillo is to be met, the participants must be in a place to participate fully and be ready to receive the gifts from the Weekend and respond to the call that follows.

³⁸ The National Cursillo Center, *Sponsor’s Booklet* (Dallas: National Cursillo Center, 2007), 9.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

In practical terms, the sponsor is responsible for preparing the participant before the Weekend starts and providing follow-up contact after the Weekend is completed. The sponsor is to explain the purpose and vision and goals of Cursillo and help the participant understand that there is follow-up, a life after the Weekend, and that God wants to use the participant in his Kingdom work. The sponsor tells the person about how the Weekend will unfold, what kind of activities are involved, what to expect, what to bring, and what will be expected of participants. Sponsors are encouraged to pray for the participant before, during, and after the Weekend, attend the serenade and/or closing ceremonies, and follow-up with the participant in the weeks and months following the Weekend. They are encouraged to drive the participant to and from the Weekend, and take care of any practical life details for them while they are on the Weekend.

Building the Staff

One of the key ingredients in a successful Weekend is the staff, including the moderator, who is the leader of the staff. The HPC Council selects the moderator of each Weekend approximately nine months prior to the Weekend. A moderator must have attended a Cursillo and served on several staff teams, with increasing responsibilities and training. After selection, the moderator begins to prepare by meeting regularly with a trainer (a person who has been a previous moderator), reading, absorbing, and even memorizing parts of the “big notebook,” which contains the adapted version of *The Cursillo Manual of the Presbyterian Cursillo*.⁴⁰ Each moderator-elect serves as an observing moderator on an earlier Weekend in order to gain experience and insight into

⁴⁰ This manual includes special instructions for the moderator, a script to adapt and memorize, and lists of duties, processes, and timelines.

being a moderator. Several months before the Weekend, the moderator-elect begins receiving applications from laity for staff positions from which he or she will choose the remainder of the staff, assign the talks, specific positions, and other responsibilities.

The staff is to consist of Cursillistas (or people who have been participants in Episcopal Cursillo, Walk to Emmaus, or other Cursillo type of weekend) who have different levels of experience in staffing. A balance is sought in terms of age, marital status, gender, and churches represented. The moderator considers the staff applicants' preferences for service and prayerfully decides who will serve in what capacity. As the teams within the staff are assigned, the heads of each team receive their notebooks and begin to develop their teams and start preparations for the Weekend.

The official staff training for the Weekend takes place approximately one month prior to the Weekend, bringing the entire staff together for introductions to each other and to the process, for worship, community building, and prayer. Each staff member belongs to a small team, which has a specific role that is defined in a carefully designed notebook. The leader of each team works with his or her group in the weeks before the Weekend, making sure all the tasks are accomplished at the right time.

Palanca

A significant part of Cursillo is the ministry of *palanca*. The word means “lever” or “influence” in Spanish,⁴¹ and Fred Keith describes how *palanca* is used in *The Manual of the Presbyterian Cursillo*. “*Palanca* in the Presbyterian Cursillo has become identified with almost any expression of concern for the participants....*Palanca* is addressed to

⁴¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/spanish/palanca>, s.v. “*palanca*” (accessed February 25, 2010).

God. It is given to God, therefore all *palanca* is given as an expression of communion with God and as trust in God's gracious provisions."⁴² The community lovingly and prayerfully prepares all kinds of *palanca* for each weekend: written *palanca*, personal notes written by both the staff and the Cursillo community and given to each participant twice during the course of the Weekend; edibles of all kinds—snacks of all kinds, fruit, and drinks; and, most importantly, prayers offered by the Fourth Day community. During the Weekend, a prayer banner is presented to the participants, which includes the huge list of the names of people who have volunteered to pray for the Weekend at each hour of the three days.

Palanca is important in all three parts of Cursillo. As members of the community engage in the preparation of food, letters, the prayer banner, and acts of service, they are encouraged in their own faith and ministry. They are sharing the joy of the Lord that they have received. On the Weekend, the participants are often overwhelmed by the love that is poured out in these forms of *palanca* by people they do not even know. These representations of God's grace move the participants to understand more of how much God loves them and cares for them. After the Weekend, both the remembrance of what *palanca* meant and the call to provide *palanca* for the next Weekend solidify the impact of this graceful ministry.

Conclusion to Pre-Cursillo

The entire Pre-Cursillo phase of the Cursillo movement sets the stage for the rest of the experience for all who are involved in the movement. When Cursillistas live out

⁴² Keith, *The Manual of The Presbyterian Cursillo*, 2.

the vision of Cursillo by embracing and exuding the transformation that Jesus has effected in their lives and they are vitally engaged in changing their environments for Christ, then whatever happens in Pre-Cursillo is a natural and meaningful response. When Pre-Cursillo is done right, the outcome is more likely to be one that is focused on the vision, the Weekend will make more sense, and the Fourth Day will be positive and lasting. As well, the kingdom of God will increase across the world.

What is described in this review of the structure of the Pre-Cursillo is the design and intent. The next chapter, “Strengths and Weaknesses,” will describe what is actually happening in HPC with regards to the Pre-Cursillo and the places that would benefit from change.

The Weekend

The three-day Cursillo Weekend is the shining star of the movement. A retreat from the world and an entrance into a community of loving followers of Christ, the Weekend is designed to give the participants an experience of the grace of God in a fresh, new way. Each Weekend includes worship and singing, fellowship, prayer, food, creative activities, all centered around fifteen talks, or *rollos*, which describe the life of following Christ. The weekend is full of love and care and surprises designed to give the participants a sense of the grace God offers. At the close of the weekend and during a first-week reunion, the participants are encouraged to continue their walk with Christ, strengthen their connection to the Church and to begin to change their world for Christ. All are urged to be part of a small group consisting of Cursillistas, using a format presented by Cursillo.

Since 1996, HPC has held sixty-five weekends. Starting with two weekends per year, the council built up to five per year through 2009. In 2010 four weekends will be held due to the decreasing number of applicants. The weekends take place in three different retreat centers within a three-hour drive from Houston. One venue accommodates forty-two participants and forty-two staff; the other two centers, by their design, work better with thirty to thirty-five participants and thirty-five staff. In the early years, the weekends were fully subscribed with waiting lists, but, in the past two years, the numbers have decreased to an average of twenty participants and thirty-five to forty staff.

The Weekend provides a unique opportunity for Christians to go deeper into their faith in Jesus in the company of other pilgrims who are also seeking to grow. According to the Episcopal Cursillo booklet, *What Is Cursillo All About*, “The three day weekend brings together a diverse group of Episcopalians to share the richness of many modes of worship and to broaden each one’s appreciation for our Church. Cursillo presumes that those who attend are already well grounded in the faith. It is not intended to be a conversion experience but an enriching and deepening of what is already there. It often provides new insights into our faith as well as fostering ministry among lay people.”⁴³

The Weekend is built around three themes: the theme of the first day (Thursday evening through Friday) is liberation. According to the Cursillo Manual, “The concept of liberation means being set free to live a new kind of life in Christ. It seeks to unmask both moral and psychological obstacles to living a life of grace. It seeks to be a moment

⁴³ “What is Cursillo?” <http://www.acswebnetworks.com/episcopalcursillo/article106390.htm>, (accessed February 26, 2010).

of specific sanctification, that is, a particular experience of heightened awareness of God's call and command, a time of heightened susceptibility to the Divine entrance."⁴⁴

The theme of the second day is Christ. "Day two seeks to engage the participants in encounter with the living Christ in whom they face the true nature of the Christian life. It offers guidance in those disciplines of faith that issue in vital Christianity."⁴⁵ Christian life is the theme of day three and turns the participants toward home and how to continue the journey of faith. "Day three offers a method for living one aspect of the life of grace. Day three does not claim to encompass the entirety of the Christian life, but only that part which engages the Cursillo purpose of re-forming environments. Day three offers the Cursillo method to accomplish the Cursillo purpose."⁴⁶ The Fourth Day, all the days that follow a Cursillo weekend, has a theme as well: perseverance.

Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3 give a brief outline of the flow of events of the Weekend. The staff arrives at the retreat center on Wednesday by dinnertime for twenty-four hours of preparation and prayer. They sing, worship, practice talks and testimonies, share and pray with one another, and prepare the site for the events of the Weekend. The schedule provides ample time for the staff to engage in personal reflection and receive prayers for healing and wholeness by the spiritual advisors (clergy). Staff pair partners meet during this prep day to pray for each other, and they are encouraged to find times to pray together during the Weekend as well. The staff prays for each participant by name in corporate worship and as individual prayer partners.

⁴⁴ Keith, *The Manual of the Presbyterian Cursillo*, 4.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Thursday PM:		Friday PM:	
4:00	Candidates begin to arrive	1:15	Participant meeting
6:30	Supper	1:25	Singing
7:30	Participant meeting	1:45	Third <i>Rollo</i> LAITY: PRIESTHOOD OF ALL BELIEVERS
8:30	Evening Worship	2:45	Fourth <i>Rollo</i> FAITH: LIVING IN GRACE
9:30	Silent retreat begins	3:15	<i>Palanca</i> distribution
10:00	Staff meeting	4:30	Fifth <i>Rollo</i> PIETY: PRACTICING THE PRESENCE
Friday AM		5:00	Afternoon worship
6:45	Wake up	5:15	Table groups prepare art projects
7:30	Morning worship	6:30	Supper
8:30	Breakfast	7:40	Singing
9:15	Participant meeting	8:00	Presentation of art projects
9:30	First <i>Rollo</i> PRIORITIES: IDEALS: THE HUMAN JOURNEY	8:30	Extended introductions
10:25	Singing	10:00	Staff meeting
10:45	Second <i>Rollo</i> GRACE: AN INVITATION FROM GOD		
12:00	Lunch		

Figure 2.1. Schedule for the first day.

Saturday AM		Saturday PM continued	
6:45	Wake up	2:00	Eighth <i>Rollo</i> ACTION: COMMITTED IN LOVE
7:30	Morning worship	3:00	<i>Palanca</i> distribution
8:30	Breakfast	3:25	Singing
9:25	Participant meeting	3:45	Ninth <i>Rollo</i> OBSTACLES TO A LIFE OF GRACE: CONFRONTED BY SIN
9:45	Sixth <i>Rollo</i> STUDY: LEARNING THE WAY	4:30	Tenth <i>Rollo</i> LEADERS: CALLED TO THE FRONT
11:00	Seventh <i>Rollo</i> SACRAMENTS: UNITED IN CHRIST	4:00	Table groups: prepare skits
	Foot washing	5:30	Supper Serenade
	Alfredo film	7:15	Participant meeting, skits, Music Box Video, Angels – surprise singing, party
11:30	Service of healing and wholeness		
Saturday PM		9:30	Agape table
12:30	Lunch	10:00	Staff meeting
1:45	Participant meeting		

Figure 2.2. Schedule for the second day.

Sunday AM		Sunday PM	
6:15	Wake up party	12:30	Lunch
6:30	Morning worship	1:40	Participant meeting
7:30	Breakfast	1:45	Fourteenth <i>Rollo</i>
9:00	Participant meeting		THREE DAYS: A LOOK BACK
9:15	Eleventh <i>Rollo</i> EVANGELIZATION: REFORMING THE WORLD	2:15	Fifteenth <i>Rollo</i>
10:00	Twelfth <i>Rollo</i> CHRISTIAN LIFE: A HOLY VISION		TOMORROW: HOPE AND PROMISE
11:30	Thirteenth <i>Rollo</i> CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY: THE CHURCH ALIVE	2:30	Closing comments
		3:00	Closing worship with Fourth Day

Figure 2.3. Schedule for the third day.

At the first official gathering after dinner, the moderator welcomes everyone, the music team leads singing, and each person is introduced and invited to share a few things about himself or herself. At the end of this group meeting, everyone moves to the chapel for meditations given by the pastors followed by instructions for the night of silence and the morning wake-up. The participants retire in silence, and the staff holds its nightly staff meeting. The silence, although a not always welcome surprise, provides time for the participants begin the process of separating from their world back home and focusing on their spiritual journeys. The theme of the first day is liberation, and this night of silence is designed to help the participants look inside their hearts and minds, reflect on their relationship with Christ, and examine anything that might be standing in the way of their faith.

That first night, the tension is obvious on many participants' faces. They have come from their busy lives, many leaving work, children, and responsibilities. According to comments on the survey, many of them have no idea what they are getting into, some

are eager to be there, and some are suspicious or dreading the whole thing. However, most of them are polite and agreeable and go off to bed without a sound.

Day One

Each of the next three days begins with a wake-up call leading to a chapel time of worship, Scripture, prayer, and sometimes the Lord's Supper, all of which set the stage for the day. After breakfast, a rhythm begins that includes singing, talks, discussions, activities, breaks, and snacks. Each table group of eight includes two staff members, who are incognito as staff and appear to be just other participants. Their job in the group is to help the conversation flow and subtly facilitate without taking over. On the first day, the groups begin to get to know each other, come up with a name, discuss the *rollos*, and use collective creativity to do an art project. At key points during the day, surprises of *palanca* appear and communicate love and care and God's grace. The day closes with what is called "extended introductions," in which people are invited to share a defining moment in their lives or some other topic chosen by the moderator. During this time, the sharing typically goes to a whole new, deeper level. By the end of Friday night, the participants are mostly much more relaxed, their walls are beginning to drop, the tension has left most faces, and people are engaged in the weekend. The theme of Liberation has been successful.

The *rollos*, a Spanish word for a talk, speech, lecture, or sermon (one dictionary said the familiar definition for *rollo* was "boring speech or lecture"⁴⁷) are the center around which all else revolves. Staff members, lay and clergy, deliver five *rollos* each

⁴⁷ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/spanish/rollo> s.v. "*rollo*" (accessed February 25, 2010).

day. Before each *rollo*, the speaker is introduced and begins his or her talk with prayer.

Each *rollo* presents some aspect of the theme of the day. Hucke says that the fifteen talks are

central to the Cursillo model in general...the basic flow and design of the talks has not changed since the earliest Cursillos.... The flow of the talks is by design. The design is a process of thought and experience that brings the guest along. The guests are not aware of this as it happens, but it is there. There is a theological progression from self-knowledge and humanity's need for God's grace, to knowing Jesus who represents God's offer of grace. On the last day, guests are prepared to go back into the world as fully committed disciples of Christ.⁴⁸

The *rollos* are designed to include Scripture, basic reformed theology, and personal experience. One of the strengths of the *rollos* is the genuine and vulnerable way the speakers share God's love and grace as they describe their own personal relationships with Jesus. The speakers weave into the talks their own life experiences, which are often very compelling. The five clergy *rollos* tell the story of God's grace from a more theological perspective, in a progression from God's invitation to the grace that sustains us as we follow Jesus and serve him in the world.

Day Two

Saturday, with the theme of Christ, is designed to take the participants even deeper into understanding who Jesus is, what he has done for humanity, and how to follow him more closely. Once again, there are five *rollos*, singing, worship, discussions, and creativity, today expressed in developing skits. There are added elements of a foot washing, a video on the sacrament of belonging, and a service of wholeness and healing with an extended time for reflection and prayer. More *palanca* that comes in the

⁴⁸ Doug Hucke, "The Great Banquet as a Strategy to Transform Northminster Presbyterian Church" (Ministry Focus Paper, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2008), 136.

afternoon and the huge blessing of the surprise serenade at dinner deeply touch the hearts of both participants and staff. Many have described the serenade as what heaven must be like. Often over a hundred Cursillistas from the Fourth Day community come bounding into the dining hall singing and praising God, waving and smiling, weeping and rejoicing. They quickly slip away and leave a group that is stunned and overflowing with love and joy. The evening continues with much laughter as the table groups perform their skits. The video *The Music Box*⁴⁹ comes next and serves as an introduction to a fun celebration with music and dancing. The evening closes with gathering around a beautiful table, a simple prayer, and a song.

Day Three

The third day, Sunday, is the day that is designed to prepare to send the participants home and live the Christian life (the theme for the day). All the *rollos* are focused on how to live out what the experienced of the Weekend. Staff and participants alike are usually exhausted by now and often have a difficult time attending to all the talks. There are many announcements and instructions given with a packet of information and resources. Everyone is invited to come to the welcome home gathering called *Ultreya*, to be held in the weeks immediately following the Weekend. The participants are also encouraged to join a renewal group or other small group to help them persevere in their journey of faith. The final hours of the Weekend are spent in a worship service called *Closing*, along with the Fourth Day community. The participants have the opportunity to share testimonies about what they have experienced, the moderator gives the participants their *Cursillo*

⁴⁹ *The Music Box* (Canyon Lake, TX: White Lion Pictograph, 1980).

crosses, and the whole community worships together in prayer, hearing the Word, singing, and the celebration of the Lord's Supper. After the Closing, the participants leave, and the staff cleans up and goes to celebrate at a staff party.

All aspects of the Weekend, from the beginning lemonade party to the Closing, are designed with purpose and intention. The whole Weekend is bathed in prayer and executed with love, organization, and grace. The staff members use their spiritual gifts and human talents to create a space and opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work in all who are present. The entire Weekend works toward the purposes of Cursillo: transforming lives and sending people out to change their environments for Christ.

The Fourth Day

The Cursillo weekend is often hugely transformative in the lives of both participants and staff. They come off the weekend filled with the light of Christ and hope for a new day. However, reality quickly crowds the new feelings, and, left all alone, the fresh Cursillistas often lose ground. The real work of a Cursillo takes place after the Weekend when the community receives the new Cursillistas and comes alongside them for the journey. Gerald Hughes, in writing about Catholic Cursillo says, "The real success of a Cursillo does not depend on whether the talks or the informal encounters are clear, deep and convincing, but on whether, backing up the Cursillo there is a real, living Christian community-an *Ultreya*-which exists and does credit and bears witness to everything that is being presented in the Cursillo."⁵⁰ He goes on to say, "Unless the Christian community is there, the Cursillista who emerges with the will to get underway,

⁵⁰ *The Cursillo Weekend*, no. 4 in the Ideario Series: The Cursillo Movement, (Dallas: The National Secretariat of the Cursillo Movement in the United States and Gerald P. Hughes, 1981), 6.

gradually collapses like a flat tire; the member who comes out with convictions becomes disillusioned. The true success of a Cursillo is not forged, therefore, when preparing the event, but while edifying a Christian community.”⁵¹

The Cursillo Weekend sets the stage for the rest of a person’s journey of life in Christ and service to the world in his name. The Fourth Day, or Post-Cursillo, is the rest of one’s life after a Cursillo Weekend. The Fourth Day ministry of Cursillo is to help Cursillistas make the transition from the Weekend to their real, everyday lives and to walk alongside them as they continue their journeys of life, faith, and service. The Fourth Day in HPC is comprised of a number of elements: communication with the community and sponsors, the Ultreya, renewal groups, providing *palanca*, and participating in Fourth Day activities that accompany each Weekend. The purpose of the Fourth Day is to live out the purpose of Cursillo, which began so beautifully for the participants on the Weekend. It is vitally important that the Fourth Day be strong and influential, or participants might end up like the example at the beginning of the chapter.

Communication with the Community

As soon as the Weekend is over, the names and contact information of the new Cursillistas are added to the community roster and email prayer list. The community is invited to come to the Welcome Home Ultreya to meet their new brothers and sisters and welcome them to the community. The new Cursillistas immediately begin receiving emails, newsletters, and announcements from the community and the Council. They are included in the prayer emails and are invited to pray for the needs of the community and

⁵¹ *The Cursillo Weekend*, 7.

to ask for prayer themselves. The communications alert them to upcoming weekends, invite them to apply to staff, encourage them to invite others to attend an upcoming Weekend, invite them to the Fourth Day activities that accompany each Weekend, and remind them to participate in providing *palanca* (letters, goodies, prayers) for Weekends.

Other communication between Cursillistas is encouraged but not formalized in any way. Sometimes a table group from the Weekend will keep in touch by email. Friendships often develop on the Weekend and continue naturally. The key communication ideally takes place with the participant's sponsor. Sponsorship, described in the Pre-Cursillo section of this chapter, is a key component of a successful Fourth Day. Sponsors who take their role seriously can be powerful mentors and examples to these new Cursillistas as they try to make their way.

Ultreya

In the Houston community, Ultreyas always occur immediately following a Weekend and occasionally at other times of year. The name Ultreya, a Spanish word whose root is the Latin, "onward,"⁵² indicates that this gathering is designed to help Cursillistas continue, or persevere, in their life in Christ. When done well, these Ultreyas bring an infusion of enthusiasm, encouragement and inspiration to individuals and to the community. The fresh Cursillistas flock to their Welcome Home Ultreya and greet fellow participants and staff with great joy and excitement.

The Ultreya incorporates many of the elements of a weekend into the gathering. People share table fellowship around a meal and worship with prayer, singing,

⁵²"What Is the Ultreya?" <http://cursillos.ca/en/faq/f05-ultreya.htm> (accessed February 25, 2010).

testimonies, a brief message, and often the Lord's Supper. The leaders give announcements about upcoming Weekends, renewal groups, sponsorship, and opportunities to serve on staff or as support for Weekends. For many, the Ultreya is a helpful bridge into the community and the start of living their lives in a new way.

Renewal Groups

Renewal groups probably have the most potential of all aspects of the Fourth Day to encourage and strengthen Cursillistas in their continued life and ministry as followers of Christ. Participants are strongly encouraged to join or start a renewal or reunion group at the end of the Weekend and also at the Welcome Home Ultreya. These small groups (typically six to twelve people) are designed to help people grow in their daily walk with Jesus, providing accountability and encouragement. The groups give insight into how to continue the journey of faith and discover and live out the call to change environments for Christ. The groups are technically open to anyone whether they have attended a Cursillo or not, although many groups choose to limit membership to Cursillistas.

The suggested format for the reunion/renewal groups is to follow this prescribed topics, found on the Renewal Group Card that is given to all participants:

- Share your week briefly from a spiritual aspect.
- Share the moment when you felt closest to Christ.
- Share your study for the week.
- Review your chances to share Christ with others.
- Share your one-line thanksgiving.
- Close with prayer.

The reunion suggested by the name is not merely a reunion of people who have gone on a Cursillo, but an occasion of intentional community of followers of Jesus who are

accountable to one another and who encourage each other in their journeys of faith and ministry.

Participation in *Palanca* and Fourth Day Activities

The final and most popular involvement in the Fourth Day is participation in the activities surrounding Weekends. Participants are encouraged to apply to serve on the staff of a subsequent Weekend. Many people think that the participant experience is not complete without staffing. Serving on staff allows people to use their gifts; to be involved in the planning, preparation, and prayer for a Weekend; and to see the underlying theology and meaning to the structure of the Weekend. Staffers find it exciting and encouraging watching the transformation God performs in the hearts and lives of the new participants. Serving Christ in this way and being in the warm cocoon of a Cursillo Weekend provides a great boost to a person's spiritual life, causing many people to serve as staff repeatedly in order to get this boost. In fact, the survey reported that 51% of respondents had staffed two or more weekends.

Other activities surrounding the Weekend are preparing *palanca*, including making fudge and other homemade goodies, writing letters, making small gifts, praying, and providing transportation and any other needed errands—services needed by the participants to make it possible for them to attend their Weekend. A very popular highlight of Fourth Day service is attending a Serenade or Closing. The Serenade is wonderful for both the people attending the Weekend and those who are doing it. Surprising the participants with beautiful singing and smiling faces brings tears to the eyes of the participants, the staff of the weekend, and the Fourth Day. The Closing on Sunday is important especially for the sponsors and friends of the participants. The

participants have the opportunity to share brief testimonies, receive their crosses and their final charge, and share a final time of worship.

Conclusion

After a Weekend, the participants respond in variety of ways. Some are never heard from again, either in the community of Cursillo or in their church. A large second group attends a reunion event or serves on the staff of a future weekend, some of them becoming very attached to Cursillo. A much smaller group moves beyond Cursillo and becomes deeply involved in Kingdom work in their churches and out in the world.

Except for these few, the majority of the members of the Cursillo community are not moving beyond Cursillo to live the vision of changing the world for Christ. What they experienced at Cursillo fades, and they either give up or they keep returning to Cursillo to get a fix of Jesus and community. For some, Cursillo becomes the focus of their spiritual walk, rather than the relationship with Jesus and the application of His grace to daily Kingdom living and service. The next chapter will focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the Cursillo movement as seen in HPC. This review will show ways HPC has and has not accomplished the vision of Cursillo and suggest possible areas for growth and change.

CHAPTER 3

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF HOUSTON PRESBYTERIAN CURSILLO

The Cursillo was designed thoughtfully and prayerfully with a two-fold purpose in mind. The founders of the movement were intent on creating not merely a spiritual experience but a lifetime training program. When the prescribed elements of the movement encompassed in the Pre-Cursillo, the Weekend, and the Fourth Day are all embraced and carried out, the purposes of the movement are more apt to be achieved. In Houston, Texas, in 2010, the Presbyterian Cursillo movement is active, important to many people, and yet showing signs that it needs attention. Though there are many strengths in the movement, there are enough important weaknesses to warrant taking a close look at HPC and strategizing for change and revitalization.

General Observations

Cursillo has been a breath of fresh air in the Presbyterian Church (USA), both in Houston and across the country. On the Weekends, people grow deeper in their relationships with Jesus, some seeing Him as an intimate, personal reality for the very first time. They feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, worship and pray with enthusiasm and passion, and experience a taste of Christian community. The Cursillo movement has been an effective tool that God continues to use in transforming lives. Unfortunately, Cursillo has not consistently developed participants who fulfill the second purpose of

Cursillo—to be leaders in changing their environments for Christ. Although the survey results show that over 50% of respondents think Cursillo is “very effective” in meeting the vision of Cursillo as they understand it,⁵³ the comments written by those who did not choose the rating “very effective” consistently spoke of the waning interest after the Weekend and the lack of engagement in ministry to change the environment for Christ. “In my opinion, Cursillo does a good job of renewing people in their faith. However, seeing change for Christ in people’s environments is weak, at best. There is a need to stay connected so that participants continue to be encouraged and guided once they return from their participant Weekend.”⁵⁴

Over the fourteen years of Houston Presbyterian Cursillo, the community has shown signs of becoming ingrown and exclusive. Many of the participants limit their awakened spiritual lives to the confines of Cursillo, looking to Cursillo to give them that glowing feeling of love and grace. A shared language and experience, a bond of secrecy about what goes on at the Weekend, and the pressure to be involved in Cursillo follow-up reinforce these cliques. A feeling of mystery, fear, and even mistrust is common among those who are not “in the club.” Pastors who have not attended a Cursillo Weekend are often suspicious and threatened by the movement, although most of pastors who have attended a Weekend seem to be enthusiastic about it. Relationships between churches and Cursillo are mostly benign or troubled rather than supportive.

The Weekends continue to attract people from a variety of Presbyterian churches, but attendance has been declined over the past two years. The demographics of the group

⁵³ Survey, question 5.

⁵⁴ Survey, question 5, response 4.

are predominantly white, middle aged, and upper middle class. The fact that the movement does not attract many young people is an issue currently facing the HPC council. The council is highly invested in keeping Cursillo alive and healthy in all three parts of the movement: Pre-Cursillo, the Weekend, and the Fourth Day.

Pre-Cursillo—Strengths and Weaknesses

The Pre-Cursillo is a vital part of the whole Cursillo movement and actually flows out of the Weekend and the Fourth Day. All of the Pre-Cursillo is a ministry of Cursillistas, those who have attended a Weekend and who are working to keep the movement alive and growing. When the Fourth Day is strong, involvement in the Pre-Cursillo is natural and enthusiastic. In HPC, the Pre-Cursillo is primarily focused on producing other Weekends, accomplished by a group of leaders who are committed to Cursillo. Because the Fourth Day ministry is so narrowly focused and limited to a small number of Cursillistas, emphasis on the deeper ministry of the Pre-Cursillo is lacking.

In the survey of HPC Cursillistas, 50% said that the Overall Pre-Cursillo effectiveness was “somewhat” or “highly effective.”⁵⁵ This surprisingly high number reflects the narrow focus of producing effective Weekends and not from an understanding of all that Pre-Cursillo is designed to entail. The comment sections of the survey reflect this lack of understanding and the need to strengthen this part of the ministry.

Strengths

The strongest part of the Pre-Cursillo is the outpouring of energy, enthusiasm, and sheer work hours in preparation for the Weekends. Preparing to staff a Weekend is

⁵⁵ Survey, question 6.

clearly one of the strengths of the Pre-Cursillo, with over 79% of the survey respondents saying that staffing a Weekend was somewhat or very effective.⁵⁶ A large part of the staffing experience takes place in the Pre-Cursillo time frame.

The Council and the Weekend moderator and staff team are all in prayer for the Weekend for months. Understanding that the Holy Spirit is in charge, the leaders strive to listen to and follow His leading. Having seen many miracles in people's lives, including their own, they are committed to providing an atmosphere, a place, a structure that invites the Holy Spirit to do His work and makes people ready to receive the grace and love of God. *Rollo* givers prepare their talks, chas stock supplies, the camp coordinators make the arrangements with the camps, and the Fourth Day writes *palanca* notes, makes fudge, cookies, and other small *palanca* items, and signs up on the prayer banner. The excitement builds as the Weekend draws closer and things are made ready.

Another strength of the Pre-Cursillo is the effect of the visible transformation of a brand new participant on the people around them. When I returned from my participant Walk to Emmaus, my best friend said that I had a glow about me that she wanted to have for herself. She could tell that my life was different, and she attended the very next Walk and became a leader in the movement. When the new Cursillistas share their experience of the transforming power of Jesus with others, the ministry is strengthened.

Community is another strength of Pre-Cursillo. People who have had a shared experience of grace come together to plan for a similar experience for others. Meetings, trainings, and relationship-building times are fun, informative, and spiritually renewing, supporting the staff's ongoing journeys with Christ. As people use their different gifts,

⁵⁶ Survey, question 14.

the system of preparation unfolds like clockwork. The tasks are completed and the Weekend runs like a well-oiled machine. All this preparation has the benefit of helping the staff focus on Cursillo, pray for God's help and direction, and daily give energy, time, and their gifts to ministry for Jesus.

Weaknesses

Although the survey indicated 50% effectiveness for the Pre-Cursillo,⁵⁷ question 7 brought out that a number of the suggested problems with the Pre-Cursillo were significant issues. Figure 3.1 shows the percentages of pastors responding and of total people responding who named the seven issues mentioned in the table as significant.⁵⁸

Significant Issue	Percentage of Pastors responding	Percentage of Total responding
Lack of a clearly stated purpose or mission for the candidate	61.5	40.2
Ineffective recruiting of candidates	76.9	55.7
Poor training of sponsors	46.2	39
Poor preparation of candidates by sponsors	33.3	29.6
Secrecy	46.2	37.3
Cliques	61.6	38.4
Not attracting young adults	69.3	56

Figure 3.1. Issues noted as significant in the survey.

The lack of a clearly stated purpose is a problem in a variety of ways. The communication to pre-applicants specifically and to anyone else who comes in contact

⁵⁷ Survey, question 6.

⁵⁸ Survey, question 7.

with Cursillo or Cursillistas needs to clearly define Cursillo's purpose. The lack of a stated purpose can be confusing and a deterrent to those considering attending. One person reported on the survey, "The unknown of what to expect is a big turn off for many people. Stating objectives or goals for the Weekend might help."⁵⁹ When the expected outcome is unclear from the beginning, it is no surprise that the purpose is not realized. It is curious that 75% of survey respondents were able to identify the vision statement since there is a marked lack of application of this knowledge to the program. It is possible that the beauty and the power of the Weekend simply overwhelm the investment in carrying out the complete vision. When the attitude of all that happens in the Pre-Cursillo is focused solely on the Weekend experience, the rest of the movement, including the Weekend, suffers from the lack of broader focus.

The ineffective recruitment of candidates for Cursillo is another significant problem in the Pre-Cursillo. From the beginning of Cursillo, the practice has been to invite only people who are already followers of Christ and who have the potential to be leaders in changing their environments for Christ. People who are not sure of their faith (or have no faith) are not viable candidates, as Cursillo is not a ministry to convert people to faith in Christ. There is a whole host of other issues in people's lives that might inhibit their ability to fully participate in the Weekend and the ministry in the Fourth Day. The National Cursillo Center *Sponsor's Booklet* says the following about prospective attendees: "Those who should not go: Those who have psychological or emotional problems; those 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

⁵⁹ Survey, question 8, response 117.

Cursillo; and those who cannot receive the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, due to a life contrary to the life of grace”⁶⁰

What often happens is that Cursillistas simply want everyone they know to experience Cursillo. Intent in getting people there, they do not always consider the person’s faith, life situation, and ability to live out the vision. Avid recruiters think that Cursillo is the answer to everyone who needs a spiritual jolt, who is sad or lonely, who is hurting or lost, or who does not seem to personally know the grace of God. The HPC Council’s application approval process is essentially a rubber stamp of those who complete applications. A number of participants have had negative experiences and have caused trouble on a Weekend because they have been inappropriately recruited. The consequences of thoughtless and rampant invitations have proven detrimental to the fulfillment of the total vision of the movement. HPC now has a Fourth Day community full of people who have had an amazing experience of love and grace and have shared it with their friends, but have not carried out the second vital part of the vision of training people to go back into the world to change it for Christ.

One glaring lack in the people recruited to attend Cursillo is young adults. Over 69% of those surveyed believe that this is a significant or major issue.⁶¹ The younger people who do attend are typically the children of older Cursillistas or seminarians. The reasons reported as to why younger people are not attracted to Cursillo seem to correlate with the issues that the larger church is facing in their congregations today. The HPC

⁶⁰ National Cursillo Center, *Sponsor’s Booklet* (Dallas: National Cursillo Center, 2007), 11.

⁶¹ Survey, question 7.

council, along with the Presbyterian churches, is engaging in conversation about how to minister to and with the young people in this postmodern generation.

Another major weakness in Pre-Cursillo in HPC is the lack of understanding and application of appropriate sponsorship. Sponsorship is unfortunately viewed as a minor responsibility that involves only the brief communication with a participant before and after a Weekend. Sponsors usually call the assigned participant once before the Weekend to answer any questions they may have, make sure they are covered with regards to transportation for getting to the retreat center and back, and address any other practical issues. Sponsors are asked to attend Serenade or Closing or both and then contact the participant after the Weekend. Even this minimal involvement rarely happens. With a stronger commitment to more selective and careful recruitment, Walk to Emmaus, Episcopal Cursillo, and Catholic Cursillo have a more rigorous sponsorship process. Each of these groups requires the sponsor to complete a form that asks deeper questions of the sponsor regarding the applicant. The sponsors also have to agree to the requirements of sponsorship before the applicant can be accepted. Episcopal and Catholic Cursillo and Walk to Emmaus also require a pastor's signature on the application.

Weak sponsorship leads to participants not being prepared for larger message of the Weekend. One survey respondent said, "I was told very little about the Weekend - was not prepared for it at all, was actually in shock when I first arrived I was so poorly prepared by my sponsor."⁶² In most cases, this lack of preparation does not negatively affect the experience on the actual Weekend, but more likely does impact the long-term effectiveness of the movement. Without an understanding of the purpose of Cursillo and

⁶² Survey, question 9, response 36.

the anticipated outcome, a participant is not able to put his or her experience in any lasting context. If people knew from their first encounter with Cursillo what it was all about, they might enter the movement with a broader purpose in mind than just going away for a renewal experience.

A second consequence of poor sponsorship is the likelihood that there will be minimal follow-up, which affects a participant's adjustment to after the Fourth Day. This missed opportunity of guiding, mentoring, and shepherding has ramifications for the achievement of the Cursillo vision. The latter section of this chapter concerning the strengths and weaknesses of the Fourth Day will treat in more detail the aspect of sponsorship as part of the follow-up to a Weekend.

HPC's poorly developed sponsorship program is the result of the very low expectations of sponsors by the council and the lack of training and information provided. The HPC Council is aware that there is a lack of adequate sponsorship and is currently working on a new sponsorship model, which would support the entire Cursillo movement and vision in powerful and effective ways.

Another major issue with the Pre-Cursillo is the way some Cursillistas embrace secrecy and cliquishness following a Weekend. Most of the communication about Cursillo, both written and oral, is shrouded in secrecy and insider language. A person curious about Cursillo or interested in attending has a difficult time finding answers to questions about the movement or the Weekend. As many new Cursillistas share about their experience, they are reluctant to give many details about the Weekend, for fear of ruining the impact of the Weekend for someone else. Having been overwhelmed with the love and grace of God and the staff, surprised with the *palanca*, the incredible serenade,

and so many other things, they do not want to spoil any of it for their friends. They say things like, “You just have to go and experience it for yourself.” An aura of secrecy and mystery surround the whole Weekend, and outsiders feel excluded and suspicious. The secrecy that surrounds Cursillo is especially heinous to young adults, who seek truth and authenticity. It is sad that the secrecy has become such a problem because, contrary to popular belief, there are not any secrets about Cursillo that cannot be shared.

Cliquishness or exclusivity is part of this mystique that develops around Cursillo. Charles Van Engen, in *God’s Missionary People*, describes the phenomenon of cliquishness in his discussion of what Peter Wagner calls ‘*koinonitis*’:

...These interpersonal relationships become so deep and so mutually absorbing, they can provide the focal point for almost all church activity and involvement. “*Koinonia* becomes *koinonitis* when the purpose for which the fellowship exists is lost. The church loses sight of why there is a Sunday school class, a prayer group, or neighborhood calling. Introversion occurs unless love is lived out in fellowship, service, and self-sacrifice. Churches who lose *koinonia* lose fellowship with the Christ who linked the promise “I am with you always” with the command to “go and make disciples.”⁶³

Koinonitis is alive and well in Houston Presbyterian Cursillo and is a huge deterrent to those on “the outside.” It affects the reputation of Cursillo, the relationship with churches, and the recruitment of new applicants for Weekends.

Communications of all types need to be redeveloped. Brochures, applications, and websites are not clear, informative, or very helpful. Both written pieces and websites are decorated with symbols from the movement such as butterflies, rainbows, and roosters, which are not appealing to many people, especially men. These symbols do not mean

⁶³ Charles Van Engen, *God’s Missionary People: Rethinking the Purpose of the Local Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1991), 92.

anything to outsiders and promote the cliquish mentality. The application is also not especially informative or helpful and needs to be redone.

Verbal communication about Cursillo takes place mostly one-to-one: people who have had a wonderful experience on their Weekend, sharing their excitement with all their friends and acquaintances. Sometimes this enthusiasm, though well meaning, is overwhelming, threatening, and even frightening. Because most recent Cursillistas are not aware of or do not understand the vision of Cursillo, Pre-Cursillo becomes a time of begging friends to go on a Weekend, rather than living out the call to discipleship and witnessing to Christ that they were supposed to have learned on the Weekend.

Communication with the churches and the pastors in the area served by HPC is another weakness of Cursillo in general and in the Pre-Cursillo phase particularly. Pastor involvement was the Cursillo activity that received the lowest percentage of approval (36%). Cursillistas sometimes become so enamored with Cursillo that they move away from the church and toward Cursillo as their community and center for worship, fellowship, and service. Churches have practically split over Cursillo, and many people have been hurt by the way some Cursillistas have placed Cursillo at the center of their world.

As stated in the section on the strengths of the Pre-Cursillo, one of the strongest aspects of this part of the movement is the preparation for the upcoming Weekends. The time of preparation for a Cursillo is filled with purpose, passion, and dedication, but the single-mindedness of it can inhibit the focus on Jesus and what he is trying to accomplish in and through Cursillo. The many details, formulas, lists, assignments, and requirements keep the staff from spending time in reflection and worship and prayer. Once a Weekend

date is set and a moderator is selected, the march to the Weekend becomes a machine. Not wanting to stray from the procedures outlined in all the notebooks, the staff is often unable to let the Holy Spirit enter into the procedure of the Weekend. “We have never done it that way before” becomes an all-important mantra with everyone afraid to change anything. The moderator has a large notebook, his or her new constant companion, which details every step of the process. Moderators are told to strictly follow the notebook and so can lose their own creativity and openness to listen to God. The notebook and the system lead them. There is a fear or resistance to doing it wrong or breaking the tradition that has been fostered by the leadership and the people who hold dearly to the model.

The council elects moderators because of previous involvement and leadership on Weekends and in the Fourth Day. One problem is that the moderator has occasionally been selected because of longevity and commitment rather than because of giftedness and ability, and the Weekend suffers from poor management and leadership. Sometimes the moderators are well qualified but are overly focused on the Weekend and even refer to it as “my Cursillo.” Many of the moderators and their teams are committed to making their Weekend the best one ever and forget about the broader purpose and mission of the movement.

In building a staff, the moderator tries to have a balance of people in terms of age, gender, marital status, and experience in staffing. As a result of many factors including favoritism, the lack of a variety of applicants, and limited input from others including clergy, some staff teams have been terribly unbalanced and ineffective. On a number of Weekends, both staff members and participants have had problems that could have been avoided through consultation with a pastor or council member.

The assignment of *rollo*-givers by the moderator also presents problems. Often the *rollo* giver, though willing, does not have the gifts for speaking or the spiritual maturity to give a proper talk. Some people give the same talk on repeated Weekends and lose freshness or new insight. The talk outlines in the Manual are inadequate and give little help to the person preparing the talk. *Rollo* givers are encouraged to have staff members listen to their talk before the Weekend, but, even when this does happen, the listeners are hesitant to give constructive criticism. The *rollos*, designed to be a combination of information and personal story, are often unbalanced, boring, too long, or inappropriate.

The Pre-Cursillo provides the opportunity to communicate about the movement, to strategically recruit participants and get them ready for the Weekend, and to thoughtfully and prayerfully prepare for the Weekends. Although HPC has built a solid foundation in the Pre-Cursillo with its comprehensive preparation for the Weekends, the overall ministry during this phase of Cursillo needs to be developed and strengthened.

The Weekend—Strengths and Weaknesses

Strengths

The Weekend is what HPC does well. According to the survey, 79% of the respondents said that all aspects of the Weekend were somewhat or very effective, and 91% ranked the overall Weekend effectiveness as somewhat or very effective.⁶⁴ The survey indicated that the respondents noted very few major issues or problems. The strengths of the Weekend are legion, due in large part to the months of preparation and

⁶⁴ Survey, question 10.

prayer. The comments from the survey reflect the powerful impact that God has made through the Cursillo Weekend. “It was a Weekend that strengthened my commitment to follow Christ.”⁶⁵ “I loved my Weekend. It was powerful and loving and a true blessing to me.”⁶⁶ “Absolutely wonderful experience. Wouldn’t change a minute.”⁶⁷ “I cannot say that I liked everything...but the Holy Spirit used it all for God’s glory.”⁶⁸ Most of the positive comments were general in nature, describing the overall feel of the Weekend and its effect on the person: feeling closer to God, understanding his love, being surrounded by a loving community, feeling forgiven, being given a new life. A few specific activities were singled out as significant: the surprises, serenade, and *palanca* letters.

Serving on the staffs of eleven Cursillo Weekends, six Emmaus Weekends, and participating in countless others through the Fourth Day activities, I have personally seen God work in the lives of the people in amazing, powerful, even startling ways. With the prayer that surrounds the entire event, both on the Weekend and by the Fourth Day community, there is felt an atmosphere of invitation and receptivity to the working of the Holy Spirit. The Weekend’s varied activities appeal to a number of different learning styles, personality types, and activity preferences. Although the fast-paced schedule of the Weekend is noted as a problem by a number of people in the survey, it does keep people from being bored or lethargic. The personal testimonies included in the *rollos* speak loudly of the power of God’s grace, forgiveness, redemption, and healing, and the frequent worship is thoughtful, tender, and healing.

⁶⁵ Survey question 13, response 57.

⁶⁶ Survey question 13, response 32.

⁶⁷ Survey question 12, response 9.

⁶⁸ Survey question 12, response 122.

One of the major strengths of the Weekend is the fun people have. I have heard participants say that they had not laughed so hard in years. Activities include creativity and humor, and, by the end of the second day, people are comfortable enough with one another to really relax and have fun. These lighthearted moments are interwoven with serious, touching, challenging times of discussion, worship, prayer, and reflection. People often release floods of tears when they begin to see the grace God offers them, when they experience confession and forgiveness, and when they offer their raw, hurting souls into the hands of our Loving God. The staff quietly serves the participants, clearing away as many obstacles they can, so that the participants can enter fully into the process. God showers grace all over the Weekend: inviting, reassuring, equipping, and healing. The Weekend is a powerful and effective tool the God uses in transforming people's lives.

Weaknesses

The Weekend, though wonderful and effective for most people, does have weaknesses and areas that need improvement and change in order to improve the outcome of the Weekend. On the survey, the highest ranked issue (30%) that was a somewhat or major issue was that the Weekend was "outdated and not appealing to younger adults." Although the survey results did not indicate that there were other "major" problems with the Weekend, the thoughts offered in the free comment sections indicate that many people have ideas of how it could be made better. Some of the key areas that were considered an issue or weakness are discussed here.

Music was mentioned. What some considered a strength, others thought was a weakness. Some thought there was too much music, or too little; it was the wrong style or wrong tempo; the songs were too contemporary, not classical, and unfamiliar.

There was pressure to “get it” or have a certain response. The survey reported that some people sensed expectations by the staff and the community to see a visible response in the participants by a certain point in the Weekend. Some people thought the Weekend was manipulative, that the staff and the structure were intent on trying to get participants to cry.

Some wrote of outdated videos. The two videos, *The Music Box* (1980)⁶⁹ and the video about Alfredo (which is actually named *Baptism: the Sacrament of Belonging* [1970])⁷⁰ are old fashioned and poorly made. Choosing new videos is important in order to reach younger people in this sophisticated technological age.

Also mentioned were the rigid schedule and not having enough alone or reflective time. The structure of the Weekend is full and demanding in order to include all the components that are deemed important but can be overwhelming. Most of the activities take place in the same main room, with lots of sitting and listening. People reported a desire for more movement, varied locales, more free time, the chance to go outside, to be alone, and to have time for reflection.

Related to the demanding structure, people reported they were exhausted physically and mentally at the end of the Weekend. Someone said, “It would be great if you left a Weekend refreshed and not wrung out and five pounds heavier. You should not need a day or two off to recover from a retreat.”⁷¹ Late nights, early mornings, non-stop activity, and deeply felt and expressed emotions leave people exhausted.

⁶⁹ *The Music Box*.

⁷⁰ *Baptism: The Sacrament of Belonging* (Cincinnati, OH: St. Anthony Messenger Press, 1970).

⁷¹ Survey, question 12, response 109.

There was too much food. There is an overwhelming amount of food offered on the Weekend, both at mealtimes and in the form of never-ending snacks. People thought the food was too fattening and tempting and offered too often and unnecessarily. Some people reported that they gained weight. HPC is known for its homemade fudge, and, even though people enjoy the treats, it can become a problem. Although most people had positive comments to make about the fun activities, some reported that there was much silliness.

Some wanted more visual experience and not so much auditory input. There is a lot of talking in the Weekend: the *rollos*, meditations, announcements, history, and testimonies, for example. Only recently have people begun to use visuals in these verbal offerings. Gearing primarily to the auditory learner has the potential of excluding the visual and kinesthetic learners from fully appreciating the messages.

It was mentioned that the Weekend attracts only white, upwardly mobile, middle class Boomers. There are not enough young people. Many people were concerned about the demographics of the Weekends and of Cursillo community. We do not attract many people outside the white Boomers. Additionally, it can be too strenuous for older people. One of the reasons we do not attract many seniors is the rigorous and difficult schedule.

Finally, the last day is anticlimactic. After the incredible serenade, the two deliveries of letters, and so many lovely surprises, by Sunday the participants are exhausted. The final talks, so important in their message of how to live as followers of Jesus making a difference in the world, often underwhelm or bore the tired participants. The closing ceremony is long and drawn out and not usually as celebratory as it needs to be in order to finish off the Weekend with power and gusto.

From my own personal observations, I see a number of other weaknesses of the Weekend. There is a tendency to put too much emphasis on Cursillo itself, especially the Weekend, and not enough on following Jesus. Cursillistas often say, “Cursillo changed my life” and do not realize that it was Jesus who was the one who changed them. This affection and investment in Cursillo rather than in Jesus’ Kingdom often leads to a weak or difficult transition to the real world. Waiting until the final day to talk about how to relate Cursillo to real life is not productive. Being so tired, they miss most of the good information and inspiration on how to continue the journey with Christ.

The *rollos* can be either a strength or a weakness. Many of them are clear, well prepared, balanced between biblical and theological concepts and the person’s personal life experience. Others, however, are poorly prepared, badly delivered, and overly focused on personal experience (in the case of lay people) or too preachy or intellectual and void of personal touches (on the part of the clergy). Many of the lay people do not have a gift of speaking in front of people and do not have a good grasp of the biblical or theological concepts they are trying to communicate.

The positive fact that Cursillistas love the Weekend and return to staff again and again can cause an inappropriate dependency on Cursillo and the inability to relate it to life and ministry outside Cursillo. When their churches do not measure up to Cursillo, they get frustrated and leave, either looking for Cursillo-esque churches or making Cursillo their church. They do not understand that they are to come down from the mountaintop, having been fed, amazed, and wowed by Jesus, and return to their lives, their churches, and their environments to be part of the amazing things God is already doing out there in the world. This issue with Cursillo is partly due to weaknesses in the

Weekend but also relates to the lack of effective ministry in the third part of Cursillo, the Fourth Day.

Fourth Day—Strengths and Weaknesses

Down off the mountain they come, slipping back into their regular lives, touched by Jesus, encouraged by faith, filled with hope, and delighted by grace. Then comes Monday, and all of the reality of living in the valley comes flooding back. Every Cursillista coming home from a Weekend needs help to continue the journey of faith and to live out the vision of Cursillo. The Fourth Day part of Cursillo is vitally important in its potential for making an impact on people long after their Weekend experience fades.

Strengths

The belief that the Weekend is the most important part of Cursillo causes the HPC community to continue to focus on the Weekend even in the Fourth Day. The most positive Fourth Day or Post-Weekend activity according to the survey was “Attending serenades and closings” with 81.5% giving it somewhat or very effective ratings. Similarly, “Staffing a Weekend” was also very positive with 79% of the respondents assigning it the same top two ratings. These results reflect the desire of Cursillistas to return to the Weekend, either as a staff member or for the opportunities to share in the Weekend experience through serenade and closing.

People return to serve on a staff for a number of reasons. Having had a wonderful Weekend themselves, they want to provide the same kind of experience for others. They want to use their gifts and talents in service to God, they want to watch God perform miracles of transformation in the lives of others, and they want to avail themselves of

more of the overpowering grace of God that flows through these Weekends. The commitment of Cursillistas who staff is inspiring. Over half of the survey respondents say that they have staffed two or more times,⁷² and many make it a point to staff at least once a year. It is amazing to see the sacrifice of time and money people make to serve on repeated staff teams. Each staff member commits four full days for the Weekend, attends a training session (a Friday evening and Saturday), spends time doing whatever preparations necessary for their assigned job, writes *palanca* letters for all participants and staff, prepares a *rollo* if assigned, and commits to pray for the Weekend.

Another strength of the Fourth Day is the communication and fellowship that take place in and among the community. Some people initiate new friendships on the Weekends that continue over months and years. Others participate in renewal groups where they share their journeys of faith with a few others and receive encouragement, accountability, and strength. Some enjoy the Ultreyas as a time to renew acquaintances, welcome new Cursillistas, and worship as a community. The group email prayer list, which is sent almost daily, helps Cursillistas keep in touch with one another. The electronic newsletter keeps people informed about past and future weekends, shares testimonies from participants and staff, and gives announcements of dates for Ultreyas and renewal groups. As a weekend approaches, HPC sends emails with all the reminders for the Weekend events, the need for *palanca*, the list of names of attendees, the invitation to the welcome home Ultreya, the invitation to sign up for the prayer banner, and the encouragement to pray for all aspects of the Weekend.

⁷² Survey, question 1.

Many of the strengths the Fourth Day result from active participation in the Fourth Day opportunities of a Weekend: Serenade, closing, providing *palanca*, prayer, and the preparations for the next Weekend. However, this focus on the Weekend becomes a weakness when it does not help Cursillistas develop their walk with Jesus or learn about changing their environments for Christ.

Weaknesses

The Fourth Day is where the most change is needed to enable more people to live out the vision of Cursillo and to keep the movement alive and healthy. The major weaknesses in the Fourth Day are in the area of continual, effective follow-up of the participants after they complete a Weekend. The survey says that 71.9% of respondents consider “Training for living out the Cursillo vision in the Fourth Day” to be very ineffective, somewhat ineffective or were indifferent about it. One respondent said, “I never heard about any training for living out the Cursillo vision in the 4th Day.”⁷³ Another 67.9% assigned the same categories to “Sponsorship” in the Fourth Day. Without an effective sponsorship program, many participants are not only poorly prepared before the Weekend but are also neglected afterwards and not taught how to take the first steps on their continuing journey. One participant said, “Figuring out how to be a Cursillista in this world is truly the hardest thing I have ever done.”⁷⁴ Returning home is often a shock to new Cursillistas after being showered with constant attention, affirmation, surprises, and being waited on hand and foot. The real world takes some navigation after a Weekend, and many people are not getting any help. One survey respondent said, “You

⁷³ Survey, question 17, response 73.

⁷⁴ Survey, question 17, response 31.

are begged to go on a Weekend and then most people are dropped like a hot potato.”⁷⁵ The community at large makes an effort at the welcome home Ultreya, but this single event is inadequate as follow-up. Occasionally, the table groups communicate for a while, and there is often a flurry of emails between the moderator, staff, and participants of a Weekend, but nothing is sustained. Even though renewal groups are encouraged, very few Cursillistas join or start one. Without appropriate and timely training, encouragement, companionship, resources, and communication, many people lose the fire and passion. People made these comments: “Immediate impact was huge, but waned over time,”⁷⁶ and “For some the Weekend was very effective, for others it just becomes a pleasant memory.”⁷⁷ Others become hyper-focused on Cursillo and cannot translate Cursillo into the rest of life. One person commented, “It needs to be made clear that people are encouraged to go back to their churches and serve...Cursillo should not take up all their time.”⁷⁸ A number of Cursillistas do become engaged in changing their environments for Christ and have become leaders in their churches, started ministries, reached out to their neighbors, and become more missional in their attitudes and lifestyle. It is also possible that some people are living lives of transformation and ministry but have felt no need to connect with other Cursillistas in any way. One survey responder said, “My moving on to other activities is not a down side in growth of discipleship,

⁷⁵ Survey, question 17, response 11.

⁷⁶ Survey, question 5, response 7.

⁷⁷ Survey, question 5, response 12.

⁷⁸ Survey, question 17, response 22.

rather it may represent the best success of Cursillo, to enable general discipleship service rather than just promoting more Cursillo.”⁷⁹

The misunderstood and underused ministry of sponsorship is a significant weakness in the Fourth Day as well as in the Pre-Cursillo. Currently, most sponsors have minimal contact with their participants before the Weekend and do not even contact them afterwards, much less follow-up over the ensuing weeks and months. The lack of sponsor training contributes to a sense of bewilderment and inadequacy on the part of sponsors with regards to how to mentor or nurture a new Cursillista in spiritual growth. There are as yet no guidelines or resources for sponsors, but the HPC council is studying how to create and provide them in the near future.

Along with ineffective sponsorship is the crucial lack of training in continuing the journey and life of faith and service. The packet given to the participants as they leave Cursillo does not include adequate information for the next step of the journey.

According to one respondent to the survey, “I never knew of any resources to get me involved in church or other ministry activities.”⁸⁰ Assuming that the Cursillista would find help in the home church, the Fourth Day community does not offer training in spiritual disciplines, spiritual direction, or resources for ways to engage in spiritual growth, opportunities or training in how to engage in changing one’s environment for Christ. However, many Cursillistas do not receive the help they need from their churches for a variety of reasons. Sometimes their churches do not offer training in discipleship, opportunities for leadership training, discovery of spiritual gifts, and teaching on how to

⁷⁹ Survey, question 17, response 9.

⁸⁰ Survey, question 16, response 6.

engage in missional ministry. Cursillistas may disengage from their churches, becoming more focused on Cursillo as their “church,” and not take advantage of what the church offers. Some only seek the spiritual high offered by Cursillo weekends and do not realize the importance of deep discipleship and ministry. In the booklet *The Health and Well Being of the Movement* produced by the National Episcopal Cursillo, the writer describes some of the dangers of Cursillo, among them: losing the vision, “emphasizing only a part of the Method: for example ‘putting on Weekends’ only without also developing an active Fourth Day program; allowing Cursillo to take the place of the Church instead of recognizing it as an integral part of the Church”⁸¹

Koinonitis, which was described earlier as a weakness of Pre-Cursillo, originates in the Fourth Day. The community, unable or unwilling to break out of the safe and nurturing cocoon of Cursillo, clings together to the exclusion of others. Many Cursillistas want to stay in Narnia, so to speak, and not live in the real world. Being more concerned about their own comfort and satisfaction than about reaching out into the world, some Cursillistas have been more concerned with building the Cursillo community than reaching out to the world. This becomes a problem in attracting people to the movement, in relationships with the churches, and with fulfilling the outwardly focused part of the purpose of Cursillo.

Conclusion

This review of strengths and weaknesses of the three parts of HPC, the Pre-Cursillo, the Weekend, and the Fourth Day, has revealed a number of important things

⁸¹ National Episcopal Cursillo, *Health and Well Being of the Movement*, Booklet #18 (Conway, SC: National Episcopal Cursillo, 2008), 1.

about HPC. First, God has worked mightily through Cursillo to bring many people into stronger, more alive and faithful relationships with Jesus; most people who attend have a positive experience and report spiritual growth and renewal. There are many ways HPC is accomplishing the first part of the purpose of Cursillo. The concern raised by this review is that the vision of lasting transformation and sending people home to change their environments for Christ has not been realized.

To establish the motivation and need for change, the next two chapters will engage in a discussion of the biblical and theological foundations of the two parts of Cursillo's purpose. These chapters will affirm the deep conviction of the founders of Cursillo that God continues to invite his people to follow him and be sent by him into the world. These discussions will emphasize the importance of Cursillo maintaining its original vision, especially in today's culture.

PART TWO

BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CURSILLO

CHAPTER 4

LIVING THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

Introduction: Back to Two Purposes

Chapters 2 and 3 presented a picture of what Houston Presbyterian Cursillo looks like today, describing the movement and its strengths and weaknesses. All three parts of the HPC movement are based on the model first given by the Catholics and adapted by Presbyterians in the late 1980s. However, over the years as HPC has grown and developed, they have focused most of their energy on creating excellent Weekend experiences, and neglected the Pre-Cursillo and the Fourth Day. The Weekends are indeed incredible and bring great renewal to the lives of many, but this singular focus on the Weekends inhibits the whole purpose of Cursillo from being realized. Change is necessary if Cursillo is to remain a vital and influential method of discipling and training followers of Jesus. In an effort to look ahead to how to change and redevelop HPC, the next two chapters will go back to the beginnings of Cursillo and investigate the biblical and theological foundations of the two-part purpose of the movement. It is my conviction that a recommitment to this grand purpose will strengthen and revitalize HPC.

The Catholic founders of the Cursillo movement saw the ravages of an unchecked downward slide of society and the church in Spain following the Spanish Civil War and were eager to bring Christ and the good news of Christ's hope, love, and grace back into their world. They believed that leaders needed to be trained to remind others that God loved them, had a plan for them, and was calling them to lives of repentance and

obedience. The Cursillo movement brought a renewed focus on God's power and grace in the transformation of hearts, souls, and lives, with the larger goal of changing the world for Christ. In the official documents of Catholic Cursillo from 1981, the national director, Gerald Hughes said, "The ultimate goal of Cursillos in Christian Living is that on the Day of Judgment there may be more people on the right than on the left. Its immediate purpose is to provide an understanding, a conviction, a real-life experience and actual community life in what is fundamental for being Christian."⁸²

The Cursillo Movement started with a double purpose, described here by the National Secretariat:

The purpose is the reason why we do what we do. The Cursillo Movement, therefore, pursues a two-fold purpose; an immediate and ultimate one: *Immediate Purpose*: To provide a foundation so the person may live what is fundamental for being Christian; love of God and love of neighbor, experienced through three essential encounters: an encounter with oneself, with Christ and with others. *Ultimate Purpose*: To vertebrae Christianity in society, through those who live what is fundamental for being Christian, the love of God and neighbor, in their daily lives by making a conscious effort to speak to the world about Christ while strengthening the three encounters that are nourished by the Group Reunion and the Ultreya.⁸³

The first purpose is to help people meet Jesus face to face, to begin to understand his love and grace and forgiveness, and to become alive in their faith in Jesus, with a renewed sense of hope and purpose. As people engage in an intimate and growing relationship with Jesus, they become more and more open to the work of the Holy Spirit inside them and begin to take on the characteristics of Jesus. A life of discipleship is alive

⁸² Gerald Hughes and The Office of the National Secretariat, *The Cursillo Movement: Explanation and Purpose* (Dallas: The National Secretariat of the Cursillo Movement in the United States and Gerald Hughes, 1981), 9.

⁸³ "The Cursillo Movement: What Is It" (Dallas: the National Secretariat of the Cursillo Movement in the United States, 2006), 23-24.

and growing and overflows with mission into the world. As people embrace Jesus and accept the invitation to be a follower, God's grace and plan for the world begin to make sense. According to John Leith, "Grace means the loving-kindness of God, but in the scripture it has a more specific meaning. It refers in particular to God's spiritual initiative in choosing a people, in forgiving sins, in transforming human hearts. It is the active favor and goodness of God directed especially to his people."⁸⁴ Chapter 3 will discuss the biblical and theological theme of the spiritual transformation of God's people in response to God's grace. The first section will paint the backdrop of God's plan for his people and the response to that plan. The next section will describe how the Holy Spirit leads and directs all aspects of the transformation of people's lives. The five succeeding sections will unpack the process of spiritual transformation using as a basis the talks on God's grace given on a Cursillo Weekend by the clergy.

Backdrop

"Long before God laid down earth's foundations, he had us in mind, had settled on us as the focus of his love, to be made whole and holy by his love. Long, long ago he decided to adopt us into his family through Jesus Christ. He wanted us to enter into the celebration of his lavish gift giving by the hand of his beloved Son" (Eph 1:4-10 MSG). God has been reaching out to the people of his creation since before the world began. He loves us as the crowning achievement of his creation and has been pursuing us for relationship since before we were born. God saves us from the darkness of the world, the sinful nature that has us in its grasp, and brings us to live with him in the Kingdom of

⁸⁴ John H. Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 220.

light (1 John 5-10). As we live as Kingdom followers we are asked to give him the glory and honor that He deserves and to share His light with the world (1 Chron. 16:29).

Scripture tells the story of God's amazing love for his people and the continuous wooing of them to himself. Genesis 1 and 2 describe the creation of the world, the forming of people made in God's image, and the relationship between the Creator and his people. Genesis 3 tells the story of how our first parents led the way in rebelling against God, struggling with the desire to know everything and control. All humans share in the sinful, frantic striving to be god in their own little universes, resulting in a separation and hiding from God (Rom. 3:23). Unwilling to leave his people in this estranged state, God continued to pursue his creation, choosing the Israelite people to be the carriers of his love and grace to the world (Gen. 12: 1-3, Deut. 7:6-9). The Old Testament is their story. The chosen people lived in a cycle of obedience and rebellion: embracing and living God's calling, then turning away from God, only to find pain and struggle and defeat without God (Judg. 2). After an unsuccessful season of "doing what was right in their own eyes" (Judg. 21:25 NRSV) and turning away from God, they repented and returned to God, and then repeated the cycle over and over again. The good news is that God persevered in the relationship with the Israelites. After centuries fraught with darkness and frustration and the ebb and flow of faithfulness, God came to live among his people in Jesus (John 1:14). The Son of God, fully human and fully divine, inaugurated the Kingdom of God and brought good news of a New Covenant with God (Luke 22:20), one that would finally restore the relationship between God and his people. In dying on the cross for the sins of the world, Jesus defeated sin and death, closed the chasm that divided God from his people, and provided the way to a life in relationship with God for eternity

(Col. 1:22, Matt. 28:20). God continues to seek after his people, delivering us again and again from the oppression of darkness, sin, our enemies and ourselves (Rom. 8:38).

Although God punishes, challenges, and allows us to suffer the consequences of our sin and rebellion, God never completely gives up on us. He is our God and we are His people forever (Ps. 95:7), and he has a plan for us (Jer. 29:11). By the power of the Holy Spirit, he seeks to transform us from controlling, driven, self-centered, sinful people into people of the light so that we can live out that plan (Phil. 2:14-18).

Transformation by the Holy Spirit

The first part of the purpose of Cursillo, living what is fundamental to being Christian and becoming a fully alive and growing follower of Jesus, is impossible without the power and work of the Holy Spirit. People are not capable of becoming God's followers on their own power. Commenting on our inability to live lives of discipleship on our own strength, David Watson, in *Called and Committed*, said, "I need to breathe in the Holy Spirit in order to live spiritually."⁸⁵ This section will briefly describe the Holy Spirit and his continuous work in the lives of those who seek to follow Jesus.

The Bible first mentions the Spirit of God in Genesis 1:2, "Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters" (NIV). Throughout the rest of Scripture, the Spirit of God is active and involved in the life and work of God in his Kingdom. In the Old Testament, the Spirit instructed (Neh. 8:20) and was upon leaders (Num. 11:17), judges (Judg. 3:10), and kings (1 Sam. 11:6). The prophets spoke of the Spirit and prophesied his activity in

⁸⁵ David Watson, *Called and Committed* (Wheaton, IL: Harold Shaw Publishers, 1982), 65.

and through Jesus (Isa. 42:1, 61:1, Joel 2:28-9, Ezek. 11:19). Followers of God acknowledged the Spirit's role in their lives: "The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life" (Job 33:4). In the New Testament, Scripture says that the Holy Spirit came upon Mary in the conception of Jesus (Luke 1:35), descended on Jesus at his baptism (Mark 1:10), was given to Jesus without limit (John 3:34), was on Jesus as prophesied by the prophet Isaiah (Luke 4:18-21, Isa. 61:1-2), empowered Jesus to perform miracles and drive out demons (Matt. 12:22-28) and was promised by Jesus to come to be with the disciples forever (John 14:16). After the Holy Spirit came with power on Pentecost, he was present in every step of the development and spread of the gospel of Jesus into the world even unto today.

Throughout the centuries, the Church has described, defined, and debated the Holy Spirit. Church doctrine across denominations offers creeds, statements, and confessions that include references to the Holy Spirit and his work in the kingdom. "The Heidelberg Catechism," one of the documents in the Presbyterian Church (USA)'s *Book of Confessions*, says in Question and Answer #53,

Q. 53. What do you believe concerning the "Holy Spirit"?

A. First, that, with the Father and the Son, he is equally eternal God; second, that God's Spirit is also given to me, preparing me through a true faith to share in Christ and all his benefits, that he comforts me and will abide with me forever.⁸⁶

A recent statement from the Office of Spiritual Formation of the Presbyterian Church (USA) regarding spiritual formation and the role of the Holy Spirit states,

⁸⁶ "The Heidelberg Catechism," in *The Book of Confessions*, part 1 of *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 1996), Q and A #53, 4.053.

Spiritual formation is the activity of the Holy Spirit which molds our lives into the likeness of Jesus Christ. This likeness is one of deep intimacy with God and genuine compassion for all of creation. The Spirit works not only in the lives of individuals but also in the church, shaping it into the Body of Christ. We cooperate with this work of the Spirit through certain practices that make us more open and responsive to the Spirit's touch, disciplines such as Sabbath keeping, works of compassion and justice, discernment, worship, hospitality, spiritual friendships, and contemplative silence.⁸⁷

Everything about being followers of Jesus is inspired and directed by the Holy Spirit. Before we know God consciously, the Holy Spirit is touching our hearts, opening our eyes, revealing himself to us. Our hearts can only turn to him as a response to his working in us; the Holy Spirit gives us the courage and will to make the decision to follow Jesus. He softens our hearts, tears down the walls of separation caused by our sin, brings us to our knees in confession and repentance, forgives us, then fills us and sustains us. The Holy Spirit brings transformation to every part of our lives if we are open to him. The daily ability to say yes to life in Christ comes only by the power of the Holy Spirit. As we participate in kingdom work and are sent into the world, the Holy Spirit leads and strengthens and comforts and directs. John Leith, in *Basic Christian Doctrine*, says, "The Holy Spirit is the mystery of the divine presence that encounters us, calls us, transforms us, makes us alive to God."⁸⁸

The Cursillo Weekend is beautiful exhibition and explanation of God's transformation by grace. According to the *Manual of Cursillo*, "Grace is the central theme of Cursillo, for it is through the experience of grace that people are set free to

⁸⁷ Presbyterian Church (USA), "Spiritual Formation," "Frequently Asked Questions," <http://missionfunding.pcusa.org/spiritualformation/faq.htm#1> (accessed October 9, 2009).

⁸⁸ Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine*, 165.

become the persons God intends.”⁸⁹ The five talks given by the clergy describe and illustrate the theme of grace as the Weekend unfolds. These talks trace the way God’s Spirit applies grace to his people from before they ever recognize him, through transformation into believers, and then to followers who serve God with their hearts and lives. They discuss the inescapable problem of sin and describe God’s forgiveness and sustaining power. The talks establish the Christian life in the context of the Church and its practices and offer testimonies to exemplify what it means to live what is fundamental to being Christian, the first part of the purpose of Cursillo. The five talks, which form the backbone of the Cursillo Weekend, are designed to explain and demonstrate God’s grace in accessible and applicable ways. When effective, the talks firmly establish grace as the foundation for living a transformed life of faith and service.

“Grace: An Invitation from God”

God issues the call to people to follow him in unique and creative ways. “Samuel, Samuel,” calls the Lord to his servant Samuel (1 Sam. 3). Samuel awakens to the call of God but does not recognize that it is from the Lord. After the third awakening call from God and direction from the priest Eli, Samuel recognizes God’s voice and answers him. So begins the awareness of God in the life of Samuel, a person who would follow and serve God in amazing and powerful ways throughout his life. Throughout salvation history, God has called to his people and waited for them to answer. God has loved us and planned for us and pursued a relationship with us. All our lives, God is weaving his way into our hearts. Often it is only when we look back that we can see just how he was

⁸⁹ Keith, *Manual of the Presbyterian Cursillo*, 54.

revealing himself to us in nature, in music, in his word, through others, through worship. We are like Samuel, in a deep sleep, and at some point God wakes us up and calls us by name.

On the first morning of Cursillo, the participants, who have spent the night in silence, come to the chapel for worship, not knowing what to expect. After the story of God calling Samuel is read, each of the participants' names is called, one by one, as if it were God calling him or her. Later, the first clergy talk, "Grace," explains this first movement of God's grace in their lives. In the Methodist Walk to Emmaus, the talk is called Prevenient Grace, stressing the truth that God has been continually pouring out his grace to us before we ever heard or responded to his voice. This is the grace that comes (venient) before (pre) our response, the grace that is offered out of the heart of God, who loves the people he created. In his call to Jeremiah the prophet, the Lord said, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you" (Jer. 1:5). God woos us, engages in a sort of courtship, a time in which God reveals himself through nature, his Word, his voice, other people, music, worship, relationships, miracles, and through the gift of the Spirit's presence in and among us. The participants are reassured that God loves his people, has a plan for them, promises never to leave them, and invites them to follow him and build their lives on the foundation of faith. Jesus told his disciples at the end of his earthly life, "You did not choose me, but I chose you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last" (John 15:16). Jesus chooses us, and, when the Holy Spirit moves on our hearts, we are able to receive him. According to an article in a teacher-training manual of the United Methodist Church, "The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church, 1996, defines this grace as 'the divine love that surrounds all humanity and precedes any and all of our

conscious impulses' (Section 60). Even while we were yet sinners, separated from Christ, God's grace was already active in us, perhaps in ways we could not identify."⁹⁰

Jesus calls each one of us by name, just as God called Samuel. He invites us to give our hearts to him and to follow him all our days. Even when we do not recognize him or flee from him, he continues to pursue after us to find us and make us his. By grace, one day we wake from slumber and hear God's voice and say, "Speak, for your servant is listening" (1 Sam. 3:10).

"Faith: Living in Grace"

God calls to his people, reaching out his hand to them in invitation (John 1:39-46). This reaching of God is depicted in *The Creation of Adam*, the spectacular painting by Michelangelo on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The painting portrays God in all of his power and might reaching out his hand to his creation, Adam. The force of the painting is all in God's action toward Adam. Adam, on the other hand, is looking away slightly, with a seemingly nonchalant attitude to the hand of God. The space between the hands is significant, speaking powerfully about the gracious distance that God leaves in his reaching toward his creation, a space of invitation for us to be able to respond to him in free will.

The ability to respond to God's invitation, to take his proffered hand, is only possible by faith, fed by the grace given by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross (Rom. 5:1-2). This justifying grace sets people right in relationship with God and enables us to take the next step in our journey with Jesus. John Stott, in *Christian Basics*, says, "Justification

⁹⁰ "Teaching Grace in Christian Education," <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=1&mid=5243> (accessed October 9, 2009).

describes the position of acceptance with God which he gives us when we trust in Christ as our Savior. It is a legal term, borrowed from the law courts, and its opposite is condemnation. To justify is to acquit, to declare an accused person to be just, not guilty. So the divine judge, because his Son has borne our condemnation, justifies us, pronouncing us righteous in his sight.”⁹¹ With this justifying grace, we are not condemned, but forgiven. “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 8:1).

According to the manual for Walk To Emmaus, “Justifying Grace tells the story of how an individual accepts the relationship that God offers. It is the moment when we realize that we do not merit the relationship.”⁹² At some point, we are able to cross the distance between God’s hand and ours and by faith connect with God and his love for us. Our faith grows as we relinquish more and more of ourselves to him and begin to trust him with every part of our being. We do not do this on our own, but only through the movement of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:8-10).

When we as God’s people take God’s hand in acknowledgement of all that he has done for us in Jesus Christ, we enter into a new relationship with God (2 Cor. 5:17). As our lives unfold, we are daily guided by the Holy Spirit in faith to trust him and live in

⁹¹ John Stott, *Christian Basics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1991), 38.

⁹² “Clergy Talks,” excerpted from *The Walk to Emmaus Spiritual Director’s Manual* (E27), (Nashville: The Upper Room, 2002), 8, <http://www.hhemmaus.org/documents/BRclergyTalkout.pdf> (accessed March 4, 2010).

deep intimacy with God (Ps. 37:3-6, Col. 2:6-7). We continually confess our sins, our need for him, and our dependence on his power and direction. Then, as forgiven sinners, we are able to interact with the world with compassion, hope, and service (John 13:34-35). Paul says in the second letter to the Corinthians, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation” (2 Cor. 5:17-20).

“Obstacles to Grace”

One of the questions for membership in the old UPCUSA (United Presbyterian Church in the USA) was: “Do you believe that you are a sinner in the sight of God, justly deserving God’s displeasure, without hope, except for God’s sovereign mercy?” This question often raised concerns and even angry reactions when posed to people preparing to join the Presbyterian Church. People did not want to say that they were “that bad”; they considered themselves nice people, and this question seemed offensive and harsh. However, the truth is that we are sinners, we deserve God’s displeasure, and, left to our own devices, we are without hope. Since sin entered the world with our first parents, every single human being is born with a sinful nature. (Eph. 2:3). The PC (USA) claims the following statement concerning our sinful state in “A Brief Statement of Faith,”

In sovereign love God created the world good and makes everyone equally in God’s image, male and female, of every race and people, to live as one community.

But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator. Ignoring God's commandments, we violate the image of God in others and ourselves, accept lies as truth, exploit neighbor and nature, and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care. We deserve God's condemnation. Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.⁹³

We all have sinned and fallen short. Satan tempts us, we are seduced by the glitter of the world, and we are selfish and want to go our own way. We erect idols to false gods, thinking that we can find happiness and peace through our own means. None of us escapes the death sentence that is the consequence of sin, but, through Jesus' sacrifice, we are saved from this death: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:23). Jesus conquered sin and has given us new life so that we no longer live under condemnation: "Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1-2). We are called to recognize our sin, to confess and repent, and to receive the forgiveness that is freely offered. When we commit ourselves to Jesus in repentance and hope, we wish that we could be finished with sin once and for all. Because we live in this world of darkness, though, on this side of heaven we will always have to deal with our sinfulness (Rom. 7:25).

The Cursillo talk, "Obstacles to Grace: Sin," given on the second day of Cursillo, describes the reality of sin and how it causes us to erect blocks and barriers to God and his love. According to the Walk to Emmaus outlines, "an obstacle to grace is anything that keeps us from enjoying the loving relationship that God offers us."⁹⁴ With the purpose of invigorating the spiritual lives of the participants and preparing them to

⁹³ "A Brief Statement of Faith," in *The Book of Confessions*, 10.3.

⁹⁴ "Clergy Talks," 14.

reenter their world as change-agents for Christ, this talk warns them of some of the dangers and pitfalls of these obstacles to grace. The Christian life is not easy. We live in the reality of God's love and grace but are constantly bombarded with messages from the darkness of the world that God is not real or truth, that we do not need to follow him, and that we can control our own lives. Although the obstacles are ever-present, God has given us ways to live in which we face these obstacles with his power and promise. The Holy Spirit gives us daily grace for fighting the battle with Sin. The good news is that the final victory is God's.

The remaining two talks given by the clergy are "Sacraments" and "The Christian Life: a Holy Vision." Both of these talks give insight into ways to live in this world, even with the constant presence and temptation of sin. God's grace in and through the Church and her practices sustains followers as they learn more and more how to live as God's own. God gives us daily grace for each step of the journey. In order to fulfill the purposes of Cursillo, it is vital that Cursillistas learn how to engage in meaningful life and ministry when they return home. These next two talks, presented effectively, can inspire and illustrate ways to take the next steps of the journey.

"Sacraments: United in Christ"

Throughout history, followers of God have developed many ways to encourage people in their daily life of faith, incorporating practices and traditions designed to make the grace of God available to the people. Some of these have been formalized as sacraments, defined by Merriam-Webster as "a Christian rite (as baptism or the Eucharist) that is believed to have been ordained by Christ and that is held to be a means

of divine grace or to be a sign or symbol of a spiritual reality.”⁹⁵ For centuries, the Catholic Church has celebrated seven sacraments: baptism, the Lord’s Supper, matrimony, penance/confession, confirmation, anointing of the sick, and holy orders. After the Reformation, the Protestant denominations espoused only two, Baptism and the Lord’s Supper, believing that Jesus instituted these two, as shown in the Gospels (Luke 22:14-23, Matt. 28:18-20). In both the Catholic and Protestant churches, the sacraments are considered a means or visible form of grace. The PC (USA) has defined the sacraments in “The Westminster Confession of Faith”: “Sacraments are holy signs and seals of the covenant of Grace, immediately instituted by God to represent Christ and his benefits, and to confirm our interest in him; as also to put a visible difference between those that belong unto the church, and the rest of the world; and solemnly to engage them to the service of God in Christ, according to his Word.”⁹⁶

The Sacraments talk, given on Saturday, serves to orient the personal relationship with Jesus with God’s signs of grace in the larger body of believers, the Church. God’s grace, demonstrated in the Sacraments talk, helps believers to make progress on the journey of faith within the context of the Church. The Cursillo Manual says that part of the stated purpose of this talk is “to acknowledge that the sacraments are a means of experiencing the grace of God and that through them faith is nourished and commitment deepened by the activity of God’s Spirit.”⁹⁷ *The Walk to Emmaus Manual* says, “Means of Grace are those human experiences that we participate in with liturgy and symbolic

⁹⁵ Merriam-Webster’s *Online Dictionary*, <http://www.merriamwebster.com/dictionary/sacraments> (accessed October 31, 2009).

⁹⁶ “The Westminster Confession of Faith,” 6.149.

⁹⁷ Keith, *The Manual of Presbyterian Cursillo*, 64.

action to recognize God's continual participation in our lives to keep the relationship alive. These sacramental moments are sacred times when God visits us in special ways to affirm the relationship we are attempting to live."⁹⁸

As believers participate in these ancient sacraments, we are connected to all Christians, both now and throughout history. These holy and biblical practices have nourished individuals and the entire Church in the walk of faith and united God's people into the Body of Christ on earth. This united community of followers finds strength for daily life and an increased ability and willingness to help change the world for God.

A further word must be said here about the Body of Christ, the Church.

Individuals do not undertake this journey of faith alone but with the family God gives them when they are in relationship with God, brothers and sisters who are also connected to Jesus. It says in 1 John 1:7, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

After Jesus ascended in heaven and sent the Holy Spirit upon the disciples and those gathered in Jerusalem, the Jesus followers "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42). The Church grew because of the unity the believers had in Christ. The life in Christ is to be lived in the Church, the gathered people of God who are on a mission for him. John Stott, in his book *Basic Christianity*, says, "The Christian life is not just a private affair of your own. If we are born into God's family, not only has he become our Father but every other believer in the world, whatever their nation or denomination, has become our brother or

⁹⁸ "Clergy Talks," 10.

sister in Christ.”⁹⁹ All of these brothers and sisters are fellow pilgrims on the journey, and together they are the Church. Individual followers must unite with some part of the larger body to have the full experience of grace that God offers. Without the support of the Christian community, we are unable to keep focused on the disciplined life necessary to grow. Mulholland says, “...left to ourselves, we do not have the resources to maintain the disciplines that God uses as means of grace to transform us to wholeness in the image of Christ.”¹⁰⁰ He puts growing faith in terms of the church when he says, “Our spiritual formation comes within a corporate and social context...that we might nurture one another into the wholeness of Christ. Our growth toward wholeness is also for the sake of others beyond the body of Christ, that the redeeming, healing, transforming love of God may be known in a broken and hurting world.”¹⁰¹

It is in the Church, in the Body of Christ, where people who believe in Jesus learn how to be his followers. Gathering together in the name of Jesus brings his promised presence: “For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them” (Matt. 18:20). When we walk this path with others and pursue holiness together, we benefit from shared focus, prayer support, fellowship, accountability, and the blessings that come from walking alongside other apprentices. The Cursillo Movement has always considered Cursillo to be a movement of the church and strives to anchor people into the

⁹⁹ John Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 50th Anniversary ed. (Grand Rapids, MI/Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans, 2008), 164.

¹⁰⁰ M. Robert Mulholland, Jr., *Invitation to a Journey: A Road Map for Spiritual Formation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 147.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

local church as their spiritual home.¹⁰² These many churches provide the garden in which Cursillistas are encouraged to grow and develop into the transformed people of God, who will participate in Kingdom work.

“Christian Life: A Holy Vision”

The most difficult part of a journey is often the step-by-step continuing that is necessary to make any progress. The entire third day of the Cursillo Weekend is focused on living transformed lives back home in order to Christianize the world as Cursillistas serve as change-agents in our environments. N. T. Wright says, “...the true Jesus is summoning you to follow him, to a life of discipleship.”¹⁰³ Grace for the journey is often called sanctifying grace as it is what God gives us to sanctify us, or make us holy. John Stott says in *Basic Christianity*, “Becoming a Christian is one thing; being a Christian is another.”¹⁰⁴ The manual for Walk To Emmaus says, “God has gotten our attention and in sanctifying grace we are seeking ways wherein we can give God our undivided attention. Sanctifying grace is the equipping process of our maturing into authentic discipleship and becoming Christ-in-the-world.”¹⁰⁵

The final clergy talk, “Christian Life: a Holy Vision,” is designed to help the participants understand that the continuing journey of faith requires an intimate and alive relationship with God. The first four clergy talks on the Weekend have set the stage for

¹⁰² Keith, “A Critique of the Cursillo Movement and A Manual of the Presbyterian Cursillo,” page 18 of chapter 3.

¹⁰³ N. T. Wright, Jr., *Following Jesus: Biblical Reflections on Discipleship* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), ix.

¹⁰⁴ Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 155.

¹⁰⁵ “Clergy Talks,” 16.

this final talk on what is often the most difficult part of the journey, living faith in relationship with Jesus everyday. This kind of relationship must be nurtured through disciplines and practices that allow the Holy Spirit to continue the work of transformation. God pours out his sanctifying grace to continually nourish those on the journey with him. Sanctifying Grace is defined in The United Methodist Church's "Teaching Grace in Christian Education":

Sanctifying Grace is a purifying and cleansing process that continues throughout our lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. Sanctifying grace is the "bearing fruit" part of God's grace. Through sanctification, according to the Discipline, "we are enabled to increase in the knowledge and love of God and in love for our neighbor" (Section 60). For Wesley sanctifying grace is the power that leads us on toward becoming more Christlike.¹⁰⁶

Scripture teaches that followers of Jesus are becoming more and more like Christ through his Spirit. In his letter to the Corinthians, Paul says, "And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit" (2 Cor. 3:18).

John Leith condenses the definition of sanctification in his book, *Basic Christian Doctrine*, "Sanctification is a *work* of the Holy Spirit in and through human life. It is a continual process, and it is never complete, at least in human history."¹⁰⁷ This process or journey is how followers of Jesus are to live life every day, inviting the Spirit to work inside of us to transform and equip us.

The daily walk needs to be constantly tended and nurtured since we can be lazy, stay busy, and forget the urgency and necessity of attending to our walk with Jesus. The

¹⁰⁶ "Teaching Grace in Christian Education" <http://archives.umc.org/interior.asp?ptid=1&mid=5243> (accessed October 9, 2009).

¹⁰⁷ Leith, *Basic Christian Doctrine*, 191.

word for disciple in Greek, *mathetes*, means a learner, pupil, disciple, or, as Dallas Willard chooses to translate the word in his book, *The Divine Conspiracy*: apprentice.¹⁰⁸ In order to make progress in the life of faith, in becoming more Christlike, apprentices first have to be connected to the source of life, Jesus. Sanctifying grace emphasizes staying close to Jesus. In John 15, Jesus uses the connection between a vine and its branches to illustrate how to live connected to him. He uses the Greek word *meno*, which and is translated as: “abide in me” (NASB), “remain in me” (NIV), and “make your home in me” (MSG). This verb carries a sense of action, not passivity. Abiding or remaining is the way to live that will serve us well. John 15:5 says, “When you’re joined with me and I with you, the relation intimate and organic, the harvest is sure to be abundant.” (MSG) Abiding in Christ is the daily challenge of discipleship.

Robert Mulholland says, “The Christian journey, therefore, is an intentional and continual commitment to a lifelong process of growth toward wholeness in Christ.”¹⁰⁹ Committing to the life of “making ourselves at home in Christ” by growing in him and becoming more like him requires discipline and practice. In Dallas Willard’s words, “...a disciple, or apprentice, is simply someone who has decided to be with another person, under appropriate conditions, in order to become capable of doing what that person does or to become what that person is.”¹¹⁰ The life of an apprentice is one of a learner, one who sits with the master and learns from him, who practices living the way the master lives. Living a life connected to Jesus requires that people not only believe but also

¹⁰⁸ Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998), 282.

¹⁰⁹ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 24.

¹¹⁰ Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*, 282.

practice being Jesus' apprentices, spending time with him and doing the kinds of things he did.

Over the centuries, Christians have developed a whole group of disciplines and practices that help followers grow in the life of discipleship. Mulholland says, "Spiritual disciplines are the act of releasing ourselves in a consistent manner to God, opening those doors in a regular way to allow God's transforming work in our lives."¹¹¹ Each person must open the doors of the hidden, inmost parts, creating space inside for the Spirit inside to come in and do his work. In the Message, Peterson says, "And then take on an entirely new way of life—a God-fashioned life, a life renewed from the inside and working itself into your conduct as God accurately reproduces his character in you" (Eph. 4:23-24).

Living the disciplines of the Christian life helps followers of Jesus separate from the demands of the world long enough to attend to the voice of God and the work of the Spirit. They also make followers ready to enter into focused activity that is directed to growing toward Jesus. God's sanctifying grace is poured into us as we worship, pray, confess, study, share fellowship, and engage in service. The disciplines help us develop habits of living as apprentices. Scripture tells the story of Jesus engaged in each of these disciplines, and so we do what he does in order to grow in him. As individuals and as the body of Christ, we become more like him and more ready to be his people in the world as we live the journey of discipleship day by day.

Because believers receive the grace that God offers in the Christian life as they make the disciplines a normal part of their lives, they experience more and more of what Paul describes as the fruit of the spirit: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness,

¹¹¹ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 38.

faithfulness, gentleness and self control...” (Gal. 5:16,22,23). Believers become more like Christ, transformed in his image, more ready to do his will. Mulholland says, “Spiritual formation is a process of being conformed to the image of Christ, a journey into becoming persons of compassion, persons who forgive, persons who care deeply for others and the world, persons who offer themselves to God to become agents of divine grace in the lives of others and their world—in brief, persons who love and serve as Jesus did.”¹¹² Our perspective on people and the world changes, and we become more prepared to be God’s light in the world. Life becomes more focused on Jesus, his hope and promise and challenge.

Conclusion

All five of the *rollos* support and illustrate the way God transforms people into his followers by the power of the Holy Spirit, the first purpose of Cursillo. They help create an atmosphere for grace given and received and can be powerful and influential in the process of the movement, but they are only a part of how the grace of God is transmitted to the participants. The whole movement is filled with incarnational symbols of God’s grace. One example is how prevenient grace is exhibited in the countless ways the staff and the community carefully and lovingly prepare for the participants before and during the Weekends. When participants experience the impact of this grace through the nametags, notebooks, the clear preparation of Samuel, the *palanca*, serenade, and prayer banner, they are often overwhelmed and begin to grasp the truth that God himself has prepared the way for them to come to him in faith. Another example is how the Body of

¹¹² Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 25.

Christ takes on new meaning for participants in the serenade, closing, and the letters from people unknown to them. God showing his love and grace through a group of believers ministers to participants and staff alike. Fourth Day activities are designed to carry on the essence of community. A final example of another way that grace is experienced is in how the concept of journey of faith and discipleship is stressed in the actual flow of the three days of the Weekend. As the Weekend unfolds, the journey is explained and experienced. The sanctifying grace is lived out in the prayers and worship and community in the time together.

The first purpose of Cursillo is to bring people to the place of falling in love with Jesus and wanting to live for him for the rest of their lives. Out of living a life transformed by Christ comes the second purpose of Cursillo: to be sent into the world to change it for Christ. Chapter 5 will discuss the biblical and theological understanding of what it means to be sent out by Christ to change the world. Paul's second letter to the Corinthians puts the two purposes together,

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God (2 Cor. 5:17-20 NIV).

So we go, as transformed people out into the world as ambassadors for Christ, ready to change the world for him.

CHAPTER 5

CHRIST SENDS HIS PEOPLE INTO THE WORLD

The world we westerners live in is dark and troubled. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, we find ourselves more technologically sophisticated and connected and yet more isolated and desperate than ever before. We have lost our moral compass, the influence of the Church is waning, and the current spirituality is not anchored in a definable truth or historical Christianity. We have become untethered from one another and from basic Christian doctrine. This state of the culture is not brand new, but merely the next iteration of living the human condition. From the beginning of time, people have chosen to live in darkness instead of light, to run from God and to go their own way (1 John 1:6, Jonah 1:3).

In the 1940s in Spain, things were also dark, both in the society and in the Catholic Church. Cursillo was born out of the commitment and determination of a small group of Catholics, who were convinced of the power of God in the transformation of people and society. Through their efforts, the Cursillo movement has been an effective tool to bring change and hope to many places of darkness. The dual purposes of Cursillo, introduced previously, are to help people learn to live what is fundamental to being Christian and to send them out to change society for Christ. Chapter 4 discussed the biblical and theological foundations for living what is fundamental to being Christian, being transformed by Christ to live for Christ. This chapter will deal with the second part

of the purpose, the being sent into the world by God as transformed people of faith to be part of the work that God is doing in dark and broken places.

The two purposes of Cursillo are intertwined and inseparable. When followers of Jesus live a life of faith, transformed and inspired by the Holy Spirit, they begin to see the world with God's perspective. Robert Mulholland wrote in his book *Invitation to a Journey*, "John Wesley repeatedly affirmed that there can be no personal holiness without social holiness. The converse is also true: there can be no social holiness without personal holiness. If spiritual formation is, indeed, being conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of others, *the ultimate test of our spirituality lies in the nature of our life in the world with others.*"¹¹³ Followers of Jesus must live out their faith both internally and individually and externally and socially. The things God does inside each individual toward transformation into a whole faithful person are the same things God wants to do through them in the culture. Growing followers who are maturing to be more like Christ are also naturally becoming more concerned with the world around them. N. T. Wright says in *Following Jesus*, "The longer you look at Jesus, the more you will want to serve him in his world."¹¹⁴ Jesus invites all people into a journey of light, faith, and hope so that they can be his ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20) and shine like stars in the universe in a crooked and depraved generation (Phil. 2:15).

Called to a Purpose

God calls people into a relationship with him, transforms them through his grace and power, and incorporates them into Kingdom work. Scripture tells story after story of

¹¹³ Mulholland, *Invitation to a Journey*, 142.

¹¹⁴ Wright, *Following Jesus*, ix.

God saving people and calling them to his purposes. At the call of Abram and the start of the nation Israel, God blessed Abram so that he would be a blessing and all peoples on earth would be blessed through him (Gen. 12:2-3). Throughout the story of the chosen people Israel, God raised up people to tell the story of his grace and promise to those who did not know him. In the Incarnation, God sent Jesus, who, in his life, death, and resurrection, accomplished salvation and brought hope and light into the world. Jesus invited people not just to be his followers but also to become his witnesses to all the nations (Acts 1:8). Charles Van Engen, in *God's Missionary People*, says, "The biblical theology of the Word-made-flesh, Jesus Christ, contains the concept of 'sentness.' The Incarnation was a sending forth. The Church becomes *mission* in following the Lord as an apostolic community that is in constant, dynamic movement, proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom of Light in the midst of the kingdom of darkness."¹¹⁵

God calls his people into his grand purpose, a calling that permeates the whole of life. Os Guinness, in his book *The Call*, describes the truth that all followers of Jesus are called to belong to Him, body and soul. "What do I mean by 'calling'?" For the moment let me say simply that *calling is the truth that God calls us to himself so decisively that everything we are, everything we do, and everything we have is invested with a special devotion and dynamism lived out as a response to his summons and service.*"¹¹⁶ This calling from God helps us find the purpose for which we are living, giving all of life a holistic focus. The seeking of our purpose in life has become a national pastime in recent years, revealing a hunger for knowing why we are here. In the first chapter of Rick

¹¹⁵ Van Engen, *God's Missionary People*, 78.

¹¹⁶ Os Guinness, *The Call* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 2003), 4.

Warren's popular book, *The Purpose Driven Life*, he asks the question, "What on earth am I here for?"¹¹⁷ His response centers our purpose in God: "The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this planet, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose."¹¹⁸ All people must learn about God's purpose, listen to his direction, and discern how they fit into that purpose and God's overall plan for the world. Ephesians 1:11-12 (MSG) says, "It's in Christ that we find out who we are and what we are living for. Long before we first heard of Christ and got our hopes up, he had his eye on us, had designs on us for glorious living, part of the overall purpose he is working out in everything and everyone." The purpose of life revolves around God and this overall purpose.

God does not simply call our names and transform us for our own sakes so that we can live in him and his grace. God wants our hearts and our hands and our feet and our words. As Richard Stearns said in *The Hole in Our Gospel*, "God asks us for everything. He requires a total commitment from those who would be his followers. In fact, Christ calls us to be his partners in changing our world, just as He called the Twelve to change their world two thousand years ago."¹¹⁹ Stearns continues to explain that, as important as a personal relationship with God is, it is incomplete if it is not also "a public and transforming relationship with the world. The gospel itself was born of God's vision

¹¹⁷ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 17.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Richard Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009), 1.

of a changed people, challenging and transforming the prevailing values and practices of our world.”¹²⁰ Every person is called and gifted by God to be part of his reconciling work in the world to bring light to the darkness. God calls his followers to look at the world with his eyes and understand the desperate need for his light in the world. As God’s people, we accept the responsibility of sharing the gospel with those who do not yet know Him, realizing that they are lost without him. God has given us the ministry of reconciliation, acting as his ambassadors to the lost world (2 Cor. 5:18-20).

God’s call to be sent into the world to be part of his mission is both individual and corporate. Everyone is responsible answer the call personally and also to unite with others to corporately respond to God’s purpose. The Body of Christ must act together to bring change into the world, speaking hope and challenge to those people and structures who are lost. Ray Anderson says, “Can the church have an authentic theology without a compelling vision and contemporary involvement in God’s mission in the world? The answer is no, and this is why. For Paul, mission precedes and creates the church. The mission is always God’s mission through Christ to reach the world.”¹²¹ The Church responds to this “sentness,” constantly trying to discover how to reach out into the world to bring hope and light. Van Engen, in *God’s Missionary People*, says, “The Church exists for humanity in that it is the spiritual body of Christ, and—like Jesus—it is sent to be a servant. As the Father sent Jesus, so Jesus sends his disciples into the world for the

¹²⁰ Stearns, *The Hole in Our Gospel*, 2.

¹²¹ Ray Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 158.

sake of the world.”¹²² As individuals and as the Church, we cannot find out who we are separate from our identity in Christ and his mission.

One church, the PC(USA), from the beginning based its belief and practice on what Scripture teaches about how to be followers of Christ in the world. *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (USA)*, in the introduction of *Part II, The Book of Order*, identifies the Six Great Ends of the Church:

- The proclamation of the gospel for the salvation of humankind
- The shelter, nurture, and spiritual fellowship of the children of God
- The maintenance of divine worship
- The preservation of the truth
- The promotion of social righteousness
- The exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the world.¹²³

In these six great ends of the Church, Presbyterians claim the call to be part of God’s Kingdom work, reaching out to God’s world with the message of Jesus, bringing light and hope to the darkness.

Presbyterian tradition teaches that, not only do individuals have a responsibility to serve Christ in the world, but each local church must also reach out into the world as a body. John Leith describes how the local congregation is being sent by Jesus to participate in Kingdom work:

Every Presbyterian congregation should have discovered its particular mission in its community. No one church can do everything that needs to be done, but all should be doing something. As we look at how Presbyterians do mission, let us note that we have a biblical mandate to enter into the mission of proclamation of the saving grace of God in Jesus Christ to a lost world; we have a biblical mandate to provide missions of compassion and education, of policy change and of advocacy for the poor and voiceless in a lost, hurting and poor world.¹²⁴

¹²² Van Engen, *God’s Missionary People*, 74.

¹²³ *Book of Order*, part 2 in *The Constitution of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)* (Louisville, KY: The Office of the General Assembly, 1996), G 1.200.

¹²⁴ Leith, *The Reformed Imperative*, 94-95.

Individual followers of Christ, churches, and all other bodies of believers, including Cursillo, participate in what God has planned for his Kingdom. Everyone needs to be doing something in and for the Kingdom. Each individual person and every corporate body of believers finds their purpose in the larger purpose and plan of God and seeks to carry out that purpose in the world.

Missio Dei:
What Is God Sending Us to Do?

God's people have long sought to understand exactly God's mission, what he is doing and why he is doing it. Today, Christians continue to ask these questions, seeking the meaning of the "*missio dei*," or mission of God, as it applies to us and to the world. The word *mission* is not actually in the Bible, but is a Latin word used to describe the major theological tone and theme of the Bible. The word means, "send, propel, hurl, emit,"¹²⁵ so the *missio dei* is the "sending of God," the One who sends, the One who pushes out into the world. God sent Jesus to save God's lost children who were living in darkness; "For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost" (Luke 19:10 NIV). God sent Jesus to "move into the neighborhood" (John 1:14, MSG) to bring people back to the saving relationship with God. His plan was and is, "that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2:10-11). As God sent Jesus into the world, Jesus also sent his disciples to heal and teach and preach to the lost (Matt. 10:6-8). Jesus commanded us to love each other (John 13:34-35) and to reach out to a hurting world in need (Matt. 25:34-

¹²⁵ Wiktionary, <http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/mitto#Latin> s.v. "mitto" (accessed November 12, 2009).

37a, 40). Jesus promised to send the Holy Spirit (John 16:7) as the advocate, comforter, and source of power to enable his disciples to be Kingdom people and then he asked God to give the disciples their mission by sending them into the world: “In the same way that you gave me a mission in the world, I give them a mission in the world” (John 17:18, MSG). Ray Anderson, in *The Soul of Ministry*, says, “In his prayer on behalf of his disciples, Jesus prayed: ‘As you have sent me into the world, so I have sent them into the world’ (John 17:18). The *as* and *so* constitute the hinge on which Christians turn toward the world for the sake of Christ’s ministry of healing and hope.”¹²⁶ Finally, in the accounts of the moments before Jesus’ Ascension (Matt. 28:18-20 and Acts 1:8), Jesus reiterated the disciples’ mission: to go out to all the nations, and be his witnesses. The rest of this chapter presents how followers of Christ are to participate in God’s mission to the world.

To Share the Gospel

The stated purpose of Catholic Cursillo includes the following sentence, “The ultimate goal of Cursillos in Christian Living is that on the Day of Judgment there may be more people on the right than on the left.”¹²⁷ God sends his followers out into the world to share the story of God and his powerful and saving love for his people. We are to tell the truth that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:23) and desperately need forgiveness, repentance, and restoration (Eph. 2:1-3). The great news we are to impart is that God loves his people so much that he forgives them and makes them alive with Christ (Eph. 2:4-5). God uses his followers to introduce people to Jesus

¹²⁶ Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry*, 90.

¹²⁷ Hughes and The Office of the National Secretariat, *The Cursillo Movement*, 9.

and teach them how to open their hearts and minds and wills to the power of the Holy Spirit. We are to be Jesus' witnesses, ambassadors, and evangelists.¹²⁸

John Stott defines evangelism: "To 'evangelize' means literally to spread the good news of Jesus Christ. There are still millions of people who are ignorant of him and his salvation, in every part of the world. For centuries, the church seems to have been half asleep. The challenge is for us to be Christians who are wide awake and active in seeking to win the world for Christ."¹²⁹ As people who have been called by God and transformed in his likeness, we are to be evangelists, telling the story of Jesus and inviting others to come and see (John 1:35-46). Gabriel Fackre says in his book, *The Christian Story*, "Mission, therefore, does not stop with the act of mercy and justice but brings the deed into companionship with the word. Evangelism, in its broadest sense, is the task of getting the Story out, flinging the Christian faith in the air."¹³⁰ Part of what it means to be engaged in the mission of God is to be his mouthpiece, to intentionally fling the faith into the air and into the lives of those who do not yet know Jesus. However, this mission of God is not just introducing people to Jesus; it is also living our everyday lives for him in a way that people will see Christ in us, around us and through us.

¹²⁸ Acts 1:8: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." 2 Cor. 5:19b-20: "We are to be Christ's ambassadors to the reconciling work of God in the world. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."

¹²⁹ Stott, *Basic Christianity*, 166.

¹³⁰ Gabriel Fackre, *The Christian Story* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1984), 168.

Pointing to Christ In Our Going

St. Francis of Assisi is quoted as saying, “Preach the gospel at all times -- If necessary, use words.”¹³¹ As followers, we are called to witness to Christ with both words and deeds. The more we are transformed by Jesus and live our lives for him, the more people will notice: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). The words of the old song, “They will know we are Christians by our love”¹³² describe some of the ways we tell the world that we belong to Jesus and live our lives for him: we will work with each other, walk with each other, guard each one’s dignity and save each one’s pride, spread the news that God is in our land, we will love each other. Stearns, in *The Hole in Our Gospel*, said, “When we committed ourselves to following Christ, we also committed to living our lives in such a way that a watching world would catch a glimpse of God’s character—his love, justice, and mercy—through our words, actions and behavior... God chose us to be his representatives. He called us to go out, to proclaim the ‘good news’—to *be* the ‘good news’—and to change the world. Living out our faith privately was never meant to be an option.”¹³³

Living out faith in Jesus does not have to be a formal program or activity, but simply a way of living. At the end of Jesus’ earthly ministry, he met with his disciples one last time before he ascended into heaven. He told them, “Therefore go and make

¹³¹ “Quoteworld,” <http://www.quoteworld.org/quotes/659> (accessed November 11, 2009).

¹³² Peter Scholtes, *They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love*, 1968.

¹³³ Stearns, *The Hole in the Gospel*, 3.

disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:19-20). The verb *go* at the beginning of verse 19 is actually a participle, giving the sense of a continuing action: “as you go, in your going.” It is in the going, in everyday life, that we are to make disciples. We do not have to reach very far to find the places God has led us to be his Kingdom workers. In Romans 12:1 (MSG), Paul says, “So here’s what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating, going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing what God does for you is the best thing you can do for him.” In all the places we go, we are going for Jesus, bearing witness as we go by how we live our lives, following his example. People watch one another, taking note of the way decisions are made, others are treated, work is approached, and relationships are developed. They notice when these life activities reflect a higher truth and purpose and begin to smell the aroma of Christ.¹³⁴ As Christ’s ambassadors, we also engage in Kingdom work by touching the lives of others in real and practical ways.

To Be Hands and Feet for Jesus

Christians proclaim the gospel using words, exhibit the Kingdom with the way we live our lives, and promote social righteousness by using our hands, our feet, and our resources to engage the world at its darkest, most vulnerable points. We are called to be in the world, working to make a tangible, practical difference in the lives of people who

¹³⁴ “For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing” (2 Cor. 2:15 NIV).

are suffering, needy, hopeless, and oppressed. We are to actively participate in hands-on ministry to the world. John Stott, in his book, *Christian Basics*, says, “Our priority concern is for people’s eternal spiritual welfare, that is, that they may know Christ as their Savior and Lord. All of us are called to bear witness to him whenever the right opportunity comes. But our neighbor’s material welfare is also our concern, we are called both to witness and to serve; both are part of our Christian ministry and mission.”¹³⁵ We are to be part of God’s healing presence to the hurt, hungry, lame, imprisoned, and naked, widows, and the poor. We are to be “Jesus with skin on.”¹³⁶

Scripture reveals God’s special concern for the poor and helpless, as well as the responsibility of his people to help them. While the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, God told them to take care of the poor (Deut. 15:7-11) and to work to free people from injustice and oppression (Deut. 24:14-22). The prophet Amos rebuked the people of Israel for their part in the injustice and oppression of the poor and needy, prophesying doom and destruction for Israel for not being concerned with the plight of the people. In Matthew, Jesus describes a future scene in the time of glory when the King will honor those who fed the ones who were hungry, gave drink to those who were thirsty, invited in strangers, clothed the naked, took care of the sick, and visited prisoners. He also promised great punishment for those who had not taken care of these same people. He wanted them to know that he considers taking care of people in need to be the same as taking care of Jesus himself (Matt. 25:31-46). If we as followers of Jesus are not connected to the world in this real, practical, visceral way, we are not connected to him.

¹³⁵ Stott, *Christian Basics*, 145.

¹³⁶ “The Mission and Vision of Young Life,” www.jeantetfamily.com/wp-content/uploads/2007/02/nlt-30.doc (accessed May 16, 2010).

We are to be his hands and feet, ministering to the needs of others, fueled by the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, bringing light into dark places. He does not call us, send us out, and then leave us on our own. God also equips us to his work.

How Are We Equipped?

The call of Jesus to follow him and participate with him in Kingdom work is the starting point of a life of faith and service. However, the continuing journey must be filled with help and encouragement for it to be successful and lasting. The Antioch Partners, a newly formed missionary sending agency, has just hired a clergy couple to be the missionary care partners for all their missionaries posted around the world. The directors of TAP are convinced that the only way for missionaries to survive on the field is to receive constant help and encouragement and resources from the home base. In the bigger picture, God is the great mission sending agency, posting his followers all over the world, assigning them to the plan that he has laid out for them and caring for them in each step of the process (Acts 1:8). Jesus promised the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to help them in their lives and ministry (John 14-16). God gives his followers the power and strength and courage to be his ambassadors through this constant and abiding presence in the Spirit, the practice of being connected to Jesus (John 15:1-16) through continuous spiritual disciplines (Col. 2:7), by the giving of gifts (1 Cor. 12:4-7), and by calling us into the fellowship of the community, the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27).

Filled with the Spirit

At the last supper, Jesus promised the disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to be their advocate, their helper, and their comforter. Without the power of the Holy

Spirit, we as followers would not only falter in our daily journey, we would certainly fail in the Kingdom work to which we have been given. He promised to be with us always, to the very end of the age (Matt. 28:20). We do not take one step or live one moment outside of his presence, he knows us inside and out (Ps. 139:1) As God sends us out, we do not go in our own strength. The Westminster Confession says it well, “Their ability to do good works is not at all of themselves, but wholly from the Spirit of Christ.”¹³⁷

Chapter 4 described how God, by the power of the Holy Spirit and the action of grace constantly at work, calls his people into relationship with him and transforms them into his followers. Every moment of every day we as his followers depend on the Holy Spirit. As we walk with him and invest ourselves in the practices and disciplines that feed us, we grow to depend on him, to trust him, to be more like him. In instructing the followers in Ephesus, Jesus says, “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Eph. 6:10-11 NIV). To face the daily challenges of life and ministry, servants of Jesus are to put on his armor and protection for strength and the ability to serve and strive to change the world for Jesus. All the grace involved in our spiritual transformation and growth discussed in Chapter 4 continues to fill us, encourage us, and prepare us for the work God is calling us to do. As God sends us out to participate in the *missio dei*, we remember the words of Paul to the Philippians, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phil. 4:13).

¹³⁷ *Book of Confessions, The Westminster Confession of Faith*, 6.089.

Disciplines

The backbone of sustaining a transformed life of service for Christ is the practice of the disciplines that help people stay connected to the grace and power of God. Chapter 4 named many of the practices that help us make space for God and the work of the Holy Spirit in us. It is vital for followers who are engaged in Kingdom building to maintain these disciplines as the lifeblood for survival in the work of mission. The more we live into our calling as sent people and change agents of the world for Christ, the more we must engage in the daily disciplines of staying connected to our God and King. Too many times, we try to live and serve on our own strength, and we fail miserably. We are not equipped to live and do this work without being connected to Jesus (John 15).

The disciplines strengthen and equip us as followers of Jesus to go out to witness and serve. Developing a constant prayer life and maintaining a close communication with God will provide stable nurture, accountability, encouragement, and teaching. The Spirit uses faithful people as a vehicle to communicate his grace when they are connected to him in prayer and meditation; the Spirit provides the words necessary for being his witnesses (Mark 13:11, Rom. 8:26). Paul asks for the prayers of the Ephesians that words would be given to him, “so that I will fearlessly make known the mystery of the gospel” (Eph. 6:19). Constant immersion in the Scriptures, the life-giving Word of God, teaches, transforms, convicts, and comforts individuals and communities of faith. Paul tells Timothy, “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking,

correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:14-17). The more believers know Scripture, the more we can speak with authority about the Truth of God and be more effective witnesses for him. All of the disciplines strengthen and equip us for our work in the world.

God Gives Us Gifts to Do This Work

Living the disciplines is a major part of the preparation and continued strengthening of God’s people for participating in the God’s mission. But the Holy Spirit also equips us in a supernatural way to do the work to which he calls us by giving gifts that come only by the Spirit. Scripture includes various passages describing the gifts the Spirit gives to God’s people to build up the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:4-11, Eph. 4:11-13). In the translation *The Message*, Paul says to the Ephesians that God handed out gifts, “to train Christ’s followers in skilled servant work, working within Christ’s body, the church, until we’re all moving rhythmically and easily with each other, efficient and graceful in response to God’s Son, fully mature adults, fully developed within and without, fully alive like Christ” (Eph. 4:12-13, MSG).

In God’s sovereignty, he determines which gifts are given and to what purpose (Eph. 4:7-11). He is working out his plan for the world and he knows best how this is to be accomplished. He has always used ordinary, flawed, human beings to be part of his Kingdom work, but, by the Spirit, he infuses his people with spiritual gifts that give them the strength, ability, and courage to accomplish these purposes. No one has the exact same gifts and God weaves us together to become one body.

We Work Together

Both the passages concerning gifts in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians teach that God's people are a body, connected to the Spirit and one another, and who can only do this ministry for Jesus together, arm in arm, as brothers and sisters of faith. In the early days after Jesus' ascension into heaven, Scripture describes the life of the followers; "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42-47). Amazing things happened to the believers as together they called upon the power of the resurrected Christ to fill them, equip them, and send them out. From the base of fellowship and unity, they began to spread the message to the world. People watched them, saw and heard the power of God in them, and turned toward the light of Jesus, and scores were saved.

Twenty centuries later, God continues to use his people to spread his message to the world. Followers of Christ today use the gifts the Spirit pours into us, each one answering and fulfilling God's call in a unique way. We unite with other believers in our churches and ministries including Cursillo so that we, like the disciples in the early days, devote ourselves to teaching, fellowship, the breaking of the bread and prayer (Acts 2:42). Through this unity, dependence on the Holy Spirit, and constant connection to

Jesus, individuals and the whole body receive the encouragement and strength to keep on living for Jesus and bringing light to the world.

Where Is God Sending His People

Followers of Christ are to go wherever he leads. Richard Halverson, a Presbyterian pastor and the chaplain of the U.S. Senate from 1981-1994, often ended worship services with the following benediction:

You go nowhere by accident.
 Wherever you go, God is sending you.
 Wherever you are, God has put you there.
 He has a purpose in you being there.
 Christ who indwells you has something he wants to do through you wherever you are.
 Believe this and go in his grace and love and power.

God sees the whole world and knows specific places for his people to spread his good news, bring light to the dark places, and change individuals and society to honor him. Before Jesus ascended into heaven he finished his last word to his disciples with these words: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

God is sending his people to Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. Jerusalem is in the neighborhood, next door, around the corner, down the street, across the city. God has a reason for each person being in the exact place where he or she is; it is in this place that God wants to use each of us to make a difference for him. Earlier in this chapter, it was pointed out that Matt. 28:18 uses the participle *going* or *as you go*, indicating that making disciples was part of everyday life. Each follower of Jesus must ask the questions: Whom do I know? Where do I work? Who are my friends? How

can I be involved in touching my town or city for Jesus? Bill Hybels wrote a book called *Just Walk across the Room*, in which he says that evangelism starts with just walking into conversation with those whom God has placed in our path. He asks this question, “What if redirecting a person’s forever really is as simple as walking across a room?”¹³⁸ People have a natural tendency to stay in their comfort zones, with safe, predictable people and situations; reaching out to strangers, especially those who are different in culture, ethnicity, sexual preference, economics, and politics is difficult and enticingly avoidable. However, Jesus calls his followers to walk toward these very people he has created, whom he loves and wants to minister to (Matt. 25:31-46). To fulfill God’s purpose for us as God’s ambassadors, we start by walking across the room, close to home, intentionally engaging people we might already know. We go deeper in our conversations and our caring, engaging in honest relationships and sharing our lives with them. Walking alongside them and ministering to their needs, we reflect the love of Jesus and we just might have the opportunity to share words of testimony to the Truth.

Just outside the confines of Jerusalem are the outer areas of Judea and Samaria, the next places ministry happens. Judea is the country in which Jerusalem resides and in today’s world represents the larger context of one’s town or region, possibly a larger metroplex area, a neighboring city, a county or parish, a presbytery, a state, or even a national entity. People who are sent by God to Judea must use creative and prayerful thinking to discern what kind of ministry they could have in Judea. Possibilities for interaction and relationships lie in the business, political, and social realms. In this day of the Internet, email, and social networking, communication is possible almost everywhere,

¹³⁸ Bill Hybels, *Just Walk across the Room* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 22.

making the whole world the mission field and opening vast opportunities for ministry.

FaceBook has proven to be an effective way for people of all ages to connect with others to promote the Kingdom.

Samaria is an even further step outside one's comfort zone. In Jesus' day, Samaria was a neighboring country that was considered disreputable, unclean, to be avoided if at all possible. In our world today, Samaria includes those places that may be close by but are different in culture, attitude, religion, and lifestyle and are considered "off-limits" for "nice" people. Possible Samarias near Houston might be one town close by that is known for its extremely conservative politics and historical prejudices or another community that is a poverty stricken, and depressed, filled with hopeless and helpless people. Both of these Samarias are places God is calling his followers to be his ambassadors, his witnesses, and his servants.

Finally, Jesus sends his followers to the ends of the earth, to lands uncivilized and unknown, places that God is working and needs our cooperation in ministry. Many people will never actually go there on a plane or boat, but all of us must become global Christians, aware of what is happening in the world and praying for God to use us to shine light in all the dark corners of the world. Some are sent to these places as missionaries, and we are to support and pray for them and their work. Some travel for pleasure or for work and have the opportunity to build relationships with those in foreign lands and to share life and faith with them. As we read the newspaper, watch world news, possibly adopt a child through World Vision, or choose one country as a focus for our time and attention and prayers, we join God's work across the world.

As followers of Christ, we cannot set limits on where we are willing to go; we must be open to wherever God leads us. One of the great verses of Scripture is Genesis 12:4, which reads, “So Abram left, as the Lord told him.” God called Abram and Abram went. We are more likely say to God, “Not right now, after I get married, after the kids grow up, when we retire, and anywhere but Africa!” The truth is that we do not want to leave our nest of supposed comfort and security to even walk across the room, much less invest ourselves in Kingdom work in the world. It is hard, messy, scary, weird, and we feel inadequate to the task, but, as people who are transformed more and more into the likeness of Jesus and have a willing, obedient heart, we become ready to be sent out.

Are We Willing to Be Sent?

One of the great temptations for followers of Jesus is to live in the wonderful place of closeness with him and other followers, to stay on a spiritual high, to make camp on the mountaintop and not live in the reality and darkness of the world. We separate ourselves from dark, uncomfortable, evil things and pretend they do not exist. Mark 9:2-29 tells the story of Jesus’ taking Peter, James, and John up to the top of the mountain where he was transfigured before their eyes. They heard God speak and saw Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah. Peter wanted to remain there in that glory, suggesting that they build shelters for them all. Hearing God speak to them, watching Jesus be transformed, seeing saints with their own eyes, basking in the glory of God—all were incredible experiences. The desire to freeze those moments would be natural and understandable, but, as in the pericope in Mark, the disciples were sent down off the mountain, back into real life. As that story continued, the challenges of the valley escalated as the disciples and Jesus descended from the mountain. A confrontation with the teachers of the law, an

encounter with a crowd and an evil spirit, and a failed healing awaited them in the valley. The valley is troubling; the mountain beckons. The temptation is to just make camp on the mountain and stay there, but the benefit of the mountain is that it serves as assurance and affirmation to those who live and move and have their being in the valley. Maxine Dunham in *The Gospel of Mark, Bible Study for Christian Living* comments on the story in Mark 9. “The mountain is not enough. Ecstasy is not enough! Don Shelby has suggested that ‘ecstasy without agony is baloney.’ That’s a way of saying that religion is real only when it both feels and heals, when the ecstasy becomes the power for coping and enduring, when it provides fidelity in the shadows and struggles of life, when it undergirds integrity for moral choices and gives us caring concerns at the crossroads of human need.”¹³⁹ Jesus led his disciples down off the mountain into the place where they lived their lives. Jesus’ heart is poured out for the valley where people are in darkness. The valley calls to him and to us and we must make our camp there so that we might shine for Jesus

Cursillo has been a mountaintop for many believers. There, people consistently have amazing experiences of God’s grace and power and are transformed into new creatures. They, like the disciples, want to stay on the mountaintop, or at least try to recreate the mountaintop experience in the valley, to maintain the feeling of hope, comfort, and community that Cursillo gave them. However, the valley beckons. God has plans for his people, newly strengthened by the Holy Spirit, to come back to the valley

¹³⁹ Maxi Dunnam, *The Gospel of Mark, Bible Study for Christian Living* (Nashville, TN: Cokesbury, 1988), 72.

that is often filled with darkness and trouble. God is calling for Cursillistas to reenter the world and to be part of the transformation of people and society from darkness into light.

Conclusion

The original dual purposes of Catholic Cursillo, helping people learn to live what is fundamental to being Christian and sending them out to change society for Christ, were grounded in Scripture in response to a deep need in the culture and the Church. In the ensuing years, the Cursillo Movement has developed and grown into a wonderfully diverse group of related renewal movements as described in chapter 1. Each national body has claimed a certain vision, and the individual communities each have worked out a specific mission under that vision. The goal of Episcopal Cursillo is to bring the world to Christ by empowering adult Christian leaders through the use of a specific method, “which equips and encourages Christians to live out their Baptismal covenant to serve Christ.”¹⁴⁰ Walk to Emmaus’ purpose is to move Christians to be leaders and to renew their congregations to be instruments of change in the world. Presbyterian Cursillo is focused on transforming people for the purpose of sending them back into their environments to reform them after the Kingdom of God. The interpretation of the vision that Houston Presbyterian Cursillo has chosen as its mission is “Calling Christians to deliberate and joyous living of their faith.” Each of the interpretations of the original vision has been and continues to bring light and life to the individual Christians and to the world.

¹⁴⁰ National Episcopal Cursillo, *What Is Cursillo?* 1.

The vision is powerful and the mission is solid, but the problem and the reason for this project is that HPC is not achieving the purposes. When the current operation of HPC is measured against the original purposes of Cursillo, the weaknesses described in chapter 3 indicate a departure from these rich biblical and theological foundations described in chapters 4 and 5. For instance, ineffective sponsorship, implying a lack of commitment to the participants both in the invitation and follow-up phases of Cursillo, fails to communicate the incredibly gracious invitation and faithfulness of God in his relationship with his people. Secrecy and cliquishness are antithetical to Cursillo's desire to share the gospel of Jesus with the world, and they give people a poor reflection of the body of Christ. Too little time for reflection on the Weekend is a poor model for how to live out a life of discipleship and reflection. The lack of preparation for returning home after a Weekend and the inadequate follow-up completely negate Cursillo's desire to help people live transformed lives and to reach out to the world to act as change-agents for Jesus. These issues, as well as declining attendance and interest and the lack of appeal for young people, call for a new strategy for bringing HPC back to the mission of Cursillo.

PART THREE

STRATEGIES FOR CHANGE

CHAPTER 6

PROPOSED CHANGES

Over sixty years have passed since the founders of Cursillo endeavored to create a tool that God could use to change lives and a culture. In many ways the world today is a very different place: technological developments and advanced communication have changed our entire way of living and the ways we relate to one another. Some of today's lifestyle is completely unrecognizable from the mid-twentieth century. What has not changed is the darkness of human sin and people's desperate need for God. The struggle and conflict between the strong voice of a sinful society and the human heart searching for God are just as real and important today as in the days of the formation of Cursillo.

The original purposes of Cursillo discussed in chapters 4 and 5 continue to be valid and appropriate to the needs of people struggling to live in this day and time. Many elements of the original Cursillo method translate easily and effectively into the postmodern culture of today. One characteristic of postmodernism is the increased use of visual images to convey information and to persuade people to a new point of view (as seen even from book titles)¹⁴¹ and the Cursillo method is filled with the use of visual images. The three-legged stool representing the three aspects of the Christian life and the *palanca* and prayer banners signifying the love and connection with the larger community are two ways the Weekend would be attractive to postmoderns. Television,

¹⁴¹ Arthur W. Hunt III, *The Vanishing Word: Veneration of Visual Imagery in the Postmodern World* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2003).

video games, and the Internet all contribute to shorter attention spans and the desire to not be bored, and Cursillo fits this postmodern characteristic by using a schedule in which activities are frequently and regularly changed. Society today recognizes and celebrates that people learn in different ways, and Cursillo offers a schedule of activities incorporating different learning styles including listening, watching, participating in drama, singing, dancing, using art, and other forms of creativity. Cursillo's design calls for the development of relationships through sponsorship, table groups on the Weekend, and renewal groups for follow-up in the Fourth Day. Today's emphasis on relationships fits well with the whole method of Cursillo. Cursillo already has a strong connection to the way the world operates today, and strategic enhancements and improvements in the current operations will help Cursillo continue to be a significant tool for God and his Kingdom in the twenty-first century.

This chapter will walk through the Cursillo method, from Pre-Cursillo through the Fourth Day, describing possible areas for change. At the end of the chapter, I will summarize the changes in a series of challenges for HPC to address, highlighting specific proposals for each challenge.

Changes in Pre-Cursillo

One of the first things that must be addressed is the culture of secrecy that surrounds Cursillo. The innocent ideal of not wanting to give away the lovely surprises of the Weekend causes Cursillistas to be secretive and mysterious about Cursillo, bringing a divide between those who are in the community and those who are not. The Presbyterian requirement adds to the exclusivity. When Cursillistas show an attachment to Cursillo, they elevate Cursillo above their churches, their non-Cursillo friends, and sometimes

even Christ himself. The Catholic publication *The Cursillo Movement: Explanation and Purpose* says, “We may never lose sight of the fact that the title of Cursillista pales considerably before the name Christian. And what really matters is that one be more of a Christian than to be a Cursillista.”¹⁴² The HPC Council must continually emphasize to the community that we belong to Christ’s Church, the Body, and that we are not to ignore or isolate others outside the Cursillo circle.

The reactions against this secrecy and exclusivity range from hurt feelings, disgust, fear, to even rejection of the movement. Pastors and lay people alike have resisted supporting Cursillo or becoming involved due to this problem. There are several things HPC can do to address this issue.

One significant modification, which would increase the openness and inclusiveness, would be to convert to Presbyterian Pilgrimage, which would open the Weekend to any Christian. Over half of the Presbyterian Fourth Day communities are Pilgrimage¹⁴³ and include people of all denominations. Short of actually changing to Pilgrimage, HPC could open all other events, such as Ultreyas and renewal groups, inviting anyone, regardless of their faith tradition or Weekend attendance. Sharing openly with the larger world the wonderful joy of Cursillo and more importantly, God’s grace, would help Cursillistas reach out to their environments and also decrease the suspicion about Cursillo.

¹⁴² Hughes and the Office of the National Secretariat, *The Cursillo Movement*, 22.

¹⁴³ The Presbyterian licensing agreement with Catholic Cursillo states that Presbyterian Cursillos must be open only to Presbyterians in order to use the name Cursillo. The main and often only difference in a Presbyterian Cursillo and Presbyterian Pilgrimage is this attendance qualification.

Another way to reduce the secrecy of Cursillo would be to revise all the literature about HPC to include details about the Weekend. Boyd said, “Cursillo must strive for complete openness and honesty concerning what happens at Cursillo Weekends.”¹⁴⁴ Cursillistas need to be reminded repeatedly that the secrecy and cliquishness are discouraged, potentially harmful, and to be resisted. They must be taught how to speak with non-Cursillistas about Cursillo, how to relate the vision, and what it meant to them personally. No one should ever say, “I can’t tell you anything, you just have to go.”

Relationship with the Church

The HPC council must warn against becoming more involved in Cursillo than in the church. Having Cursillo become a person’s only community is contrary to the foundations of Cursillo and detrimental to the furtherance of Kingdom work. The council and all Cursillistas need to continue to strengthen their relationships with the participant churches and become mutually supportive. We might devise a way to enlist church representatives to communicate with the council about ongoing church relations.

In an effort to improve relations with the churches and to live in a spirit of cooperation, HPC should consider adding Walk to Emmaus’ practice of requiring all applicants for a Walk to secure the signature of the pastor of their church. At the very least, this requirement informs the pastor about the movement and that this person is applying. The practice presents an opportunity for the pastor and the participant to talk about faith, renewal, anticipated outcomes, and how the participant can share his or her experience upon returning from the Weekend. From another perspective, pastors often

¹⁴⁴ Kevin R. Boyd, “Decently de Colores: A Reformed Evaluation of the Cursillo Movement in the Presbyterian Church” (Doctor of Ministry Project, Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary, 1998), 139.

have personal knowledge of people who are applying and could be a helpful resource in determining who ought to attend a Weekend.

Communications

Besides revising the literature to reduce secrecy, all communications directed to those outside the community need to be changed to reflect the meaning and purpose clearly, and to educate, inform, and invite. The written materials, both print and electronic, need to be revised to be more informative, inspirational, and descriptive. The application needs to include the details about the Weekend clearly state the overall purpose of Cursillo, how that purpose fits into God's Kingdom work, and the desired outcome of the Weekend. It also needs to require the sponsor's signature and comments, the pastor's signature, and the name of the church. The material should not use the insider words or symbols that do not have meaning to those who have not attended.

We also need to update the introductory video with more stories about the transformation and ministry that have grown out of Cursillo. Once revised, this video and all other materials should be put on the website, FaceBook, and YouTube, thus, made available to all Cursillistas to share with their circles of influence.

Once a person has been accepted as a participant on a Weekend, the registrar needs to send more information to help the person prepare. To accomplish this, we might write and produce a booklet to be given to each candidate before the Weekend. This booklet would explain the purpose of Cursillo, what to expect during the three days, and what the follow-up will be. Each sponsor will be charged with reviewing the booklet with his or her participant so that each person fully ready for the experience.

Recruitment

The recruitment of potential candidates for a Cursillo Weekend is one of the most important parts of the Pre-Cursillo and the entire movement. Since all Cursillistas are potential recruiters, each one must be made aware that recruitment is a serious and intentional act. Although the joy and obvious changes evident in the people's lives after a Weekend are the best natural recruiting tools, some training is essential. One of the weaknesses of the current style of recruiting is that people just want their friends to go to experience the wonder and love and grace of the Weekend. People thusly recruited are not conscious of the greater purpose of Cursillo and might not be ready to attend.

The main thrust of recruitment is to intentionally, prayerfully, and selectively seek out people who will be open to the purpose of the movement and who have the potential to effectively live as transformed change agents in their environments. Boyd says, "Cursillo identifies potential leaders and trains them to be the 'backbones' of the Church for the purpose of evangelizing our environments. Cursillo was never intended to help individuals find Jesus Christ for the first time or to be a social organization where participants come together to make friends. Neither was it intended to be seen as a necessary step in salvation."¹⁴⁵ In order to clean up our current unfocused, haphazard methods of recruitment, the council must create some written guidelines to be made available to all Cursillistas. Sponsors will be given more in-depth training as they seek and work with potential candidates.

¹⁴⁵ Boyd, "Decently de Colores," 136.

Sponsorship

A smaller group of Cursillistas will actually become sponsors. At the present time, the lack of a well-developed sponsorship program is one of the major weaknesses in Pre-Cursillo in HPC. The current practice is to match each approved participant with a sponsor, a Cursillista who is asked to contact the participant to answer any questions about the upcoming Weekend. This seldom happens with regularity or effectiveness.

Only those Cursillistas who are committed to spending the time and energy with the process should engage in sponsorship and only after much prayer and discernment. The HPC council must offer appropriate sponsorship training, encouragement, resources, and follow-up of the sponsors to make the program successful. For the past six months, the Permanent Study Group (PSG) of the HPC council has been studying sponsorship across the Cursillo movement and has recently produced a sponsor booklet, which contains information defining sponsorship, what it includes, and tips on how to be a good sponsor. They plan to distribute it more widely in the coming months.

Other movements already have more extensive sponsorship programs, complete with written materials, training procedures, and job descriptions. Walk to Emmaus, Episcopal Cursillo, and Catholic Cursillo have extensive materials available for purchase on their websites that provide thorough information and training in all areas of the movement, including sponsorship. Each of these movements requires that the sponsor intentionally interact with the candidate throughout the entire process, from the application to following up after the Weekend. They require the sponsor to complete a section of the application about the participant and ensure that a pastor from the potential

candidate's church sign the application form. Adding these practices to HPC would undergird and enhance our sponsorship ministry.

We must train the sponsors to engage with people and discern who might be good candidates for a Weekend. We will need to create training materials that teach people the important aspects of Cursillo, how to engage in spiritual friendships, the type of participant who is appropriate and ready for a Weekend, and how to do follow-up. We need to include helpful resources for the sponsors and provide skilled mentors for them. The sponsors must be trained to speak about the Cursillo experience with regards to the purpose of Cursillo, the structure of the Weekend, the busy schedule, roommate issues, worship, communion, dietary issues, table discussions, and what will be expected of the participants. The sponsors need to be sure to communicate that someone will be praying for the participants throughout the process. They need to discuss with the participants what happens after the Weekend and to commit to accompanying them on the journey.

Preparation for the Weekend

The training and preparation for the Weekend on the part of the staff and community are already strong, effective elements of the Pre-Cursillo. The manuals for the moderator, trainer, staff members, and *rollo* givers are detailed and comprehensive and, after sixty Weekends, HPC runs the Weekend prep like a well-oiled machine. However, the process does need attention and renovation. The following is a list of a number of parts of the Weekend preparation that the HPC leaders need to evaluate and consider changing or adapting. First, all materials such as schedules, manuals, and calendars need to be made available electronically and updated regularly. Next, the HPC Council should carefully study the moderator and staff selection processes to counter some tendencies

toward favoritism and expediency rather than clear assignment with regard to giftedness and leadership. Another point of consideration is how much leeway to give the moderators and the staff in adjusting the script and activities of the Weekend. In an effort to adapt the Weekends to make them more relevant and effective, the staff might be given more choices with regards to things such as creative activities, frequency and type of snacks, and style and amount of music.

The overwhelming details during the preparations for the Weekend keep moderators and staff members more focused on perfection and achievement than on the movement of the Spirit. The staff needs to be continually reminded of the vision of Cursillo and how it affects each part of the Weekend. HPC needs to take a hard look at what could be streamlined; how the council could help with preparations to relieve the staff; how to incorporate more fun, worship, and prayer into the preparations; how to keep the vision front and center; how to make sure that all these preparations lead to the transformation of people and helping them to become leaders in changing their environments. A final question for HPC to consider is how to develop the Cursillo leader who has served on numerous staff teams transition into a person who serves, not solely on a Cursillo Weekend, but also in the community, church, and world.

With some serious attention, the Pre-Cursillo phase of Houston Presbyterian Cursillo could become a vital, effective, and meaningful part of the movement. Some of the changes will be simple and easy to make; others will take a long period of training and practice. The most difficult task will be helping current Cursillistas understand that there is a purpose to Cursillo that is beyond getting people to go on a wonderful retreat. Chapter 7 will present a process for incorporating some of these changes into HPC.

Changes in the Weekend

Currently, the Cursillo Weekends of HPC are accomplished with excellence, are beautiful expressions of God's grace, and are the most effective part of the movement. The leadership prays over every aspect of the three days, prepares with diligence and commitment, and endeavors to present God's truth in everything. The fruit in the personal spiritual lives of both participants and staff is obvious and exciting. The theology of the Weekend is carefully aligned with the call to be transformed in Christ. However, the method and style of our expression of Cursillo limit furthering the vision. If we are serious about helping participants understand the truth of *missio dei* and sending them home to change their environments for Christ, we must redevelop and revitalize distinct components of the Weekend.

Emphasize the Purpose of Cursillo

One of the main problems with the Weekend is the reported inability of participants to apply the spiritual transformation they experience on the Weekend to their own lives. Over and over again on the survey, people said that they did not see evidence of people returning to their environments to change them for Jesus. The whole Weekend must point to the expected outcome. Established in the Pre-Cursillo application process and through the literature and good sponsoring, the purpose of Cursillo must be stressed from the first moment of the Weekend. The introductory comments by the moderator, which could include a testimony about the impact of Cursillo, emphasize the goal of the Weekend and set the tone for the entire Weekend.

Throughout the Weekend, the purpose of Cursillo needs to be reinforced. All the meditation and *rollo* givers, not just those on the last day, should weave into their talks

how they have lived out the purpose. *Palanca* writers would be encouraged to speak of the mission God has sent them on and that is awaiting the participants. The staff needs to explain the history and purpose of the movement in interesting and engaging ways, setting Cursillo into a frame of reference or sense of connection with the larger purpose. A written history for later perusal would help the participants understand how their experience fits into the bigger picture. Since one of the goals of Cursillo is to prepare people to be ready to change their worlds for Jesus, every part of the movement must be clear and explicit about this goal from the beginning.

Expectations

Another aspect of the Weekend that needs to be addressed is the level of expectation of the staff and community for the participants to respond to the Weekend in certain ways. The participants often feel pushed or manipulated to “get it” and exhibit an outward emotional response. Tissues are left all around, in fact, as a considerate gesture, but interpreted as manipulation to encourage people to cry. One survey respondent said, “I was assured that there was no pressure during the Weekend. In fact, that statement is in the Cursillo promotional video. However, I felt extreme pressure the first day and a half and frankly was irritated by it.”¹⁴⁶

The staff and community must be taught at staff training, Ultreyas, and through the newsletter that there is not a specific response to Cursillo. God moves in each person in different times and ways, and responses will be unique. Everything should be done on the Weekend to reassure the participants that they are not being manipulated or coerced

¹⁴⁶ Survey, question 9, response 47.

in any way. The staff must not continually be watching participants, hoping to see a desired response. We must teach the community to let God touch people in his way.

Structure and Schedule

The three days of the Weekend follow a detailed schedule that has been used for years. Moderators do make a few changes here and there, but, overall, this schedule is set in stone. Boyd says, “Cursillo must learn to be less rigid in its schedule when that rigidity hinders the work of the Holy Spirit.”¹⁴⁷ The tightly packed schedule with no time allotted for rest and reflection is a problem. One survey respondent said, “It would be great if you left a Weekend refreshed and not wrung out and 5 pounds heavier. But I believe we border on hazing with up late and up early and sugar highs (From a pastor who has staffed 25 times). You should not need a day or two to recover from a retreat.”¹⁴⁸ Many others said that they were unable to absorb all that was being presented because they had no time to think or reflect. Having virtually no time alone was also a concern for many participants, especially the younger ones. People need time to reflect on a talk or a worship time before they are asked to participate in a group discussion.

In HPC, the Weekends typically take place at retreat centers located in beautiful parts of Texas. There are many complaints from participants about the lack of opportunity to be outside because of the busy schedule. People want to be able to get out of the main room, move around, and enjoy the outdoors. There is so much sitting that people become mentally exhausted and unable to listen. The schedule needs to include a variety of activities to keep people engaged and to address different personalities,

¹⁴⁷ Boyd, “Decently de Colores,” 147.

¹⁴⁸ Survey, question 12, response 109.

learning styles, and energy levels. HPC might study Celebration, the youth version of Cursillo, which has a rotation system that allows for a more varied schedule and includes more kinesthetic activities.

Style

“The Weekend is our most effective part of the movement. But it is now 60 years old and some parts show it. We need to update for the 21st century,”¹⁴⁹ says one survey respondent. The world has changed, but Cursillo has tried to keep everything just the same. While preserving the integrity of the foundational beliefs and practices is vitally important, some of the aspects of the Weekend have lost effectiveness because they are “tired” and out of date. Many responses on the survey reinforced the need to rejuvenate the Weekend, especially in order to be relevant to younger people. The modernism, rational thinking, and the scientific method, which ruled the day in the mid-twentieth century and had a significant impact of the development of the Cursillo method have given way to postmodern thinking. The Cursillo method’s structure was logical and orderly, even rigid, and, though Cursillo has expanded its influence and grown in adherents and adaptations, the structure has remained basically the same. The world has changed dramatically, but the strict observance of the “rules” and the exact replication of the Weekends have inhibited any adaptation to the changing culture of today.

One of the difficult issues in changing Cursillo is that style is based largely on personal preference and not on uniform principles. The survey responses were quite varied on the different style elements and reflect generational as well as other differences.

¹⁴⁹ Survey, question 13, response 67.

The changes offered here will have to be considered carefully and with the audience in mind. We might offer the moderator choices for different elements to meet the needs of the particular Weekend.

Music and Videos

Worship and music play an important role in a Cursillo Weekend, providing an invitation to enter into God's presence throughout the Weekend. A team of musicians selects the music, rehearses before the Weekend, and leads all the singing. They coordinate with the clergy and the moderator to plan the worship services. The survey had a variety of comments about the music: it is too contemporary, too outdated, not classical enough, not current, and too much music: "I would say to get rid of at least half of the music. It's too much and am not sure what the purpose of so much music is...it wears everyone down."¹⁵⁰ Another response was, "Music seems to have taken over the Weekend." Much of the singing has accompanying movements--weaving, hand raising, and motions, which often make people uncomfortable. The council needs to take a careful look at the music, how it contributes to the purpose of Cursillo, and how to change it to make it support the Weekend in a more effective way.

Two videos are shown during the Weekend as illustrations of the love and grace and call of Jesus on our lives. These videos, *Alfredo* and *The Music Box*, are both over thirty years old, of poor quality, and outdated. The messages of each film have made an impact on many participants, but the council needs to consider changing them or at least offering optional videos or activities that are more relevant and appealing.

¹⁵⁰ Survey, question 12, response 14.

Talks

The fifteen *rollos* present the message of Cursillo over the three days and are the foundation to the other activities. The talks, usually fifteen minutes, vary tremendously in quality and effectiveness, depending on the gifts and abilities of the speakers. The talk outlines need to be rewritten to give a clear, biblically based, theologically sound outline of the purpose and direction of the *rollo*. Each *rollo* needs an action focus at the end challenging the participants to reflect on how they will apply this truth in their home environments. The *rollos* on the last day need to be changed to focus more precisely on how to live out Cursillo at home. The moderator and/or other staff must coach each speaker on delivery, timing, personal testimony, and use of Scripture. Fifteen talks delivered lecture style can be tedious and boring, so the *rollo* givers should be encouraged to use visuals, technology, and other creative ways to enhance their talks.

The other talks are the meditations given by the clergy during the worship services throughout the three days. These outlines need to be examined and updated with the overall purpose of Cursillo in mind. The head spiritual advisor must coach the pastors to give meditations that are clear, concise, interesting, and that promote worship and reflection.

Changes in Specific Events of the Weekend

The many other events add fun, depth, meaning and grace to the Weekend. They are interspersed around the talks to provide physical, tangible, kinesthetic examples of God's grace. The cumulative effect is powerful and life changing. That being said, there are some things that need to be examined by HPC to see if they could be even more effective in communicating the purpose of Cursillo.

The first event of Cursillo is the arrival lemonade party, which provides an opportunity for participants and staff to meet and mingle before dinner. The participants have been met at the entrance and ushered into the retreat center to get their room keys and then on into this gathering. They have had their cars and luggage taken away from them and have not been allowed to go to their rooms. The awkwardness can be difficult for the participants and give them a negative introduction to the Weekend. The council needs to determine what can be done to make this first gathering more welcoming, comfortable, and less awkward.

The second night of Cursillo, Friday, there is an activity called “Extended Introductions or Defining Moments.” A microphone is passed around the entire room and people are invited to share a defining moment of their lives in two minutes or less. Most people share (willingly or feeling pressured into it) although they are given the option to pass. The two-minute limit is mostly ignored and the sharing can go on into the late hours of the night, often with much drama, oversharing, or even hysteria. Strict instructions on the sharing need to be explained and reinforced. Alternative ways of sharing might make this experience more manageable and effective. This time can be a powerful moment for people, but it needs to be handled carefully.

One of the high points of the Weekend is the surprise Serenade during dinner on Saturday evening. The participants are swept off their feet by the joy that comes pouring in from the Fourth Day at Serenade. The only criticisms of the Serenade are that the singing goes on too long and that the Fourth Day is sometimes overzealous and overemotional with the participants. The Fourth Day community must be reminded that Serenade is another example of *palanca* for the participants, a gift of God’s grace and

also a glimpse of the community that is waiting for them after the Weekend. To enhance the experience for the Fourth Day, we might consider the model of Walk to Emmaus' worship service for the community that takes place before their Serenade.

After the high of the serenade and the lively and often hilarious presentation of the table skits, the Saturday night party seems redundant and maybe unnecessary. Of all the activities of the Weekend, the party stands out in its lack of impact and importance. Although many people do enjoy the singing and dancing, others report feeling lonely, exhausted, and ready for bed. A number of the survey responses indicated a desire to change or eliminate the party. The council needs to take a careful look at the party to determine its effectiveness and its purpose in furthering the goals of Cursillo.

The table group is where much of the work and blessing of the Weekend takes place. Building community, sharing stories, and discussing *rollos*, this group of fellow pilgrims walks through the three days together. The table guides need to be trained during the Pre-Cursillo in small group dynamics and how to work with the participants. They also must be prepared to facilitate discussions about how the participants can take what they are learning home and apply it to their lives.

The schedule of the last day of Cursillo (Sunday) is rushed, limiting the discussion time, table interaction, and thoughtful preparation for going home. By this point in the Weekend, most participants are exhausted, tired of sitting, and ready to leave. The council needs to create a new schedule for this day that will allow for more table interaction and personal reflection to prepare the participants for their return to their environments.

The final event of the Weekend is the Closing, a service of worship, celebration and “graduation.” Closing has the potential of being a powerful culmination of the Weekend and energetic launch of participants into the world. Unfortunately, the low attendance by the community, the extended and often unfocused sharing, and the length of the service decrease its effectiveness. Low attendance from the community and the huge sanctuary where it takes place give it a feeling of emptiness. I recommend sharpening the focus of the sharing to allowing only participants to share and then only on two questions (given to them earlier in the day) such as those used in Walk to Emmaus:¹⁵¹ What has the Weekend meant to me? And, What am I going to do about it? I would shorten the service, eliminate the laying on of hands for the moderator-elect, and require the participants’ sponsors to attend.

Miscellaneous

From personal experience, conversations with others, and survey comments, I have identified a number of other areas of the Weekend to be examined: written *palanca* from the community, the amount and type of snack food constantly distributed, reduction of staff size, the use of the Spanish words, the seating arrangements in the main room, the devotional booklet, “Into His Life,” and the going home packet of resources.

With a few changes, the Weekend would take on a fresh, updated feel, be more welcoming and helpful to the participants, and emphasize the purpose of Cursillo to a greater degree. If the participants not only have a wonderful experience and but also

¹⁵¹ Stephen D. Bryant and Richard A. Gilmore, *The Upper Room Handbook on Emmaus* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room Books, 2001), 93.

grasp the message in a deeper way, there is a higher likelihood that they will return home as transformed people who are ready to change their environments for Christ.

Changes in the Fourth Day

Attending a Weekend, no matter how wonderful and transforming, is not the end goal of Cursillo, but a step toward a continuing journey of faith in Jesus and a renewed passion for God's world. Support, encouragement, and training for living out the purposes of Cursillo will ideally occur in the Fourth Day. Unfortunately, this follow-up does not happen for many Cursillistas, and the Fourth Day is considered the weakest part of the movement. I recommend that the council ask some difficult questions about what is needed in the Fourth Day to ensure that Cursillistas receive the help and encouragement they need to take the next steps in their journeys. The current measure of "success," involvement in Cursillo Fourth Day activities, is not valid for determining whether or not Cursillistas are living out the vision. As important as connection to Cursillo and service in the ministry are, the real measure of success is whether or not Cursillistas can apply what they have learned in Cursillo to their real world. We must devise ways of surveying or interviewing Cursillistas at different points post-Weekend, asking about their continued journey and engagement in ministry to their environments. The more important questions are not about attendance at Ultreyas, serving on the staff of Weekends, writing *palanca*, or being in a Cursillo renewal group. Rather, they are about where people are finding growth and accountability, where God has led them to serve in their community or church, and how they are growing as followers of Jesus.

All that being said, the current Fourth Day ministry of Houston Presbyterian Cursillo needs some serious attention. As in the proposed changes to the Pre-Cursillo and

the Weekend, the process for changing the Fourth Day will need to be done carefully, diplomatically, and prayerfully. Some of the redevelopment will be simple and easy; some will be complicated and painful.

Post-Weekend Follow-up

The first weeks after a Weekend are important in fostering growth and development of new Cursillistas. One of the first issues that must be addressed with new Cursillistas after a Weekend is the whole issue of secrecy and exclusivity. These recent graduates are simply so excited about their experience that they want to savor it with others who have shared the experience and naturally exclude non-attendees. Before the end of the Weekend, the staff needs to tell the participants in clear language that Cursillo does not support secrecy and cliquishness. They must be coached on how to share with their friends about Cursillo in welcoming and transparent ways. There will need to be some strong re-education of many who have already attended Cursillo since they are currently part of the problem.

When participants leave the retreat center on Sunday afternoon, they head home to their families, friends, work, problems, and all that constitutes their world. As they separate from their table groups and newfound friends, they often feel lonely, afraid of losing what they have experienced, and a little lost. The Fourth Day must do a better job of coaching them through this period and helping them find their place in their churches, the Fourth Day community, and their Kingdom work. The first place we can touch them is through a welcome home email sent by the moderator the very next day. The table group leaders also need to contact their table members in the first day or two and continue to encourage and walk along with them for the first few weeks. The table groups

might want to have one or more reunions to provide a safe place for their group to process the Weekend and to make some goals for their next steps.

The fresh graduates are immediately added to the general email distribution list and prayer chain list and begin receiving the communications meant for the entire community. The council needs to examine these communication tools to determine their effectiveness. The prayer email system is often clumsy, unused, and overwhelming to new people. There might be a better way to alert the community to general prayer needs. Table groups or even Weekend groups could form their own prayer chains. We could develop a smaller prayer team that would be committed to pray for the many prayer needs that do not have to be broadcast to the whole community.

To further the purposes of Cursillo, the newsletter and other communications need to be enhanced to include devotionals and Bible readings focused on discipleship and on being sent into the world. These publications could include testimonies, reflections, and stories of change and ministry. The contributors to these communications need to learn how to utilize technological and social networking tools such as blogs, FaceBook, and Twitter, to aid people in their journeys of faith and service.

Sponsorship is important in all phases of Cursillo; in the Fourth Day, well-trained sponsors would walk alongside their participants as they figure out how to live the life introduced to them on the Weekend. Effective Pre-Cursillo sponsorship results in natural and easy follow-up. The relationship that is built before the Weekend will continue with phone calls, emails, and face-to-face meetings. The sponsor training should include specific and practical guidelines on how to walk with a participant after the Weekend. The guidelines would include: a possible timeline of when to contact participants,

resources to give the participants, how to help the participants find a small group for accountability and encouragement, ways to help them connect with their churches, methods of sharing their Cursillo experience with others. The council might create a network for the sponsors for their own growth and encouragement and devise a way to follow-up with participants whose sponsors are unable to do so.

HPC is currently working on a new Renewal Weekend as a way to engage people in a deeper way in their growth in following and serving Christ. The weekend will include training, resources and testimonies focused on how to live the Fourth Day, interwoven with worship, prayer, sharing, and fun activities. This even will hopefully become an annual event to provide a currently missing piece of the follow-up process.

The positive elements of the Fourth Day reported in chapter 3 were the reunions with Cursillo friends and participating in subsequent Weekends, either as staff or community support, by providing *palanca*, praying, or attending serenade and closing. As encouraging and uplifting as this involvement can be, it does not provide adequate help in advancing discipleship or engagement in ministry to change one's environment. The Fourth Day must create a training model for the living out of the purpose of Cursillo.

HPC would provide a huge service both to the Fourth Day and to the larger community by identifying and developing resources in discipleship, Bible study, mission, and spiritual growth. A small task force could research the Internet, bookstores, seminaries, and churches and create a list of written resources, upcoming events, seminars, classes in area churches, online blogs, FaceBook pages, different venues and styles of worship, seminary classes, mission trips and service opportunities, both local and global, conferences, and places for spiritual direction.

Since people often do not remember what happened on their Cursillo, another helpful resource would be a written or visual explanation of the Weekend. The themes, meditations, *rollos*, and activities would be explained and put into the context of the Weekend and the whole ministry of Cursillo. This could be made available to all Cursillistas and anyone interested in Cursillo.

Training must be an ongoing part of the Fourth Day ministry. One comment from the survey affirms this, “Fourth day activities and communications need to include teaching, not just emotional inspiration.”¹⁵² All Ultreyas, renewal groups, and staff training for Weekends need to include education about how to live out the purpose of Cursillo. We must make a concerted effort to partner with the many churches that already provide effective training in discipleship and mission. For any gaps in available training resources, HPC might develop training events or classes and offer them to Cursillistas and to the larger community. Although being engaged in serving Christ in the world is the backbone of Cursillo, HPC seems to think that people will figure out how to do this on their own. Training must include teaching and modeling in determining spiritual gifts, praying for God’s leading, building relationships, leadership development, and how to begin to be a change agent in our environments. Cursillo could offer mission opportunities to serve God’s people in the world both locally and globally. Cursillo might collaborate with churches and even the presbytery to sponsor an Internet bulletin board with outreach opportunities for Cursillistas and the larger community. Ultreyas could include mission or service as part of their focus. People involved in ministry to the world

¹⁵² Survey, question 8, response 148.

could share testimonies about real experiences in making a difference in one's environment and invite others to come along with them or step out on their own.

The Ultreya has been a vehicle for welcoming home new Cursillistas and sharing Fourth Day joy and fellowship. To use these gatherings more effectively in furthering the larger purposes of Cursillo, the council must consider redeveloping the Ultreya as tools for training. The Ultreyas should be well planned and include elements of worship, teaching, testimony, and fellowship with the focus on God's continuous work in our lives as we follow and serve him. The testimonies should include stories of how people are changing their environments for Christ and growing in their daily walk with him. Ultreyas should be open to anyone and not have a hint of cliquishness or exclusivity.

Renewal groups, designed to provide a supportive and safe environment for growth and accountability, have not been very successful in HPC. A few are healthy and positive, but many others are floundering or have failed completely. I recommend that Cursillistas be encouraged to develop or join groups from their natural environments with other followers of Jesus (not limited to Cursillistas) to focus on discipleship, not Cursillo. These could be groups already meeting in churches, neighborhoods, or the workplace. HPC could provide resources for materials, structure, and small group dynamics.

Engaging the Church

The founders of Cursillo never intended the movement to be or replace the Church, but to be a movement of the Church, to serve the Church and to work within and through the Church. Since Cursillo sometimes seems to compete with or threaten churches, HPC must renew efforts to connect with area churches. The council might create a plan for communicating with pastors and lay leaders, not for the purpose of

promoting Cursillo or attracting participants, but for developing partnership and co-ministry. Pastors need to be consulted about how Cursillo can serve and assist them in ministry. When we add the requirement for a pastor's signature to the participant application, all the pastors in New Covenant Presbytery need to be informed and asked to participate. With a sense of cooperation, pastors will hopefully begin to see Cursillo as a way to help church members become closer to Christ and more passionate about living a life of service.

Currently, HPC has designated a person in each church with Cursillistas to be a liaison for Cursillo in that specific church, to help get *palanca* for participants, hold a prayer meeting for each Weekend, and to encourage fellow Cursillista church members to attend Fourth Day activities. HPC might develop this person's assignment by encouraging intentional communication with the pastor and leaders of the church and active support for Cursillistas after Weekends, with a special emphasis on re-entry into church life from a Cursillo perspective.

Cursillo must continually encourage Cursillistas to stay connected to the Church and not neglect church and community ministry to do Cursillo specific ministry. HPC needs to think about setting a limit on how often or how many times a person can staff Weekends each year in an effort to enlarge people's ministry beyond Cursillo.

Younger Generation

The final section of proposed changes to the Cursillo movement will focus on the problem Cursillo has in attracting young people. The people in HPC are predominately white, upper middle class boomers, reflecting the churches they represent. The low number of people under the age of forty reflects the same problem in the PCUSA and in

most mainline denominations. One survey respondent said, “We are in a dying denomination, so that hugely effects Cursillo. Hard to attract younger people when they just aren’t there.”¹⁵³

However, the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people, and HPC must consider how to reach them. If Cursillo is to survive as a tool to train people to follow Jesus and change their environments for him, we must be strategic now in order to engage young people in life-transforming ways. I would like to enumerate a few changes to the movement that might make it more attractive and acceptable to younger people.

I would begin by interviewing the younger people who are members of the community for their feedback and suggestions. The survey indicated that those young people who have attended a Weekend thought it was effective. From there, we might obtain marketing assistance about how we might change to reach younger people.

Recruitment of young people must be strategic and focused. We must engage the current younger Cursillistas to be the face of Cursillo in communications, publications, videos, and sponsorship. We need to enlist the youth who have attended Celebration (the youth version of Cursillo) to recruit their friends. We need to develop ways to nurture, train and develop these youth into leaders and give them responsibilities in Cursillo.

The Weekend changes already suggested must be geared toward young people in many ways, including special emphasis on technology and media. One survey comment was, “Remember, they grew up watching 40 hours of TV a day, playing video games, watching movies, and in general, needing/demanding visual stimulation to keep their attention or to connect with them. Suggest greater use of visual material to effectively

¹⁵³ Survey, question 8, response 2.

reach the younger folks.”¹⁵⁴ Another way to appeal to younger people is to relax the schedule and allow for time for reflection, both alone and with others. Young people tend to want more flexibility and time to move around, to go outside, and to change venues. They are open to more creative, experimental activities, especially those that involve movement. Young marrieds may need help with babysitting and scholarships. They would also be more concerned about having enough healthy food and time for exercise. Since they are constantly connected to their world through FaceBook and Twitter, some provision might be made for them to be able to do these activities.

We must be open and transparent about Cursillo to everyone, but especially to young people as secrecy and cliquishness are particularly abhorrent to them and might frustrate and repel them. This generation prides itself on inclusiveness and will not understand the requirement of being Presbyterian. For this and a number of other reasons, HPC needs to seriously consider becoming a Pilgrimage community, opening participation to anyone.

HPC has an opportunity to look beyond itself by reaching into the younger generations and exhibiting Christ to them. If Cursillistas are serious about being part of what God is already doing in people’s lives, they must begin to develop relationships with people unlike themselves, regardless of any interest in Cursillo. This might possibly be the very environment God is calling Cursillistas to help change. The point is to go where all kinds of people are, maybe even outside one’s comfort zone, instead of simply trying to attract new people to come to a Weekend.

¹⁵⁴ Survey, question 2, response 127.

In order to attract young people, HPC must do more than change the style or tempo of the music or show new videos, although that would be a place to start. The leadership of HPC must think strategically about how to become involved with younger people, how to enter their world, and how to build relationships with them. Each Cursillista must be challenged to think creatively about how to engage and care for young people—at work, in the neighborhood, at the local schools, and at church. HPC might provide opportunities for round table discussions at an Ultreya or in renewal groups to brainstorm ways to connect with younger people. The council could publish stories of how intergenerational relationships have been born and flourished, provide projects at work, neighborhood, or church sites for people of mixed ages, and find out what young people need and seek to provide it. Veteran Cursillistas must listen to the stories of the younger generation and find out how to be of service and ask them for their help and expertise. As the generations meet and get to know each other, God will provide opportunities to be open about faith, doubt, and how to live in this world. He might even clear the way to invite someone to a Cursillo Weekend (or not). HPC must encourage all Cursillistas to change their environments by crossing generational and possibly other demographic lines.

Summary

This chapter has offered a whole menu of change possibilities for redeveloping and revitalizing Houston Presbyterian Cursillo in the hopes of helping HPC achieve the purposes for which it was created. These suggestions arose out of my personal experience, the wisdom of Cursillistas through the survey and personal interviews, and the brainstorming of the Permanent Study Group of the HPC council. This summary re-

organizes many of the suggested changes to make them more accessible. I have gathered into eight challenges what I consider the most significant and pressing issues that HPC faces in redeveloping and revitalizing Cursillo. Each challenge includes specific suggestions for changes that might be made in each of the three phases of Cursillo: Pre-Cursillo, the Weekend, and the Fourth Day.

Table 6.1. CHALLENGE A: CLARIFICATION OF PURPOSE	
Pre-Cursillo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train sponsors and all Cursillistas to communicate the two-part purpose of Cursillo to any prospective participants rather than just getting people to come to a weekend of spiritual renewal. • Revise all written and web literature, especially the application form, to clearly state Cursillo's purpose. • Create a new introductory video with purpose clearly stated. • Create a new information piece to send to participants upon acceptance for a Cursillo, clearly describing the purposes and expectations.
Weekend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise the script for entire weekend to clearly state the purpose of Cursillo, starting with the first meeting on the opening night. • Remind the entire staff of the purpose of Cursillo (at the nightly staff meetings). Brainstorm in each meeting ways to help participants take the next step in their lives and their service. • Encourage all <i>rollo</i> givers to reiterate the dual purpose in their talks. • Make changes to Closing to emphasize the second part of the purpose, always pointing to the next step of the journey. • Remind staff and Fourth Day community to resist forcing or expecting any emotional or spiritual response from the participants; rather, focus on what the Holy Spirit is doing uniquely in each person.
Fourth Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revise Fourth Day literature to emphasize the importance of both purposes. • Restrict the attendance at the Welcome Home Ultreya to those who attended and their sponsors. • Add personal testimonies to the agenda of each Ultreya to share a

Fourth Day <i>cont'd</i>	<p>story of how someone is living out the purposes of Cursillo.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share testimonies of how people actually, daily live out the purposes in the newsletter and the prayer email. • Contact recent participants immediately with a welcome home email reiterating the highlights of the Weekend, focusing on the specific purposes. Table groups, prayer partners, and clergy need a schedule of follow-up for the first month after a Weekend.
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Table 6.2. CHALLENGE B: APPLICATION OF THE PURPOSES TO REAL LIFE	
Pre-Cursillo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train all Cursillistas, especially sponsors, to recruit new participants who are ready to embrace and apply what Cursillo teaches. • Prepare all <i>rollos</i>, meditations, and the moderator's script using concrete examples of how to apply the principles of Cursillo to life. • Communicate with participants before the Weekend what HPC believes the outcome of their experience might be, using stories of how others have applied Cursillo to their lives.
Weekend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train table guides to consistently apply talks, discussions to real life. • Use art or other creative projects to illustrate how participants will apply their experience to their lives. • Change the Closing worship service to focus on next steps. Invite participants to share at the closing the answers to two questions: What happened to me here? What am I going to do about it?
Fourth Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct an annual Renewal Weekend for Cursillistas to reflect on their lives and to recommit to living for and serving Jesus. • Provide an annual survey for all Cursillistas to determine the efficacy of Cursillo in applying the principles to everyday life. • Assign mentors (or use sponsors) to follow-up with each participant for at least six months after attending a Weekend. • Redevelop sponsor/mentor training to be practical and specific. • Create resources to help people determine how to take the next steps in their journeys of faith, discipleship and service. • Offer opportunities for further study and application of Cursillo principles.

Fourth Day <i>cont'd</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperate with churches in determining areas of application in discipleship and service. • Use the Ultreya as a place for teaching, modeling, praying for ways to incorporate real changes in everyday life and ministry. • Revise Renewal groups, offering a variety of styles, formats, resources with the purpose of helping people grow. • Review the themes and major points of the Weekend and how to apply them through resources on the web and at Ultreyas.
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Table 6.3. CHALLENGE C: ADDRESSING THE CULTURE OF SECURITY AND CLIQUISHNESS	
Pre-Cursillo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Become a Pilgrimage community, thereby opening the movement to all followers of Jesus (not just Presbyterians). • Remove “insider language” from all literature, web information, applications, etc. • Communicate openly about the movement to others, especially prospective applicants, churches, and pastors through letters, emails, personal visits, presbytery communications, and events. • Encourage everyone, including sponsors, not to use secret or cliquish language when talking about Cursillo. • Make materials available electronically, including manual, <i>rollos</i>, and schedules so anyone can have access to them.
Weekend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remind staff to be open and forthcoming with the Weekend process and schedule. • Always introduce all staff rather than hiding the identity of some. • Replace Spanish words with more accessible words for <i>rollo</i>, <i>palanca</i>, <i>ultreya</i>, etc. • Instruct participants that the movement is not secretive.
Fourth Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite non-Cursillistas to all events including Ultreyas, renewal groups. • Encourage and train Cursillistas to share openly with others about how Jesus is changing their lives.

Table 6.4. CHALLENGE D: RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHURCH	
Pre-Cursillo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change application to include pastor signature. • Assign liaison to each church to build relationship with pastor(s) and sessions. • Write letter to pastors explaining the purposes of Cursillo and inviting them to attend for free.
Weekend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue and strengthen prayer at churches before and during a Weekend. • Invite pastors of churches to write a letter to their church members who are participants.
Fourth Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact pastors after a Weekend, advising them that a participant from their congregations is returning home. Have liaison and new Cursillista meet with pastor or other church members to share the Weekend experience. • Cooperate with churches in classes, trainings, seminars on how to live out discipleship and service to the Kingdom. • Develop shared service projects with the churches to reach into the local community. • Advertise and form renewal groups or other small groups with people in the local churches and Cursillistas.

Table 6.5. CHALLENGE E: SPONSORSHIP	
Pre-Cursillo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop intensive training for sponsors. • Redesign participant application with section for sponsors to complete. • Require face-to-face meeting(s) between sponsor and participant before the Weekend. • Design method for assigning sponsors to applicants who do not find one on their own.
Weekend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require sponsors to attend Serenade and Closing, providing transportation when possible. • Encourage sponsors to sign up for prayer banner.

Fourth Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train for follow-up. • Provide resources for sponsors for use with their sponsoree. • Create schedule/process for follow-up. • Encourage participation at Ultreya. • Sponsors help make connections with home churches.
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Table 6.6. CHALLENGE F: PACING OF SCHEDULE	
Pre-Cursillo	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review all preparations for a Weekend to determine how to reduce the number of details to be accomplished ahead of time. • Make all manuals available online. • Recruit a small team of people to take care of some of the details for the staff.
Weekend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review entire Weekend schedule with regards to pacing, especially the Sunday schedule. • Add reflection time throughout each day. • Allow free time for both participants and staff. • Reduce amount of music to allow for more personal/group time. • Teach how to build reflection/quiet time into a life of discipleship through modeling throughout the Weekend, using examples and exercises in worship, table time, personal time, and in the <i>rollos</i>.
Fourth Day	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide resources for a disciplined life of following Jesus. • At Ultreyas, renewal groups, and other gatherings, allow time for personal prayer, reflection, guided meditation, <i>lectio divina</i>, and Ignation prayer.

Table 6.7. CHALLENGE G: STYLE OF THE WEEKEND	
Weekend	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Redesign the Lemonade party to be more welcoming and comfortable; less awkward. • Select new booklet (more current, applicable) for the participants for Thursday night. • Redesign extended introductions on Friday nights. • Shorten the music sets. • Review and update music selection with an eye to the demographics of the participants. • Research and select optional videos to <i>Alfredo</i> and <i>Music Box</i>. • Shorten Serenade. • Eliminate or modify the Party on Saturday night. • Train table leaders in small group dynamics. • Change style of closing: shorten, provide two guided questions, limit music, eliminate sharing from the Fourth Day, focus on next steps. • Reduce amount of snack food and provide healthier alternatives. • Evaluate moderator's script for ways to update style of communication. • Evaluate worship and meditations.

Many of the changes above will hopefully have some impact in appealing to a broader audience, particularly the younger generation. In an effort to determine how to better connect with younger people, I offer the following suggestions in table 6.8.

Table 6.8. CHALLENGE H: APPEALING TO A YOUNGER AUDIENCE	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview younger people who have attended Cursillo and Celebration. • Interview younger people who have NOT attended. • Invite and pay for targeted young people to attend and to give feedback on what could be done to attract their peers. • Plan focused recruitment of young adults. • Investigate ways to connect with younger people through service opportunities in the community and to build relationships with them. • Produce literature for the Internet, including a new video, geared specifically for young people. • Hire a marketing expert. • Utilize social networking (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) to publicize Cursillo.

The HPC Council has agreed to review the changes suggested in this project, starting with the Permanent Study Group reading the whole paper. The final chapter outlines a suggested process for change for the Study Group's consideration.

CHAPTER 7

THE PROCESS FOR CHANGE

The major work of this paper so far has been to examine Cursillo, both historically and currently, to reflect on the biblical and theological foundations of the purposes of the movement, and to identify areas of needed change. The first six chapters set the stage for what comes next, the realization of the changes required to redevelop and revitalize Houston Presbyterian Cursillo. Following a process such as the one described in this chapter is vitally important to the success of accomplishing any of these changes to HPC. I offer this process humbly, trying to imagine the most effective way to present the ideas and appropriate ways of accomplishing them.

The problems with Cursillo have become increasingly obvious to those in the leadership of HPC, and some investigation toward making changes is already underway. The HPC Council, mostly through its designated Permanent Study Group (PSG), has been in conversation about many of the weaknesses and growth areas for months, even years. The major areas of weakness that are currently being addressed are sponsorship, continuing renewal, and training. The PSG, realizing the pervasive lack of effective sponsorship, studied the sponsorship programs of other communities and movements and wrote and produced a sponsor booklet in the spring of 2010.¹⁵⁵ The council held two sponsor trainings in the spring of 2010 and plans to make other changes to the program.

¹⁵⁵ Task force of the Permanent Study Group of HPC, *Sponsor Booklet* (Houston, TX: HPC, 2010).

HPC has been making efforts to improve the continuing renewal of Cursillistas in the Fourth Day, working to revive renewal groups and encourage people to come to Ultreyas and other Fourth Day events. A study group of the PSG is planning a Renewal Weekend for September 2010 to take seriously the need for follow-up for Cursillistas and to train them to embrace both parts of the purpose of Cursillo. With regards to training, the National Council of Presbyterian Fourth Day Movements met in March 2010 and held a training session for leaders on ways to move toward reinforcing and engaging the whole purpose of Cursillo. The representatives from the different communities shared ideas, successes, and failures. Each community is working to improve and enhance their particular ministry. Many of them had participated in the survey I conducted for this project, and they are eager to see the results, especially when it is sorted for their specific community. After the analysis of the survey is complete, any of the national communities can access the results and use the information as they wish.

The process for change will involve the initial study of the proposed changes by the PSG; their prioritization of the changes to be made; a season of research, study, and listening; review and approval by the council; testing of the changes; final approval; writing the changes into the manual; implementation; and, finally, training and education of the community. The process will probably extend over three years, during which time the need for other changes will arise and need to be incorporated.

Timeline

Upon completion of this final project in the summer of 2010, I plan to give it to the members of the PSG to read and discuss, with particular attention to chapters 6 and 7. I propose the following timeline (figure 7.1) for working through the process for change:

August 2010	Finish Final Project and send it to the PSG
September 2010	Discuss with PSG and prioritize changes; make assignments for information gathering
November 2010	Share results of information gathering, finalize priority list of changes, and prepare report for council
December 2010	Present report to council. Plan process for getting feedback.
February 2011	Report to council the feedback to suggested changes.
March 2011	Give update to National Council
April 2011	HPC decides on first round of changes to be implemented, which need to be tested on the June Weekend, which need more study
June 2011	Changes tested on Weekend (and in training of moderator and staff beforehand)
August 2011	Report to Council how the changes worked. Make recommendation to make changes permanent.
September 2011	Recruit task force to begin making changing in the Manual.
September 2011	HPC begins process on next round of changes
September 2012	HPC finishes implementing changes and continues to rewrite the Manual
September 2012	Finish re-write of the Manual and incorporate changes.

Figure 7.1. Timeline for changes in HPC.

Other changes that need more study will have to go through a similar process of discussion, getting feedback, testing, reporting, and approval to make permanent.

The first step is for me to present this project to the PSG as soon as possible. The discussions there will undoubtedly lead to the desire for more study and information. I am suggesting that the PSG members initially sort the proposed changes into a group of those that are simple to achieve and not controversial, those that will take more study and information, and those that definitely will be controversial and necessitate significant prayer, discussion, and discernment. Then they will prioritize the changes within each group.

At this point, the PSG will undoubtedly want to give study assignments regarding the more serious issues to gather resources and information that will help them address these changes. I recommend having conversations or meetings with leaders from Walk to

Emmaus, Episcopal and Catholic Cursillo, and other similar movements and reading their information on these issues. *The Health and Well Being of the Movement*¹⁵⁶ is a publication from National Episcopal Cursillo, which discusses how their leadership is addressing the state of their movement. Other research might include searching the Internet to find samples of applications, publications, guidelines, brochures, and other communications. Finally, the PSG might contact the other communities in the National Council of Presbyterian Fourth Day Movements and ask for their experience and wisdom on the issues.

The next task of the PSG will be to prepare a report for the council that will include the PSG's recommendations about the proposed changes and suggest a three-year plan for processing them. I anticipate much discussion, arguing, and heartfelt conversation to follow. I would suggest that the council read the report in its entirety before taking any action. I hope that the first group of the proposed changes would be so obvious, simple, and universally agreed on that a quick process of approval and institution would occur. For the second group of items that need more study but are not highly controversial, I would recommend forming small task forces to continue the study of these issues. These groups need to be comprised of a cross-section of the Cursillo community, including those of different ages, stages in life, gender, marital status, ethnicity, and length of time in the community. I would then ask the task forces to spend the following three months in discussion. Each task force would deal with an issue that might have one or more proposed changes. After their study of the issue, they will write a

¹⁵⁶ National Episcopal Cursillo, *Health and Well Being*.

proposal to council outlining the rationale for the changes and how they would be accomplished.

For the third type of proposed changes, those that will challenge tightly held convictions and affections, the council might want to hold some round table discussions at an Ultreya or other gathering to discuss specific topics. Speakers on the topics could include clergy, past moderators, trainers, and other experienced staffers. Some of the issues might warrant a further survey to elicit feedback from the community at large. I anticipate many lively, difficult, and painful discussions. Through Cursillo, God has touched the hearts of many Cursillistas in deeply personal and powerful ways, causing them to have deep and strong feelings about Cursillo in general and certain aspects of the Weekend in particular. Each person has a favorite, meaningful part of the Weekend that he or she particularly does not want to change, for personal and emotional reasons. The change process, which will be discussed later in the chapter, will have to be approached with grace, prayer, kindness, and diplomacy.

The council will meet in February to receive reports and proposals from all the task forces and will decide on how to proceed. After reviewing all the information and modifying the three-year plan, the groupings, and the priority list of the PSG, the council must determine their priorities and timeline. When this is complete, they will recommend the first set of changes to be tested before, during, and after the June Weekend. The proposed changes to be tested will be introduced to the registrar, Webmaster, moderator, trainer, staff of the June Weekend, and those who will be working with the Fourth Day activities. These people will spend the two months before the Weekend working the changes into the process. During this time period, the National Council will meet at its

normal meeting, and HPC will report how this process is progressing. Hopefully some of the other communities will be working on similar changes and some helpful conversations will occur.

During the actual Weekend, a designated member of the staff, either the trainer or a person assigned by the Council, will be charged with observing the Weekend and keeping track of how the changes are implemented and received. After the Weekend is over, this person will present his or her findings to the Council. If the changes prove to be positive, then the Council will vote to have them instituted into the manual. As the Council approves each change, it will be incorporated into the movement in an appropriate and positive manner. Each proposed and tested change would have to be treated in the same way. After the first changes are approved, the Council will appoint a task force to begin the process of incorporating the changes into a revision of the Manual of Cursillo. The revision process might be as simple as making the changes that have been approved or as complex as a complete rewrite of the entire document.

Some of the changes will initiate creative work to be done in developing written and visual pieces of communication, training guidelines and programs, education events and materials, and transforming long held attitudes and procedures. The council will need to design a process for this work to be accomplished by smaller groups focused on those particular issues. It will take years to fully institute some changes, and, by then, they might need to be changed again. One of the mottos of the Presbyterians is that they are reformed and always reforming.

Change is difficult. Personal change, corporate change, and global change can challenge us beyond our imaginations. However, the God of the universe is about

changing us from the inside out, about making life new and fresh, and about bringing light and hope into the darkness. The process of change I have proposed in this chapter is long and arduous. I do not know if it will work at all. My hope and prayer is that, by God's grace, HPC will be able to change Cursillo enough to allow it to be his effective tool as he builds the Kingdom.

Having a set of proposed changes and a process to follow to carry them out is not enough. As I finish this chapter, I would like to reflect on change and how to go about it on other levels than just following the step-by-step process. I believe that God is in charge of Cursillo, the lives of the Cursillistas, and the plan for saving the world. Throughout the whole process of discovering, suggesting, and implementing change to part of God's ministry, we must be in constant prayer and dependence on his strength, wisdom, and power. The Council and any others who will be engaged in this process must be firmly grounded in the disciplines of spiritual growth and be willing to be accountable to one another. I would suggest having a spiritual director and/or pastor be available for prayer and counsel during the process. Each person, starting with me, must speak and act with humility, grace, patience, and a healthy set of boundaries. We must keep Jesus at the center of our lives and this process and not sacrifice relationships for issues.

I am anticipating that there will be a fight over many of these proposed changes. People hold Cursillo close to their hearts and are very attached to the elements that were meaningful to them. We need to think about ways to approach this attachment and somehow separate it from the actual changes. If people are able to see what is best for the movement as a whole and for the work of the Kingdom, they will be more willing to

sacrifice their favorite thing. I hope that sharing the results of the survey will cause people to see the bigger picture. When I read the hundreds of comments from the community I realized that almost every single one of the thoughts I had had about Cursillo and the changes I thought were necessary were all reflected there. When the community has the opportunity to read these comments, they will hopefully be introduced to the breadth of the experiences of other Cursillistas and will realize that Cursillo is much larger than their own personal experience.

Asking for people to offer suggestions for change is a strategic way to get them to own the changes. When I was doing research for this project, I sat with the PSG and asked them to brainstorm how they would change all phases of Cursillo. They came up with the same things I had been thinking about, but did it without my prompt. At every stage of the process for change, I would recommend that the leader of each task force, focus group, and study group first have their group brainstorm possible changes regarding their specific issue, even before the proposed change is presented. This will lead to greater ownership of all the ideas generated, including the presented change.

When the process hits pockets of resistance, and it will, the leaders need to employ prayer, good group processing skills, helpful psychology, and possibly the help of dispassionate mediators or outside consultants. I predict that even what I consider the simple, obvious changes will spark arguments and defensiveness. There are many resources available that address how to engage in the change process. John Kotter's book, *Leading Change*,¹⁵⁷ describes an eight-stage process of bringing about change. One of the steps is to establish a sense of urgency to help people understand the need for change.

¹⁵⁷ John P. Kotter, *Leading Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1996).

One example of how to do this in Cursillo would be to publish the statistics showing the declining attendance at Weekends. The average attendance in 2005 was 40.8 and it has decreased since then: 2006-36.4, 2007-33.4, 2008-29, and 2009-21. When people realize that attendance has fallen this much, they might sense the urgency to change.

In their book, *The Heart of Change*, John Kotter and Dan Cohen describe a situation called “Painting pictures of the future.”¹⁵⁸ When the “orthodox planning exercise” did not bring any change, the leader created six pictures of possible futures for the company and then brought them to life. As the people saw the possible outcomes for the future, they were willing to make changes. The PSG might create some pictures in dramas, videos, and stories of possible futures if Cursillo dies. They could then present these pictures to the Council, at an Ultreya, or at another group of gathered Cursillistas who need to become convinced that Cursillo needs to change to survive. Another concept in *The Heart of Changes* is the idea of looking for short term wins. The authors suggest trying some changes that are easy and non-controversial at the beginning, getting the support of as many people as possible, and then celebrating the wins publicly. Alan Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk’s book, *The Missional Leader*, call this “experimenting around the edges.”¹⁵⁹ They also encourage not tackling the big things first, but easing into the process with smaller issues. Additionally, they advise starting with the group of people who are already on board with the change and who understand the need for the change, rather than trying to convince a large group of resisters right at the beginning.

¹⁵⁸ Dan S. Cohen and John P. Kotter, *The Heart of Change* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2002), 62-66.

¹⁵⁹ Alan J. Roxburgh and Fred Romanuk, *The Missional Leader* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 99.

Resistance to change is often not about the change at all but about something else that is operating in a person or community. Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky, in *Leadership on the Line*, make this statement early in their book, “People do not resist change, per se. People resist loss.”¹⁶⁰ In the recent brainstorming discussion I had with the PSG about needed changes in Cursillo, the members of the committee said things that show this quote to be valid. They are afraid that changing their favorite part of Cursillo will devalue their experience in some way and reduce the significance of Cursillo for them. If Cursillo changes too much, they will not have the same experience when they staff that they had before, and they feel sad that others will not have a Cursillo like theirs. People must be nurtured through the fear of loss and the grief that these changes threaten to bring. Those creating the changes must be patient and caring as they continue to share the vision for what Cursillo needs to be in order to survive in the future.

Prayer, preparation, good communication, and a clear plan will be necessary for walking through this change process. I hope to be able to walk alongside the HPC Council as they engage in this process of change. My prayer is that the leadership of HPC will be influenced by the arguments and information in this project and will be convinced of the necessity of redeveloping and revitalizing this great movement.

¹⁶⁰ Ronald A. Heifetz and Marty Linsky. *Leadership on the Line* (Boston: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2002), 11.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

I love the Cursillo movement. Since my first experience as a pilgrim on a Walk to Emmaus in 1992, I have embraced and supported the ministry. Serving on many staff teams, I have watched God touch the hearts of countless participants, showering them with his love and grace, healing their deep wounds, forgiving and restoring them to an intimate and growing relationship with Jesus, and filling them with great joy.

In the past several years, I have become increasingly concerned about the movement as I have watched attendance decline and the sparkle and passion of Cursillo fade. It seems that HPC is going through the motions to produce Weekends, and, although wonderful things are still happening, the ministry seems tired, less vibrant, and in need of change. Houston Presbyterian Cursillo has reached a plateau and has maybe even started into decline toward extinction. Aubrey Malphurs, in his book *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders*, describes the trajectory for any organization in terms of the S-shaped curve, or sigmoid curve. This trajectory is described as "...the natural development of one's personal life and relationships. It also represents the natural development of biological systems, institutions, worldviews, civilizations, and organizations including the church. The message of the sigmoid curve is that all good things (and even some bad things) end. The pattern is that they wax and eventually wane."¹⁶¹ To keep this decline from happening,

¹⁶¹ Aubrey Malphurs, *Advanced Strategic Planning: A New Model for Church and Ministry Leaders* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), 45.

any system must create new S-shaped curves to refine the organization's vision and make changes before the decline begins. HPC is poised on the edge of this plateau and must move quickly and decisively to rebuild so that it will not merely survive but, more importantly, continue to reach the world for Christ. In *Post-Modern Pilgrims*, Leonard Sweet says, "Christians must say yes to the moment God has given them."¹⁶² For Houston Presbyterian Cursillo, God has brought them to this moment.

The intent of this paper is to help steer Houston Presbyterian Cursillo to a new place of life and ministry. Cursillo is a powerful tool that God has used to change lives and change society for more than sixty years. With strategic planning and creative change, HPC could become vibrant and effective, ministering to a whole new generation of people. HPC must return to the original purposes of Cursillo and re-build the whole ministry on this solid foundation. Being focused on providing well-planned and transformational Weekends has inhibited the growth and development of the second part of the purpose, sending people back to their environments to change them for Christ.

Cursillistas need to learn what it means to be missional, understanding in the core of their faith that they are a transformed and sent people. It is important that they receive training, modeling, and encouragement to begin to step out of their normal lives of faith into the ministry of being change agents for Christ. They must have opportunities to share their stories with others and to participate in Kingdom work. They must learn that ministry to others is sometimes as simple as walking across the room and building

¹⁶² Leonard Sweet, *Post-Modern Pilgrims* (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman Publishers, 2000), 46.

relationships. HPC must provide training, support, and resources to assist Cursillistas in finding their place in Christ's ministry to the world.

HPC needs to redevelop and revitalize the ministry of Cursillo because what it offers is so important to Christ's mission. Cursillo is one of the best methods available of transforming people in their walk of faith. The grace of God shown throughout the Weekend introduces people to a new way of living as Christ followers. The *rollos* on grace help people understand how much God has loved them from before the foundation of the world and how he reaches out to them over and over again, offering them new life and an invitation to live as his followers. People today in this postmodern time are desperate to hear about this kind of love and connection. They are hungry to belong and to be known by someone, to be loved and cared for.

The *rollo* on sin is powerful and important, especially for today's world. The current state of our culture encourages the avoidance of responsibility and accountability, resulting in a warped understanding of justice and forgiveness. This one *rollo* could have a tremendous impact on a generation which has not been taught to admit that they are at fault but whose souls are starving for forgiveness. The discipleship emphasis in many of the *rollos* offers ways to grow in faith that have been effective over the centuries, and the *rollos* on the last day have the potential of preparing people for their next steps in faith and ministry.

One of the key gifts that Cursillo must continue to offer is that of relationships that are built on and following a Weekend. Cursillo provides a forum for hearing and sharing the real, honest stories of joys and struggles, tragedy and heartbreak, failure and new chances that offer hope and promise to the world today. We need to listen to one

another in a time when people are so busy no one takes time to listen. We also need to mentor one another; young and old alike have something to teach the other, and Cursillo can cultivate these kinds of relationships. Unlikely alliances might blossom and continue as Cursillistas of all kinds live out the purposes of Cursillo. Eddie Gibbs, in his book *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry*, said, “The response of Christian witness to a person enmeshed in postmodern categories must be that of a fellow traveler.”¹⁶³ Sharing the journey with more people today will help open doors for transformation and change in the lives of all involved. Gibbs also said, “...in our day people are looking for individuals and communities who are in touch with God—a reality demonstrated in their personal and corporate living.” If the Cursillo community can be a place of authenticity, wholeness, and hope, then we have a chance of relating to the world today. The search for meaning and significance is acute in the culture today. People are starving to find meaning and to make a difference in the world. Cursillo can introduce them to the grand purpose that God has for the world and God’s call for them to be part of that purpose. This reality has the potential to change them completely and give meaning to their work, their relationships, and their whole lives. HPC must find ways to gain access to these searching people.

Failing to realize the goals of Cursillo not only will affect the future of the movement but also, more importantly, will affect the Kingdom. If Cursillistas never learn to live as transformed people, devoted to changing their environments for Jesus, the Kingdom will suffer. Paul, in the letter to the Romans, says that we have to get the

¹⁶³ Eddie Gibbs, *ChurchNext: Quantum Changes in How We Do Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 29.

message to the people: “How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news’” (Rom. 10:14-15, NIV)!

God is still speaking to his people in the context of the culture of today, as strange and dark as it may be. The Body of Christ, both gathered and scattered, is engaged in entering into this culture and bringing hope and light to the world. Cursillo has the opportunity to link arms with others who are living as God’s hands and feet all across the world. Always keeping Jesus at the center of everything we do, HPC must prayerfully and humbly ask for God’s direction in how to join him in his Kingdom work. By God’s grace, may a new day dawn for Houston Presbyterian Cursillo as we seek to follow Jesus and be his ambassadors in the world.

APPENDIX A

CURSILLO SURVEY BY THE REV. KRISTIN HUFFMAN

I am working on my D.Min final project which is focused on the revitalization of Presbyterian Cursillo/Pilgrimage. I would appreciate your honest and confidential feedback about how you experience the Cursillo/Pilgrimage Movement today and what changes you would like to see made in the Movement. Your comments will help identify the areas we perceive to be stronger, weaker, problematic and in need of attention. I hope that we will get some info that is revealing, helpful and takes Cursillo to the next step in its growth as a movement. If you would like to send me comments separately from this survey, my e-mail address is khuffman@mdpc.org. There are a total of 24 questions inviting your responses. The survey will close on December 15, 2009.
Thank you so much!

1. First tell us a little about yourself so we can interpret your answers better. Please check all that apply to you in the list below.

Have attended a Cursillo weekend as a participant.

Have attended a Pilgrimage weekend as a pilgrim.

Have attended a non-Presbyterian weekend as a pilgrim.

Have staffed a subsequent Cursillo or Pilgrimage weekend.

Have staffed two or more Cursillo/Pilgrimage weekends.

Have been a member of a Cursillo Renewal/Reunion group at some time.

Have served as a moderator or rector of a Cursillo or Pilgrimage weekend.

Am a current member of the National Council of Presbyterian 4th Day Movements.

Am a pastor.

Am 35 years old or younger.

2. My local 4th Day body where I am currently involved (or the community I feel some connection with) is: (select only one)

Alabama Presbyterian Cursillo

Arkansas Presbyterian Cursillo

Austin Presbyterian Cursillo

Florida Presbyterian Cursillo

Georgia Presbyterian Cursillo
 Houston Presbyterian Cursillo
 Indiana Presbyterian Cursillo
 Louisiana Presbyterian Cursillo
 Mississippi Presbyterian Cursillo
 North Texas Presbyterian Cursillo
 Eastern Oklahoma Presbyterian Cursillo
 Palo Duro Presbyterian Cursillo
 Tennessee Valley Presbyterian Cursillo
 Chicagoland Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 Colorado Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 Great Plains Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 Michigan Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 North Carolina Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 Oklahoma Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 South Carolina Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 Peaks Virginia Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 James Virginia Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 Eastern Virginia Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 Shenandoah Virginia Presbyterian Pilgrimage
 Non-Presbyterian 4th Day Community
 No Current 4th Day Community

3. Please state your understanding of the overall vision of Presbyterian Cursillo/Pilgrimage

To renew people in their faith and send them back into their environments to change them for Christ.

To equip participants to live deliberate and joyous Christian lives.

To recruit and train leaders for Church and mission work.

To refresh Christians who have grown tired in their faith.

Other (please state)

4. If the mission of your specific community is different from above, please state in the comment box.

5. Rate the overall effectiveness of Cursillo/Pilgrimage in meeting this vision, on a scale of very ineffective to very effective. If you rated the effectiveness lower than very effective, please add comments below in the "other" box on why you gave this rating.

Cursillo Effectiveness:

SECTION 3. Pre-Weekend (everything that takes place before the actual weekend)

The Cursillo/Pilgrimage movement includes three phases: the Pre-Weekend, the Weekend, and the Post-Weekend or 4th Day. Each community is involved in each phase to some degree.

In this section, please consider the PRE-WEEKEND activities of the Cursillo/Pilgrimage experience with regards to strengths, problems, and improvement opportunities.

6. Based on your opinion, rate the effectiveness of the following PRE-WEEKEND activities on the following scale:

Partnership with churches
inseeking candidates

Seeking
candidates/participants/pilgrims

Pastor involvement in seeking
candidates

Sponsor involvement with
candidates

Preparing candidates for the
weekend

Overall PRE-WEEKEND
effectivenss

7. Please rate the following issues that have been identified as problems for the PRE-WEEKEND activities using the following scale:

No | Minor Issue | Indifferent | Significant Issue | Major Issue

Lack of a clearly stated purpose or mission for candidate

Ineffective recruiting of candidates

Poor training of sponsors

Lack of information about the weekend (secrecy)

Perception of Cursillo/Pilgrimage as a clique

Exclusivity to Presbyterians (for Cursillo only)

Poor preparation of candidates by sponsors

A bad review of the program from a prior participant

Not attracting younger adults (under 35)

8. What specific changes would you recommend which would address the problem areas you noted in the previous question? We are particularly interested in changes in the Pre-Weekend that would address making Cursillo/Pilgrimage more effective in the 21st century.

9. Please provide any other comments about the PRE-WEEKEND part of Cursillo/Pilgrimage.

Section 4. The Weekend (the actual weekend experience)

In this section, please consider the WEEKEND activities of the Cursillo/Pilgrimage experience with regards to strengths, problems, and improvement opportunities.

10. Based on your opinion, please rate the effectiveness of the following WEEKEND activities from very ineffective to very effective. If there are other elements not listed that you'd like to mention, please do so in the comment box.

Very Ineffective | Somewhat Ineffective | Indifferent | Somewhat Effective | Very Effective

Table group sharing

Talks

Music

Serenade/Closing

Palanca

Healing and worship services

Fun activities

Overall WEEKEND effectiveness

11. Please rate the following issues that have been identified as problems for the WEEKEND activities using the following scale:

Minor Issue | Somewhat Minor Issue | Indifferent | Somewhat Major Issue | Major Issue

Did not feel prepared for my participant weekend

Too many talks

Too much sitting and not enough activity

Music (specify any problems with music in the following question)

Not enough free time/opportunity for reflection

Schedule too demanding

I felt out of place or was uncomfortable

Weekend was not meaningful to me

Outdated and not appealing to younger adults

12. What specific changes would you recommend which would address the problems areas you noted in the previous question? We are particularly interested in changes in the Weekend that would address making Cursillo/Pilgrimage more effective in the 21st century.

13. Please provide any other comments about the WEEKEND part of Cursillo/Pilgrimage.

Section 5. The Post-Weekend or 4th Day

In this section, please consider the POST-WEEKEND activities of the Cursillo/Pilgrimage experience with regard to strengths, problems, and improvement opportunities.

14. Based on your opinion, rate the effectiveness of the following POST-WEEKEND activities on a scale of very ineffective to very effective.

Very Ineffective | Somewhat Ineffective | Indifferent | Somewhat Effective | Very Effective

Renewal/Reunion
small groups

Ultreyas (4th Day
gatherings)

Staffing a Weekend

E-mail communications

Attending serenades
and closings

Sponsorship

Training for living out
the Cursillo vision in
4th Day

15. Please rate the following issues that have been identified as problems for the POST-WEEKEND activities on the following scale:

Minor Issue Somewhat Minor Issue Indifferent Somewhat Major Issue Major Issue

Utrechans not relevant/interesting/helpful

Not interested in Renewal/Reunion groups

Too many follow-up emails

No resources to help me get involved in church or other ministry activities

Never knew who my sponsor was.

Never heard from my sponsor again.

I moved on to other activities

Not enough contact with my weekend table group

Too cliquish
Re-entry into my church was difficult post-weekend

16. What specific changes would you recommend which would address the problems areas you noted in the previous question? We are particularly interested in changes in the POST-WEEKEND that would address making Cursillo/Pilgrimage more effective in the 21st century.

17. Please provide any other comments about the POST-WEEKEND part of Cursillo/Pilgrimage.

Section 6. Cursillo and the Church

The last section asks you to reflect on Cursillo's relationship with the local church, and its ability to reach younger adults.

18. How would you describe the relationship between your Cursillo/Pilgrimage community and your local church? Evaluate the effectiveness using the following scale:

Not at all Insignificant amount Indifferent Significant amount Very much
--

My church supports involvement in Cursillo/Pilgrimage.

My Cursillo/Pilgrimage and local church(es) need to be more integrated with each other.

Cursillo has become a competitor to church.

My Senior Pastor has attended a Cursillo/Pilgrimage.

Many leaders at my church have attended a Weekend.

19. How many of the clergy in your church (if you have more than one pastor) have attended a Weekend?

None

Few

Some

Many

Don't Know

20. Approximately how many people from your session (board of elders) have attended a Cursillo/Pilgrimage or something similar?

None

Few

Some

Many

Don't Know

21. Please provide any comments about the relationship of Cursillo/Pilgrimage to the church. We are especially interested in areas that you see as problems and what you would do to change these areas so as to be more effective in the 21st century.

22. Please rate the following issues that some people have previously noted as problems for young adults (35 or less) using the following scale:

No Issue Minor Issue Indifferent Significant Issue Major Issue
--

No other young adults involved.

Music outdated and played too slow.

Too much sitting and not enough activity.

No child care provided.

My life is just too busy.

Cliquish.

The cost.

I felt out of place or was uncomfortable.

Weekend limited to only Presbyterians.

Weekend was not meaningful to me.

23. Please provide any comments about the issues above related to young adults. We are especially interested in areas that you stated as issues with the Pre-Weekend, Weekend, and Post-Weekend as they relate to young adults. What you would do to change these areas to be more effective in the 21st century. What is your particular 4th Day Community doing to address these issues?

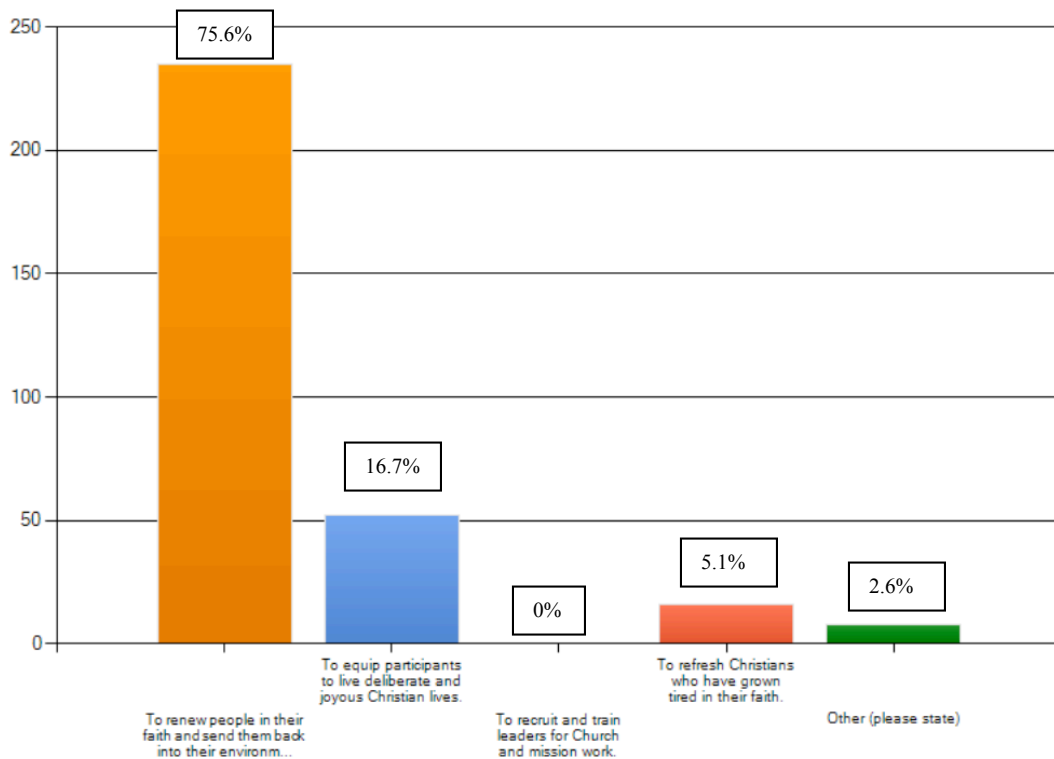
24. Please use this space to offer additional comments or suggestions regarding Cursillo/Pilgrimage.

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE RESULTS FOR SURVEY QUESTIONS

Total answered questions: 311
 Skipped questions: 2

Please state your understanding of the overall vision of Presbyterian Cursillo/Pilgrimage



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